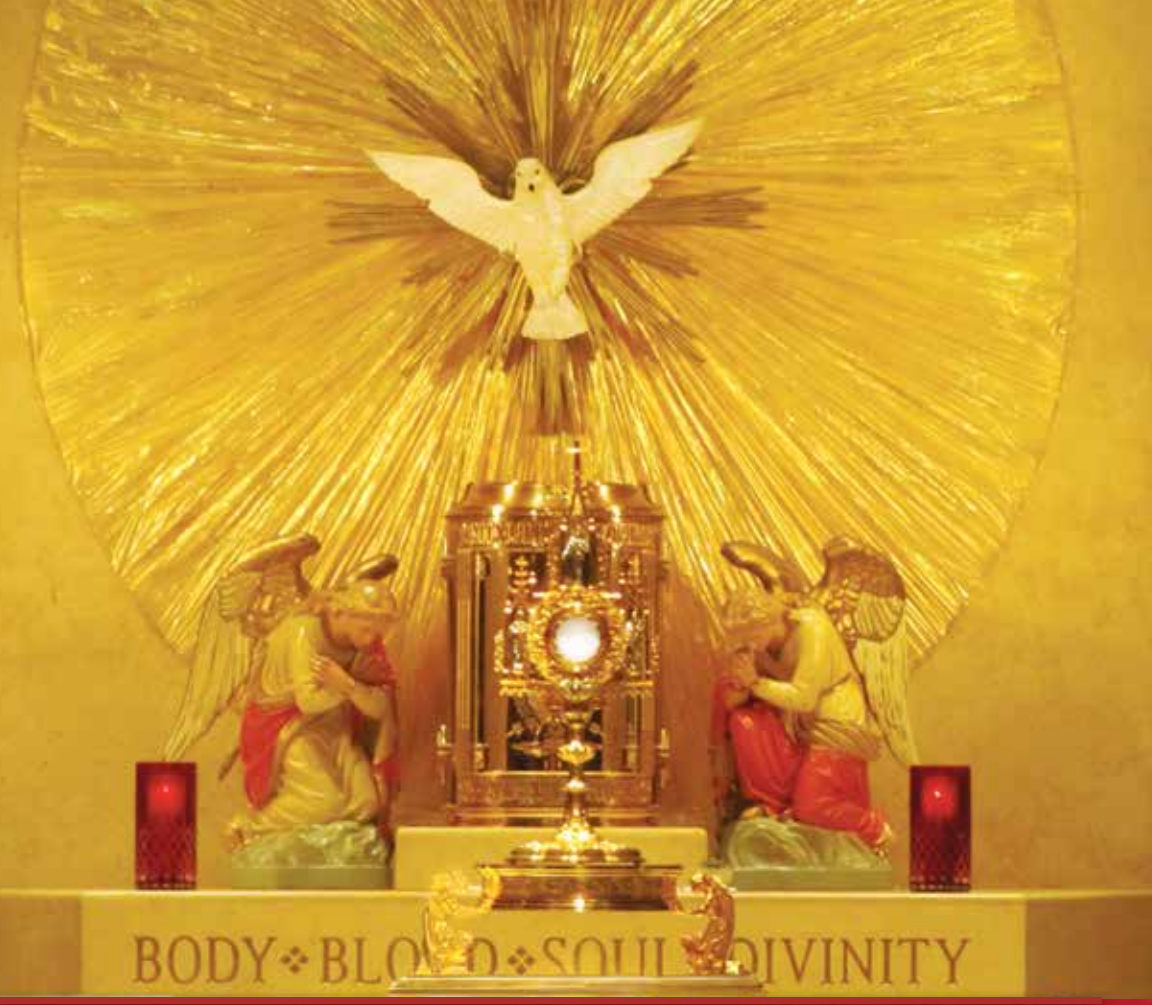

Foreword by Paul A. Ray

GOD MOMENTS II:

Recognizing the Fruits of the Holy Spirit

WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY

Michele Elena Bondi

God Moments II

Recognizing the Fruits of the Holy Spirit

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First edition

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God Moments II

Recognizing the Fruits of the Holy Spirit

Written & Compiled by
Michele Elena Bondi

JOSEPH KARL
PUBLISHING

Award-Winning Books Available From Joseph Karl Publishing

Your Personal Apostolate: Accepting and Sharing the Love of God
Michele Elena Bondi
2010 Catholic Press Association Book Award Winner

"***Your Personal Apostolate*** is a small book that packs a big punch. Walking in the footsteps of St. Therese of Lisieux and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, Michele explores what it means to "accept, return, and share God's love." This book would be a wonderful resource for a Bible Study or prayer group. I heartily recommend it."

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Written and Compiled by Michele Elena Bondi
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"Even devout believers sometimes feel that God remains somewhere far away, distant and uninvolved in their daily lives. But, as Michele Bondi Bottesi suggests in her book ***God Moments***, God draws near in everyday situations. When one opens one's eyes, one can see God at work—providing, caring, and teaching. Catholics like Bottesi will be inspired and challenged by this book, which celebrates the intimate faith many adherents crave... However, any Christian believer uninhibited by Catholic theology will also appreciate this discovery of God in the everyday."

—Diane Gardner, ForeWord Reviews

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Gene X. Kortsha
Winner of four Royal Dragonfly 2011 Book Awards
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—Gjon Bucaj, M.D.

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Written by Michele Elena Bondi and
Illustrated by Kristina Marie Pope

WINNER OF FOUR ROYAL DRAGONFLY 2011 BOOK AWARDS
WINNER OF FIVE PURPLE DRAGONFLY 2011 BOOK AWARDS

"This award-winning picture book from Catholic publisher Joseph Karl Publishing asks First Communicants where our true Treasure can be found. It's a fun way for kids to learn about the search for what truly matters in our lives, with delightful illustrations. It is a great keepsake book and would be perfect for classrooms. Those who are preparing children for their First Eucharist will find this a joy to share with their students."

—Nancy Carabio Belanger,
Author, *Olivia and the Little Way* and *Olivia's Gift*

JOSEPH KARL
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God Moments II: Recognizing the Fruits of the Holy Spirit is dedicated to Nancy Carabio Belanger, Belinda Bondi, Andre J. Bottesi, Rejeanne Buckley, Chris Capolino, Sharon Cecil, Maribeth Criscenti, Ellen Gable Hrkach, Gene X. Kortsha, Janet MacKinnon, Tom Mulcahy, Sean McVeigh, Paul A. Ray, Susan Schoenstein, Jerry Weber, and to everyone who has shared stories of charity, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, goodness, kindness, joy, patience, and peace for the love of God and one another.

God is at work in you!

"The Holy Spirit wants to take us to Heaven;
we have only to say "Yes," and to let him take us there."[1]
—St. John Vianney

1. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), pp. 68-69.

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Foreword

By Paul A. Ray

Living the life Jesus Christ has called all of us to live is mysterious. *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways, says the Lord."* Isaiah 55:8 Yet when we take the time to quietly listen when He speaks so softly into our hearts, He gives us little glimpses of what I call "Divine light." These insights into the spiritual life come from our Creator Himself to feed our souls and help shape the way we think and live. We all know that prayer is a two way conversation. Far too often we pray with sincere intent and fail to take the time to let God get a word in edgewise.

In doing so we find ourselves questioning whether or not He has heard our prayer and wondering what His answer is or will be. He is always talking to us and we need to develop an "ear" to hear him. (Matthew 11:15; 13:9; 13:43; Mark 4:9; 4:23; Luke 8:8; 14:35). Not doing this will leave our souls dry and thirsty.

Picture this, if you will: Our lives from birth are surrounded in darkness due to original sin. Through the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation we open the door to God's grace, mercy, and love, and freely welcome Him in. As the door opens, His light begins to shine forth and pierces the darkness that we have grown so used to. As the door opens even wider, His Divine light begins to take hold of us and everything around us. This light is no ordinary light. It is blinding not to our eyes but to our souls.

When a bright light shines in our faces, we squint our eyes. We might even place our arm in front of our eyes to shadow the brightness of the light so we won't do ourselves harm. Eventually we get used to the light and can look around without squinting. The same is true with God's light. As our eyes adjust to His light, we are able to look around us at the rest of the world and it shocks us, because we now see it through and by Him. We see the world how He sees it.

Since this Divine light exposes all within us, we also see our own faults, sins, and weaknesses for what they are. His light points them out to us because nothing can be hidden from God. These defeats of our soul determine how wide we want to open the door. We can be immersed in His light substantially and even completely if we choose to be. This is union with God, and few attain it. Our lives are spent keeping this door open and WE are the only ones in charge of it.

God Moments II: Recognizing the Fruits of the Holy Spirit contains real stories from everyday people who listened to His voice in their hearts and have seen this light. Our lives are forever changed when we allow God to open this door wider and wider and enter more and more. My prayer is that all those who read these life-changing encounters with God will be encouraged to open the door of their hearts and listen to what He is saying to them, and thus be transformed into the people He has created them to be. In Him, we find authentic happiness that is never fleeting.

—Paul A. Ray

Paul is a Catholic writer, speaker, Creative Director at Joseph Karl Publishing, and member of the board of *True Love Leads to Life.* Following his miraculous deliverance from alcohol addiction by Jesus Christ in a Protestant community, Paul was led to discover the fullness of the Christian faith in the Catholic Church. Visit Paul's blog, *Tongues as of Fire!* at www.tonguesasoffire.blogspot.com.

"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." Luke 11:9-10

Introduction

The events leading up to the completion of *God Moments II: Recognizing the Fruits of the Holy Spirit* tell yet another story that confirms God's constant loving presence among us, always knowing, always guiding with perfect judgment and precision timing.

As the stories for this second book in the God Moments series were being compiled, I asked the good Lord to confirm that it was His will that the book be written, because the genesis of this book was different than all the others. This book seemed to come together on its own. God provided clear affirmation to proceed on four separate occasions.

God's first confirmation came as the book's cover art and theme came to fruition. At the very beginning I knew what picture He wanted on the cover: a beautiful image taken during Eucharistic Adoration at Ss. Cyril and Methodius Slovak Roman Catholic Church. The picture shows Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament in an ornate monstrance, angels bowing reverently on either side, the tabernacle behind the monstrance, and the Holy Spirit represented as a dove at the top of the picture. At our initial meeting to discuss the cover, graphic designer Roseann Nieman and I failed to see how the image fit into the grand scheme of the book, so we decided to consider other ideas instead.

When most of the stories were compiled, they were passed on to my friend and colleague Paul A. Ray, who decided on the theme and organized the stories into distinct chapters, each of which focuses on one of nine (out of the twelve) Fruits of the Holy Spirit.

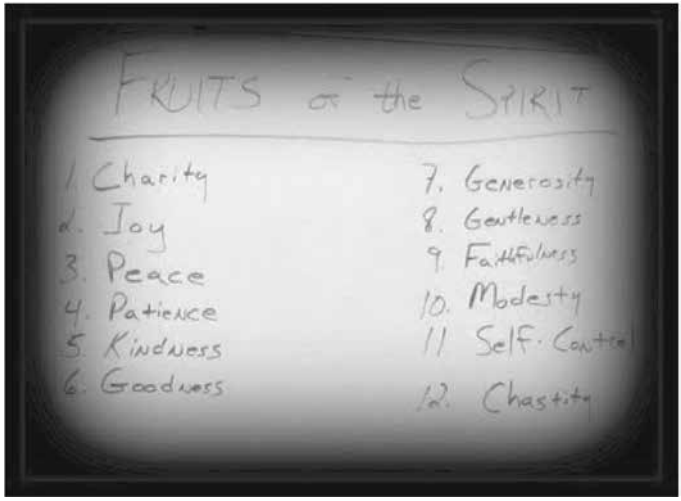
The Fruits of the Holy Spirit are supernatural works that, according to St. Paul, manifest the presence of the Holy Spirit. The one who performs them recognizes God's presence by the happiness he experiences, and others the divine presence by witnessing these good works (Galatians 5:22-23). They are, in other words, identifiable effects of the Holy Spirit. [2]

One Saturday morning while having breakfast with my children, I suddenly understood in a Divinely inspired instant how the cover picture God wanted and the theme of the book fit together. The very picture that did not make sense to us in the beginning was a perfect fit, and the Holy Spirit was the connection. The stories in the book involve the action of the Fruits of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit was represented in the picture God had already chosen before we even knew the theme of the book.

At another time, God told me the theme of the third book in the series, which confirmed that this second book had to come first.

Several weeks later I brought my son Nick to our parish for his Confirmation retreat. After finding an empty classroom, I set up my mobile office equipment with the intention of finishing the book. After sitting down, I looked up and noticed the dry erase board on the wall across the room from where I was seated. The Fruits of the Holy Spirit were listed on the board. What an absolutely delightful moment of confirmation that was, at the very parish where the picture on the cover was taken.

Despite being so close to being finished, work on the book was suspended for six weeks due to persistent viral bronchitis. Despite my great desire to complete the book,



God had not yet provided the words to finish it and would provide them when His timing was right. Work on the book would have to wait, and that is exactly what happened.

Just before Easter, I ran into my friends, author Nancy Carabio Belanger and artist Sandy Casali LewAllen (who wrote and illustrated the award-winning books *Olivia and the Little Way* and *Olivia's Gift*), at a café. They were meeting to discuss the exciting youth books in development at Harvey House Publishing, and Nancy brought up *God Moments II*. During our discussion, Sandy recognized the classroom experience as another God moment, and suggested that the story be integrated into the unwritten forward of the book. Right then and there, the Lord provided the final thoughts for the book through Sandy, all in His most perfect timing.

The manuscript for *God Moments II: Recognizing the Fruits of the Holy Spirit* was completed during Holy Week, one year after its predecessor, *God Moments: Stories That Inspire, Moments to Remember*.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1832), the Fruits of the Spirit are "perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: 'charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity.'[3]

This compilation of stories is categorized into chapters focusing on nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit, including charity, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, goodness, kindness, joy, patience, and peace.

May *God Moments: Recognizing the Fruits of the Holy Spirit* create a greater awareness of God's unfathomable love for you and for every single human person, increase your understanding of the meaning and purpose of your life, and inspire you to greater virtue and deeper surrender to God.

—Michele Bondi Bottesi
Holy Week, 2011

2. John A. Hardon, S.J., *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life, 2008), pp. 222-223.
3. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), p. 451.

Chapter 1 ~ Charity

Charity is the infused supernatural virtue by which a person loves God above all things for his own sake, and loves others for God's sake. It is a virtue based on Divine faith or in belief in God's revealed truth, and is not acquired by mere human effort. It can be conferred only by Divine grace. Because it is infused along with sanctifying grace, it is frequently identified with the state of grace. Therefore, a person who has lost the supernatural virtue of charity has lost the state of grace, although he may still possess the virtues of hope and faith.[4]

Each Day is a Pilgrimage

Symbols Remind Us of God's Tremendous Love for Us

True Love

"I'm Hungry"

The Pilgrimage, the Shepherd, and the Lost Sheep

The Patient, the Pregnant Nurse, and Roe versus Wade

"All our merit, my children, consists of cooperating with grace."[5]

—St. John Vianney

4. John A. Hardon, S.J., *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life, 2008), p. 95.
5. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 62.

Each Day is a Pilgrimage

Revisiting the places where we encountered the Divine.

Every one of our days is an adventure all its own with tremendous opportunities to recognize God's loving presence among us, accept His love, love Him in return, and share His love with others. Each day is also a pilgrimage as we travel through and to places that lead to a deeper, more personal relationship with God.

We encounter mini-retreats throughout our days while revisiting places where we have encountered the Divine, places where God has manifested His great love for us, instructed us, or pursued us. Lately I have experienced these pilgrimages in a very profound way.

While doing things around the house I fondly recall my Divine encounters during the six years we have lived here. Each one is a unique story, having occurred at a certain time, in a particular place, and for a specific reason.

Where have such encounters taken place in your home? Where have you thought about God, listened to Him, conversed with Him, offered thanks, asked for guidance, unified your suffering with His, shared His love with others, or told Him you love Him?

Encounters with God can happen anywhere as we journey through our days. They involve people, places, events, animals, nature, circumstances, and discovery. God may speak to us, we may reach out to Him,

or He may manifest His majesty, splendor, love, and mercy in a host of other ways.

I especially love when my pilgrimage begins in the morning before I even get out of bed, when I awake before the alarm clock sounds and share precious, peaceful time alone with God in prayer before embarking upon the responsibilities of the day.

After dropping my children off at their schools, I drive to Holy Mass and pass so many places that are of great personal significance. The places we go offer mental snapshots of how God's love is woven so beautifully and meaningfully into our days. We are constantly reminded that our lives have great value and meaning, and that we are loved more than we can ever imagine.

One day my sons and I went to St. Andrew Catholic Church to take pictures. It was the first time we had returned to the church since following our summons to attend Sunday Mass at our new parish. For us it was like returning home, home to God's house where we received Jesus so many times, where my children each first celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation and received their First Eucharist, where Andre was confirmed the year before, where we met so many wonderful people and made so many valued friends. We felt many emotions as we prayed before the Blessed Sacrament, took pictures, and reminisced. So much happened to us that year and so much had changed forever.

While traveling through places of significance to you, think of the Virgin Mary and the apostles and disciples as they continued on with the particular mission God had for each of them following Jesus' Death and Resurrection. Their responsibilities must have taken them past places where Jesus walked, taught, healed, worked, suffered, died, resurrected, and appeared. Perhaps they returned to places where they were with Jesus and fondly remembered a moment, a smile, a glance, something they learned, or a conversation they shared.

Imagine what they were thinking and feeling as they traveled to or through those places, lovingly remembering Jesus. Perhaps they renewed their commitment to live in imitation of Christ. May we follow

their example and remain close to God through all the circumstances of our lives.

Recognizing that God is always with us, make each day a pilgrimage as you revisit places where you have encountered Him in a very special way.

St. John Vianney reminds us, "When we are walking the streets, let us fix our eyes on our Lord bearing His Cross before us; on the Blessed Virgin who is looking at us; on our Guardian Angel who is by our side." [6]

—Michele Elena Bondi

6. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), pp. 31-32.

Symbols Remind Us of God's Tremendous Love for Us

What are your favorite reminders?

"To possess God, that is the joy of joys."[7] —St. John Vianney

Ten years ago I purchased a ring that very quickly became a symbol of the extraordinarily loving and ever-deepening relationship between Jesus and me. I never took the ring off. Never. Often throughout my busy and very challenging days I would glance at the ring representing the most important relationship in my life, so vital to my eternal life, and think fondly of Jesus. Seeing it there on my hand was a very powerful, frequent reminder of how much God loves me and remains with me.

During the Christmas break my children and I went sledding. That day, the snow on the hill had been packed down well by the many people who had gone sledding before we arrived. My 10-year-old daughter Alyssa and I got on our tube and began our descent. Immediately I became frightened because straight ahead of us in the distance stood a very large tree. The tree was not typically a concern, but because of the icy condition of the slope we were traveling down the hill much faster than usual. Perhaps we would not veer left on the small hill just in front of the tree as we always had before. To make matters worse, the snow tube rotated on the way down, positioning me backwards and unable to see where we were in proximity to the tree.

Within the three seconds that were available to make a crucial decision as we raced down the hill, I put my hand out to try to slow us down. We hit the small hill in front of the tree and the tube did veer left. When the tube stopped I turned with great relief to look at my daughter, but she was gone. She could see that we were headed right for the tree, and jumped off the tube just before it hit the small hill, and was lying safely in the snow.

I, on the other hand, had injured a finger on my braking hand, the very one on which I wore my symbolic ring. Although I predicted it would take my finger a long time to heal, I did not think to take the ring off. The next morning the knuckle was very blue and swollen. The ring was way down at the base of my finger and there was hardly any wiggle room left. Praise God, the swelling did not cut off the circulation to my finger during the night.

The finger remained swollen for weeks and the ring would not come off. I constantly worried that I would further injure my finger, because there was no room for additional swelling. The whole matter annoyed me tremendously. As soon as it was possible I wrestled the ring off the battered finger and the violated knuckle swelled again. While I was greatly relieved for my finger's sake, I was very sad to be without my special reminder.

Five months later, the knuckle still had not returned to its original size and I remained unable to wear the ring. While the ring is not a sacramental like the Rosary or my Brown Scapular, it is very special to me because it served for so long and through so much joy and suffering as a beautiful representation of my relationship with Jesus and my fidelity to what He asks of me.

Just after the finger injury, the monstrance pin that I usually wear kept falling off my coat. I lost so many of those pins I stopped counting, and started buying five replacements at a time at Catholic supply stores. That pin gets more comments than any other pin I have ever worn. Some people are drawn in by the beauty of Who the pin represents, without even knowing what a monstrance is. Others recognize the monstrance and are

smitten for the same reason, because Jesus loves us and wants to come to every single one of us.

What symbols do you wear to remind you of God's tremendous love and mercy, of Jesus' sacrifice because of His great love for you, of the Virgin Mary's love and intercession on our behalf, and of the angels and saints? They all love us and want to help us know, love, and serve God, and spend forever in His loving Presence.

Have you ever lost your symbols or medals, changed them, or had something happen that made you unable to wear them? God has so much love for us, it is sometimes hard deciding which symbols to choose from among so many! How blessed we are, how unfathomably loved we are!!

One night I was getting ready for bed and reached into my pocket to empty the contents onto the nightstand. I had forgotten what was in my pocket until my hand opened and the treasures were displayed: a Venerable Fr. Solanus Casey badge with a relic, and a rosary that was blessed by the Pope. How delightful! I may not be able to wear my special ring, but I have been given even more signs of God's incredible generosity. They are around my neck, in my pockets, in my purse, in my briefcase, all around the house, in my vehicle, and even on my children.

What are your very favorite reminders? Where do you keep them? How have they helped you in your efforts to love and serve God? He loves every single one of us immensely, unconditionally, and eternally, and His proof is all around us!

My knuckle never did return to its original size. So one day Jesus suggested that I have our ring resized. A wonderful, devout jeweler in my town resized it. What a beautiful moment that was when I finally put our ring back on my finger, and there it remains.

—Michele Elena Bondi

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7. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 46.

True Love

True love is not made of sand, that's why
It withstands the tests of time.
It does not fade like a rainbow does,
Or the sun that dims at dusk.

For forgiveness is its daily bread,
And to patience is love wed.
It is lasting, and never gives up,
And it loves, it loves, very much.

Its heart does not break for pity's sake,
Or leave memories at wakes.
True love is not made of sand, that's why,
It withstands the tests of time.

Nor does it change like the seasons do,
For it's genuine and true.
It is golden and will never rust,
And it loves, it loves, very much.

It does not fade like a rainbow does,
Or the sun that dims at dusk.
True love is not made of sand, that's why,
It withstands the tests of time.

—Belinda Bondi

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"I'm Hungry"

Everything we have is a gift to be shared.

One day my mother was in her car and had stopped at an intersection just off the exit ramp of a freeway in Detroit. She had driven past that spot many times, and often saw the same man standing on the corner. He held a sign that said, "I'm hungry."

A woman in a nice car in the next lane was also waiting for the light to turn green. She was dressed well and was well coiffed. While she waited for the light to turn green she noticed the man holding the sign and yelled to him, "Why don't you get a job?"

The real question here is: Why didn't she do or say something helpful?

My dear mother was so shocked by what she had witnessed. She had been praying for the man holding the sign that said, "I'm hungry." When I shared the story with my friend Nancy, she sagely remarked that the woman failed to realize that everything she has doesn't even belong to her. As you read the story, did you think that the woman was going to help the man in some way?

That woman represents every one of us in some way or another, in some time or place. What transpired there on the street corner that day turned into quite a teaching moment. How ironic that an intersection shares the shape of the cross, the very symbol of sacrificial love. Interesting how the circumstances occurred at an intersection, a well-traveled place where the world goes by.

God loved every one of us first, and it is His love that we are to share with one another. Love is free and there is an unlimited supply. Let us be aware of Who we serve and why, and remain open to moments God sends us to serve in His place, in ways we may never have considered.

St. John Vianney reminds us in his sermon on almsgiving, "What

joy will there be at the judgment for those who will learn from Jesus Christ that the kindness they showed to the poor was kindness shown to Him. 'Yes,' He will say to them, 'it was I myself that you came to see in that poor person; it was to me that you rendered that service; it was to me that you gave alms at your door.'"[8]

Everything we have has been given to us by God. He sends us to serve and to share with our brothers and sisters what He has loaned us. May we never fail to see Jesus in any given situation. May we ever be mindful of the fact that He sends us to help and we help in His place.

My friend Sharon Cecil read this story and shared the following:

"I loved the analogy of the intersection being a cross! My daughter, her friend, and I have a little project: We make up duffel bags with non-perishable food items, prayer/rosary/scripture, and other reading materials, some personal care items, and a note. We keep them in our car and when we see someone with their sign, we give it to them. There have been so many awesome responses from the recipients, especially when the bags are handed to them by teens. Who wouldn't have hope after that!"

The story did not end there. It continues on, every moment of every day, in each one of our lives. The outcomes depend upon the choices that we make. My friend Mary shared the following account after hearing this story. Mary has a friend who is a priest. At one time in his life, he regularly encountered a beggar. After a while, he started hearing the words "Give more." He continued to discern exactly what God was asking him to do. Naturally, he wondered if he was supposed to give the man money. Then one day, he finally understood.

He was to "give more"—of *himself*.

The story "I'm Hungry" continues, and will not be finished until the end of time, because we are all in need of something, and to varying degrees. God sends each one of us to give more of ourselves on His behalf. We stand in His place.

Is God asking you to "give more" of yourself?

—Michele Elena Bondi

8. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 71.

The Pilgrimage, the Shepherd, and the Lost Sheep

He Will Go to Any Length for Just One Person.

Ten years ago I was on a pilgrimage in Italy with Fr. John and pilgrims from St. Andrew and Divine Child. It was a life-changing experience for me. I decided to make the pilgrimage as much of a private retreat experience as possible, and was blessed to be part of a group of very holy women from St. Andrew Catholic Church. We began every morning with the Divine Office and the Holy Rosary before joining the group for breakfast.

Every day at three o'clock, wherever we were, we prayed the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Before retiring every evening we gathered in one another's rooms for night prayer. We prayed for a deepening of faith in Christ for all of the pilgrims. Muriel and I chanced a ride in a taxi and then boarded a bus for Chiesa Gesu, my favorite church. I had many opportunities to make sacrifices, offer up my sufferings, fast and pray. I cried at the bones of St. Peter and during Holy Mass in the Catacombs.

In Boston, while waiting for a shuttle bus to take us to the terminal on the way home, a young man approached me and asked, "Where are you going?" I told him I was on my way home to Detroit after a long pilgrimage.

"Where did you go?" the young man asked.

I said, "To Italy."

The gentleman asked, "What did you like best about your pilgrimage?"

I said, "Seeing the bones of St. Peter." The man mentioned that he was Catholic. I asked him if he had ever asked Jesus Christ to come into his heart and life. He said he was not ready for that.

I responded, "Jesus is ready for you. May I pray a prayer with you? You can repeat the words silently in your heart."

"Okay," he replied.

Jesus gave me the words to pray and this fine young man invited Christ into his life. Immediately after we prayed he asked if he could hug me. He was trembling. I asked him where he was going. He said he was traveling to Mexico City for his job. I said, "Well, find a Catholic church and a good and holy priest, go to confession, and begin your life anew."

We boarded the shuttle but I did not see him get off. *I truly believe that the pilgrimage prepared me for the encounter with that man.*

The Good Shepherd was running after this little lamb who was lost. He will go to any length for just one person.

—Janet MacKinnon

The Patient, the Pregnant Nurse, and Roe vs. Wade

A lot has happened since 1973.

Last weekend I drove a beloved family member to the emergency room at a hospital in Detroit. She had been diagnosed with cancer nine months prior and the treatment, while necessary to save her life, had brought her to the brink of death.

So many memories came to mind as my loved one, my mother, and I walked into the emergency room. This was the same hospital where my father was taken in 1975 after he had a massive heart attack in church while walking up the aisle to receive Holy Communion. He was 39. My brother, sister, and I spent many hours after school in the sixth-floor waiting room while my mother visited my father in cardiac care.

I was in the fourth grade at the time and remember eating dinner every day in the cafeteria, meeting new people while waiting day after day in the waiting room, and spending many hours looking out the sixth-floor window onto Moross Road, watching the cars go by. I remember going into a restroom at the hospital one day and deciding in my 10-year-old mind that I had to leave a testimonial to the time my family spent there. I don't remember what I wrote in the thin area of white grout between two tiles, just that I wrote something.

As I stood in the corridor of the emergency room thirty-five years

later, I marveled at how much has changed in such a short time. The advances in technology have been astounding. My mother and I ate dinner in the cafeteria, which bears no resemblance to the cafeteria I remember from my youth. It is now two stories high and much more modern. I traveled back in time in my mind and remembered our young family standing in line with our trays, thinking it was so great to be able to choose every day whatever we wanted from the options, as my father recovered as best he could from the significant damage to his heart.

After reminiscing during dinner, my mother and I returned to the emergency room and I sat next to my loved one. This time, instead of looking out the window to pass the time, I had my laptop computer and portal to the entire world to keep me occupied. The medical equipment is so much more sophisticated, and so much more can be done to save people's lives than was possible in 1975.

As the nurse tended to my family member, I thought about how much my loved one and my mother as her caregiver had endured in the quest to preserve her life. I thought about how close their suffering has brought them to our dear Lord, and how immeasurable the value of her life is to Him and to us. I thought about the human condition and the great dignity we possess having been created in the image and likeness of God; how loved and valued we are, how precious and important our time here is. What extraordinary plans God has for us.

It is crucial that we not rely on our own understanding.

The nurse moved to the other side of the bed to adjust the intravenous tubes, which positioned her between my loved one and me. I was seated in a chair, and the nurse's abdomen was at my eye level. She was eight months pregnant. My thoughts turned to the sanctity of life, of the precious new life God created, and of the many guardian angels in the room: the angels of my loved ones, mine, the nurse's, and the guardian angel of the unborn child. Then my thoughts turned to the tens of millions of unborn babies that have been denied their right to live, and be loved and valued.

There were so many people who did everything possible to preserve

the life of my loved one. People that she never even met before had prayed for her, and she had a team of doctors and nurses working to save her life. What stark contrast to the total lack of consideration for the lives of the children who are killed by abortion. To think that those children had a team, too: volunteers, administrators, receptionists, nurses, doctors, and marketing specialists. Those children should have been defended, protected, loved, and cared for in equal measure to my loved one.

So much has changed in the world and in the hospital setting since I spent so much time there in 1975. So many more lives are saved today because of advances in medicine. In stark contrast, abortion was legalized in the United States in 1973. Since then, over 46 million people in the United States alone have lost their lives to abortion (Pro-life Action League).

What a tragedy that we work so hard to save some lives and kill others before they ever have a chance to live. We have no right to decide who is loved and who is discarded. If we try so hard to save certain people, life must be worth something.

After my loved one was admitted to the hospital that night, my mother and I saw her to her room and then left for home. It was hard leaving her there, but fortunately her tests came back with good results. What sorrow to leave someone you love when you know they are suffering. Just down the hall my mother showed me some doors and told me they led to a chapel. She suggested we go inside. I expected the doors right off the hospital ward to lead to a plain little non-denominational chapel the size of a closet. Upon walking through the doors, I felt like we had walked into another dimension!

I was absolutely enchanted as we entered the large Catholic church inside the hospital. The Stations of the Cross were in mosaic and were so beautiful, as was the stained glass. I even saw the likeness of my friend St. Anthony. As I made my way up the long center aisle to the altar, I came upon a side niche. The Pieta was recessed back in a well-lit area. Jesus and Mary understand our suffering. They suffered for every single one of us, without exception.

Next I approached the altar, above which hung a beautiful double-sided crucifix. Jesus gave His life for every single one of us, because He loves and values every single one of us.

I was so delighted by our time in the chapel. I said to my mother, "Let's have her (our loved one) wheeled in here!" That is where I would have wanted to spend the night! Visiting the chapel was of great comfort to my sorrowful heart.

What will people think of ***us***, thirty-five years from now?

May the legacy of our time be our choice to respect and defend life from conception to natural death. Let us live in imitation of Christ.

If you or anyone you know is in need of a place to renew, rebuild, and redeem a heart that has been broken by abortion, in an environment of emotional and spiritual safety, please visit: http://www.rachelsvineyard.org/

—Michele Elena Bondi

Chapter 2 ~ Generosity

Generosity is readiness or liberality in giving and freedom from meanness or smallness of mind or character.[9]

Fully Cooperating With Grace

Flat Tire Prayer

The Bakery and the Missing Book

A Cup of Hot Chocolate and the Little Way of Love

Abortion and One Woman's Past, Present, and Future

"Offer Your Temptations for the Conversion of Sinners"

"God wants us to unite our acts of penance with his own…"[10]

—St. John Vianney

9. Dictionary.com

10. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 76.

Fully Cooperating With Grace

We must be willing every moment of every day.

One evening, well past 9:00 p.m. on a school night, my children and I were taking turns talking on the phone with my mother and sister. Earlier I had promised the children a story before tucking them in for the night. There were still so many things left to accomplish at that late hour, and I was so tired. Then the doorbell rang.

Now what?!!

The kids and I looked at each other. Who could it be so late in the evening?

"We're not answering it," I said. In that instant I made the decision to stop serving. In the next instant I realized that it was the wrong decision. The doorbell rang again. All sorts of things shot through my mind within seconds.

I am so tired. Lord, and so much has happened to us this year. My responsibilities seem greater than ever. I did what You asked of me so many times, even when it meant doing things I had never considered, even when it cost us much.

I wasn't thinking of all the positive outcomes of our efforts, only that I was so tired. Has this happened to you lately?

There were still many responsibilities yet to attend to before sleep

could even be considered. Still, I could not deny how vital it is for us to cooperate with grace whenever we are called to do so, even when such moments are very inconvenient and quite unexpected.

What if it was an emergency?

The doorbell rang again. I stopped trying to convince myself that doing nothing was an option. I ended my phone conversation with my sister and went to a second-story window facing the backyard. I looked down and saw my neighbor at the back door. Our conversation was brief; she had locked herself out of her condo, it was late, and the neighborhood was very dark.

After inviting my neighbor in, I kissed my children goodnight, tucked them in, and drove my neighbor down the street to the residence of the maintenance man at her complex. I waited in my vehicle while she summoned him. Then I drove her home and waited with her and her dog for the gentleman to drive over and open the door. She was so apologetic. After having relented to God's will, I was able to help both of us find humor in the situation.

The gentleman arrived and worked on the door lock while I held on to one squirmy, barking dog in my vehicle. My considerate neighbor did not want others disturbed by the barking at that late hour. He wasn't happy to see a stranger with his master at the door to their home! Even though I was willing to help, I still regretted the timing of the situation and occasionally glanced down the street toward my house, hoping to return soon.

We must be willing to cooperate with grace whenever God asks us to. Sometimes we are called to do so at times that make serving others particularly challenging. Those are very powerful moments, and ironically, they may mean more to us than those we are called to serve in God's name.

My neighbor moved in to her condo about two years ago and we formally met about six months after that. My house is on a corner and many people pass by while walking through the neighborhood. We met one day when she was walking by with her dog. Since then, my neighbor occasionally stops by and we chat. She is a lovely lady. Once, she brought me bulbs to plant in the yard, and another time she had me over for tea.

She has baked us treats and is always quick with a thoughtful gesture. We have had many good conversations, she and I.

Early in the evening one July, she came over and led us to three cherry trees growing on the property of her complex. We had so much fun picking the tiny, delicious cherries that she made into a pie and brought over to share with us.

On the Fourth of July, she unexpectedly brought my children colored sparklers, so we lit torches by our picnic table and laughed as the children ran the loop from the driveway to the street, absolutely delighted with this special once-a-year celebration of freedom. Then she and I stood in the garage as it poured rain for about five minutes, joyfully watching as my children blissfully ran around in the warm downpour.

My neighbor cooperates with grace a lot.

In August she noticed that we have a pear tree in our backyard, and asked if she could pick just a few when they were ripe so she could make a pear cake for us. As the weeks went by we checked the fruit and eagerly anticipated the day when we could harvest the pears. We decided that she would make the cake and I would make pear juice, and we would share them with each other.

Those pears sure took a long time to ripen. At one point, my neighbor decided not to wait any longer. She bought some pears and made us a cake.

This is how that grace-filled moment played out.

I had been suffering from recurring headaches for about a week and a half. One Saturday evening, my children and I joyfully attended the Tridentine Mass at our parish. The next morning we had planned to attend Sunday Mass and then travel on to my mother's house to celebrate my sister's birthday.

On Sunday morning I woke up with another bad headache, and so we did not go to Holy Mass. I slept in a little and as we were preparing to leave for my mother's, the phone rang. *Not another thing!* I said to my aching head. I was sad we missed Mass. Although I was very happy to be celebrating my sister's birthday, I would have preferred to stay home and lie down.

I answered the phone, and it was my neighbor. She had baked that pear cake and wanted to bring it to us that very day. I resisted because my head was hurting and I didn't want the pressure of having return home by a certain time that night.

I was surprised when she firmly insisted, so I reluctantly said we would look for her when we got home, without committing to a time. Throughout the day I had it in the back of my mind that we had to get home before too long and take delivery of that cake. That would mean we would not be able to return home and just relax, which I wanted to do so very badly. I had been promising my daughter for a week that I would watch a movie with her, and had already set aside that night to watch the movie. Resting while watching a movie would have been so ideal! By the time the conversation ended, I was very mad.

We returned home well after 8 p.m. If my neighbor brought the cake, it would be late, and we still had a movie to watch. I called my neighbor and first requested, then insisted that we meet up the next day. *She held her ground!* I finally relented and glanced longingly at the couch in my family room while straightening up the kitchen. Despite the fact that I was quite mad at having lost the battle, I lamented as I straightened up the kitchen how wrong I was and how ungrateful I was behaving. What a paradox.

Twenty minutes later she came to the house and handed me the beautiful pear cake along with a bowl of cream. How terrible that I acted so inconvenienced while taking possession of that lovely cake! Most likely in response to that, my neighbor, who must have felt very rejected, told us how much the ingredients cost, how long it took her to make it, and how much she had wanted us to enjoy it while it was fresh. I said miserably, "It's not that I don't appreciate it." I just wanted to appreciate it less tired and without an aching head.

My 11-year-old daughter Alyssa stepped up to the plate so wonderfully. She thanked our neighbor and was so kind to her. We tried a piece of the cake and remarked that it tasted so good. In fact, I had never tasted a cake like it.

It was so important to my neighbor that she make this cake for us to enjoy. To think that I had resisted, and thought more of myself than of her! While I was mindful of that truth and finally cooperated with grace, I did so with resentment. Thank God I regretted my actions. Cooperating with grace in this situation was to benefit me—imagine that—and when I eventually cooperated, it did.

We watched our neighbor as she walked home through the darkness, to make sure she returned home safely. I thought about how God sometimes asks us to cooperate with grace when it is particularly challenging for us. I was granted another precious opportunity to serve, learn, and grow closer to God, once again late at night, once again through the very same person.

We must be willing to cooperate with grace at any moment. The decision to serve God totally, according to His plans, takes some getting used to and requires our generosity. We must be willing to serve him twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We cannot accomplish this on our own; we must ask the Holy Spirit to instruct us in everything.

As my neighbor walked through the dark into the distance, I saw Christ in her and knew that pear cake had been of tremendous benefit to me spiritually. What we do for each other, we do for Jesus. Accomplishing the will of the Father cost Jesus everything He had, and He cooperated not for personal gain but for our sake. May we live in imitation of Christ and cooperate with grace twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

—Michele Elena Bondi

Flat Tire Prayer

We were surprised our prayer was answered so quickly.

Many years ago, when my husband, James, and I were newlyweds, we were traveling through New York State along Highway 81. We were returning to Canada from visiting relatives in my home state of New Jersey. All of a sudden, one of our tires blew. As James was trying to maneuver the car over to the side of the road, we both said a prayer.

At the time, we were very young and had no idea how to change a tire. So we said something like, "Please God, send someone to help us." We pulled to the side of the road and immediately, a car drove up behind us. A man jumped out and handed James a can of something which inflated flat tires and plugged the hole. He then drove away. We were astonished that our prayer had been answered so quickly. My husband then filled and inflated the flat tire and we finished the rest of the trip without incident.

—Ellen Gable Hrkach

Ellen is the wife of James, mother of five sons, and award-winning author of two novels, *Emily's Hope* (www.emilyshope.com) and *In Name Only* (www.innameonly.ca). She is a reviewer for *Catholicfiction.net*, a monthly columnist for *CatholicMom.com* and a monthly columnist for www.AmazingCatechists.com. She is a frequent contributor to *Family Foundations* magazine as well as co-creator of the Family Life cartoon. Ellen and her husband are a certified NFP teaching couple for the Couple to Couple League and are active in marriage preparation in their diocese. Visit her blog, "Plot Line and Sinker" at http://ellengable.wordpress.com.

The Bakery and the Missing Book

How one man's apostolate is changing lives.

One morning I went to a local bakery to do some writing. As I was ordering a cup of coffee, the manager came over and asked if I had left a book there during my last visit. As I took a mental inventory of my books, she asked if I was missing a book by Sean McVeigh.

Immediately I smiled, knowing that the book was mine. She added that it was inscribed in the front "To Michele." We both smiled some more as I acknowledged that the book was indeed mine.

I noticed by the expression on her face that something was amiss. She told me that she had read the book and loved it! We both agreed that the book has tremendous value, especially for young people. The young clerk listened to our discourse and patiently waited for me to finish ordering. The moment seemed too important to interrupt!

However, our exchange was not yet finished. There was more! The manager proceeded to explain apologetically that she could not return Sean's book because she no longer had it. She said, "I know I'm not Catholic, but I gave it to someone in my youth group to read. Is that okay?" I was even more delighted to learn that the book was changing hands so quickly, that people were finding it so valuable, as had I, and that the book was being read by more young people.

I don't think I will be getting that book back, and hope that the youth group continues to pass it around. Sean's books are that good. Once again the manager asked me if it was okay that she had shared the book with others. I was all smiles, and assured her that it was.

After finally ordering a cup of coffee, I sat down at a table and sent a message to Sean on Facebook, informing him of what had just transpired. Sean gave all the credit to God, who loves each one of us so very much and makes His presence in our lives known in the most amazing ways.

What a blessing it is to know Sean, who is doing such incredible work for God's glory and for souls that are loved and valued beyond measure. Several of Sean's stories are included in this book.

—Michele Elena Bondi

A Cup of Hot Chocolate and the Little Way of Love

Very small children can make a very big difference.

The crowds asked John the Baptist, "What then should we do?'" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Luke 3: 10-11

One Sunday, in the gray, misty cold of December, my son and I were privileged to attend a hot chocolate stand. That would have been fun and festive enough at that time of year, but this was no ordinary hot chocolate stand. It was nine-year-old Grace's second year running a charity drive at the end of her driveway for a local faith-based homeless shelter, Grace Centers of Hope. On any given night, this shelter, which receives no government dollars, accommodates between 150-200 men, women, and children who have nowhere else to go.

We were happy to participate in Grace's beautiful mission. The thought of a nine-year-old girl with such a loving heart moved me. A little girl who would stand out in the cold for two hours raising money and donations for those who have nothing must have a very big heart, and she does!

As we pulled up to her house, Grace greeted us with a hearty smile- and the cutest hot-chocolate mustache you ever saw. Some kind friends of hers were seated with her, helping collect donations and scooping mini Christmas-tree marshmallows into Styrofoam cups of creamy hot chocolate. Next to the table were many boxes of donations that had already been given.

Handmade signs invited passers-by to stop. My son and I placed our donation with the others and sipped hot chocolate. It felt so warm on such a cold, damp day.

"How wonderful of you to do this," I said to Grace, who also happens to be my son's classmate and friend. She humbly grinned a chocolaty smile back and adjusted her earmuffs. I greeted her friends, telling them how nice it was of them to sit outside in the cold to keep Grace company.

Just then, a car drove up. An excited man got out, smiling from ear to ear.

"I don't believe it! A hot chocolate stand? How cool is that?"

Grace giggled. "It's for charity," she said. "For the Grace Centers of Hope."

"Well, I've heard of lemonade stands before, but this is really fun!" he exclaimed, as he opened up his wallet and donated generously into a green plastic Christmas bucket with a slit on top. "What a great thing you are doing!" The man was still laughing, smiling, and shaking his head as he got into his car and drove away with his cup of hot chocolate. I think Grace made his day!

I asked Grace's mom how this all began.

"Last year, right before Thanksgiving, Grace told me she had an idea. She wanted to give out hot chocolate in a stand like a lemonade stand. I assumed she was coming up with another scheme to make money, so I told her no," her mom said. "But Grace was persistent. She explained that she wanted to help the poor. She wanted to give them money and things that they needed but she was only eight years old and did not know how to do it. So she figured if she gave people free hot chocolate, they could give something for the poor and that way she could help them."

Her parents were floored, since they had never discussed the idea before.

"I asked her what made her come up with this idea and she said she had been thinking about it for a long time and it just came to her. She also said that people want to help more at Christmas time so she thought it would be a good idea to do it near Christmas. She loves hot chocolate, so

she was sure that everyone else would want to help the poor for some free hot chocolate. If you could have seen her little face telling this to me, you would have known that it was the Lord speaking through her," she said.

So Grace made a flyer, decorated it, and passed one out to every mailbox in their subdivision. She also gave it out to her classmates at school.

The day finally came, bringing with it snow, freezing cold, and icy, slick roads. Her mother told Grace not to be disappointed if no one came, since the weather was so frightful.

Grace looked at her mother and said, "Mom, you just have to believe."

"Sure enough, at noon, the cars started sliding up the hill. I thought it was a miracle," her mom said.

She decided to do it again this year, and it was another successful charity drive at Grace's house. Her mother told me that her daughter ended up with 59 bags of donations and $202.41 to help the poor.

Grace and her friends spread Christmas joy to everyone on Sunday: both to the givers and to the receivers. By giving away one of her favorite things, hot chocolate, she was able to help give a merry Christmas to the cold and hungry of our community.

Last year, Grace wrote thank-you notes to those who came:

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your donation to Grace Centers of Hope. Together we collected $231 and about 52 bags of stuff! When I got a tour of Grace Centers of Hope everybody there gave me a thank you. I'm glad all of you helped the poor. Thank you for being so generous.

Sincerely,
Grace

"As a family, we would never have taken on this initiative without her idea, ambition and hard work," her mom said. "Even very small children can make a very big difference. Many families will have a happier Christmas because of Grace."

As we said our goodbyes, I couldn't help but think of the Gospel

reading we had heard in church a couple hours earlier. As John the Baptist tells us, even in these difficult times, we can still share what we have with those who don't have enough. There is no better way to welcome the Baby Jesus, our Savior, than helping others and sharing our joy.

My son and I left Grace's charity hot chocolate stand filled with joy, not only to have helped our neighbors in need, but also because a little girl brought us the true meaning of Christmas on a dreary, cold day in December—right at the end of her driveway.

"Remember that nothing is small in the eyes of God. Do all that you do with love."—St. Therese of Lisieux

—Nancy Carabio Belanger

Nancy is an award-winning Catholic children's author and the founder of Harvey House Publishing (www.harveyhousepublishing.com), whose mission is to provide quality books for youths that celebrate the Catholic faith, modesty, and the gift of life. Her books include *Olivia and the Little Way* and *Olivia's Gift*. She is currently writing two more books for Catholic pre-teens. Visit her blog at nancybelanger.blogspot.com.

Abortion and One Woman's Past, Present, and Future

I learned a lot from this courageous woman.

Recently I listened to a life-changing discussion between Jerry Weber and "Tabitha," a woman who shared her abortion experience on *The Catholic Revolver with Jerry.* Tabitha discussed the circumstances and experience of the abortion she had as a young woman, why she regrets aborting her child, her relationship with her next child, and her advice for other women. She also offered wise, life-changing advice to people who are considering abortion, to help them before they make the wrong choice and abort their child or children.

Tabitha recommended that mothers considering abortion research the procedure rather than relying on what others say about it, and that they see images of the child they are considering terminating.

She also recommended that women who are considering an abortion talk to a holy priest, and reach out to someone they trust.

She acknowledged that there are resources available to help pregnant women, and reminded that there are people willing to help. She informed that should anyone feel she or he is not ready to raise a child, there are people willing to adopt their child(ren).

Her story is very moving and a stark reminder that our choices have very real consequences for ourselves and for other people.

She said that trusting and impressionable teenagers, young adults, and even adults assume that what is legal is moral, even though that is not always the case, as we see with legalized abortion. Tabitha challenged us to remember that we have an obligation to pass moral laws, including laws that protect every person's life from conception to natural death.

Tabitha reminded us that the consequences of abortion are very real and very destructive.

She encouraged people to make it a law that anyone who is considering an abortion should be required to see an image of the baby (or babies), to confirm that the fetus is in fact a human person.

Jerry, the host of the show, poignantly added that we must remember that children are created by God and are not ours to do with what we choose.

Regret for terminating a pregnancy may be felt immediately, soon after the abortion, or any time later as was the case for Tabitha. Many mothers never wanted to have an abortion in the first place but felt that they had no other option or were coerced into having one. Healing is necessary also for fathers, grandparents, great grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings, cousins, and friends.

If you were involved in or have been affected by abortion, know that help is available.

Visit: www.rachelsvineyard.org

Prayer To End Abortion

Lord God, I thank you today for the gift of my life,
And for the lives of all my brothers and sisters.
I know there is nothing that destroys more life than abortion,
Yet I rejoice that you have conquered death
by the Resurrection of Your Son.
I am ready to do my part in ending abortion.
Today I commit myself
Never to be silent,
Never to be passive,
Never to be forgetful of the unborn.
I commit myself to be active in the pro-life movement,
And never to stop defending life
Until all my brothers and sisters are protected,
And our nation once again becomes
A nation with liberty and justice
Not just for some, but for all,
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

~Priests for Life
www.priestsforlife.org

Listening to Jerry's show and hearing Tabitha's powerful testimony was a very significant God moment for me personally, and I am very grateful to Tabitha for generously sharing her experience to help so many others. The official website of *The Catholic Revolver with Jerry* is www.thecatholicrevolver.com.

—Michele Elena Bondi

"Offer Your Temptations for the Conversion of Sinners"

Wise advice from St. John Vianney.

Last year my family experienced a particularly intense spiritual battle. The assaults occurred in places that were both expected and unexpected. Our adversary has also tried to thwart our mission with a marked attack on technology including our cell phone, both computers, recharger cords, CDs, flash drives, SD cards, and cameras.

I believe that one of the reasons for the assault has to do with something that I recently learned from our dear friend in heaven, St. John Vianney. His advice is incredibly efficacious in avoiding sin when we are tempted by Satan, and saves precious souls in the process!

"Offer your temptations for the conversion of sinners. When the devil sees you doing this, he is beside himself with rage and makes off, because then the temptation is turned against himself."[11]

Copy and print out his words and read them as often as you need to. Memorize them! *Offer your temptations for the conversion of sinners.*

These words remind us that the only thing we have to call our own is our free will. Self-mastery takes work, and we must remain close to the Sacraments to obtain the graces we need to help us overcome our faults and avoid sin.

Seeking to do the will of God, especially when we would have it otherwise, allows God to work most effectively in us and leads to better outcomes for ourselves and for other people.

We must live in imitation of Christ. Jesus Himself was tempted by the devil. He triumphed over evil and sin by accomplishing the will of God the Father. We must strive to do the same.

One Sunday evening my children and I offered each other hugs and words of support following a particularly difficult day. While hugging my teen son Andre, I happened to look down, and there on the carpet was a piece of wire in the shape of a fish, the very symbol representing Jesus and His followers. We shared a smile and retired with confidence having been reminded that God loves us, remains with us, and is our strength, always.

Interesting how that very symbol applied to our lives and our calling that year. Remember that God wants to work through each one of us. We must let Him.

—Michele Elena Bondi

11. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 55.

Chapter 3 ~ Faithfulness

Faithfulness is being true to one's word and strict or thorough in the performance of duty. To be faithful is to be loyal, constant, reliable, and trustworthy.[12]

So Many Sweet Catholic Moments

The Priest

God is Full of Surprises

"There is Something I Want You to Finish"

The Amniocentesis

Have You Ever Wondered Who God is, Exactly?

"God makes use of anything"[13]

—St. John Vianney

12. Dictionary.com
13. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 12.

So Many Sweet Catholic Moments

Life is just full of them.

I treated myself to a cup of coffee at my favorite local bakery one Sunday after Holy Mass. As I was putting my things down on a table by the register, I heard a small child start speaking with great excitement. I looked toward the counter and watched as the clerk on the other side handed the child a plate with a pastry on it. As she took the plate, the little girl exclaimed very loudly and with great joy, "That's a slice of heaven!"

I immediately thought of just having received Jesus in the Eucharist, Who comes to us as a thin consecrated wafer of bread. I thought to myself with great joy, *Now THAT's a slice of heaven.*

During the consecration at Holy Mass one day, I heard someone whisper, "Jesus, I love You!

Once, during daily Mass, I looked up and saw that a woman sitting by the main aisle had dropped her saint and prayer cards. The cards were scattered all over the floor. I had never seen anything like it; there were so many cards on the ground. *Now that's faith*, I thought with a smile.

Last year I took my daughter to get her sixth-grade class schedule for what was to be her first year of public school. A very kind woman was putting family information into the computer and asked for our e-mail address, which has "God is at work ***in you***" in it. She repeated it back as "God is at work ***for us***." I giggled when I heard it. Then today a friend of mine brought up that famous line of ours and said "God is at work ***with us***." I giggled again.

God is always for us, remains with us, and works through us.

—Michele Elena Bondi

The Priest

Amidst the darkness in my world
A sign of hope
A light to light my way.

Humility exposed.
Ever listening to the pain of this human heart
Have I met Jesus.

Truth revealed.

The cross, the cross,
The weight of the cross.

A gentle man approaches
Offers a prayer
Lightens my load.

Ordinary hands.
What draws my attention
To his hands.

Hands that touch
Hands that heal
Hands that forgive and bless.

Sin melting away
Like the early snow of autumn
Kissed by the sun.

Was that Jesus passing by?

Too soon gone!
Come to the Table of Life
He beckons.

—Janet MacKinnon

God Is Full Of Surprises

The decision made at the next fork in the road.

One Tuesday morning I returned to my regular schedule following a delightful Memorial Day weekend. After dropping my children off at their schools I traveled on to daily Mass. By the time I arrived there, something had changed dramatically. At the time I did not know what was happening, nor can I adequately describe to you what happened. It was a very unique experience for me personally, but then again, it had been a year of incredible surprises.

There it was again as I walked to the chapel, that feeling of discontent that I had come to know of in greater measure beginning the spring before. The feeling was unanticipated and took me by surprise. After Holy Mass, I continued on with my day and by the end of the morning, it was clear that God was telling me it was time to make a decision.

I happened to be driving home—on the freeway of all places—when granted that understanding, and right then and there in my vehicle I made the decision to leave the parish my family had been members of for almost ten years. That was such an incredible moment because God orchestrated it, He let me make the decision and at the same time I knew for certain what He wanted.

Just as I made the decision, a vehicle in the slower lane to my right passed me. Most of the back windshield of that vehicle was covered by a huge picture of Jesus. He was wearing the crown of thorns and was looking up to heaven in loving submission to the will of God the Father, reaping the rewards for us from the decision He made based on what God wanted, all at His expense. Below the dramatic picture was an image of His Sacred Heart, representing the immeasurable and infinite love He has for each one of us.

The next morning while in the chapel for daily Mass, I began saying my goodbyes. I took a few pictures before daily Mass so I could always remember the moment. As Mass began, God and I exchanged a private, public moment and I thanked Him for His great love, consideration, guidance, and generosity as we responded to His latest summons. We were to continue serving Him, always striving to love in greater measure, somewhere else.

Eucharistic Adoration began at the end of Mass, a very loving and fitting end to an era of tremendous spiritual growth for our family.

Are you also in a time of transition, great or small?

Know that God is present through every transition and always loves you, is there to guide you, and has a plan for you. Seek His will in all things, take up your cross, and follow Him. May we live in imitation of Christ, because God wants to work through each one of us.

—Michele Elena Bondi

"There Is Something I Want You to Finish"

Once it was accomplished, I was free to return home any time I wanted.

This is the story of what happened last year, on day six of another novena to the Holy Spirit. I finally received the answer to a question that had gone unanswered for so long. I was participating in Holy Mass in the chapel of my former parish. I had planned to attend daily Mass at our former parish earlier that week, and then take my car nearby for a much-needed oil change, but I did not make it there until Thursday morning.

Earlier that year, my family and I responded to God's summons to attend Holy Mass on weekends at a different parish. Several months after that, He told me there was something He wanted me to finish, but He did not tell me what that was. Several months after that, He encouraged me to switch parishes completely. So I did.

My dear friends at my former parish greeted me warmly upon my return to the place where I had attended daily Mass for almost eight years. Carole hugged me before Holy Mass, and during Mass, Lynn held my hand and would not let go. I still miss these lovely people of great faith terribly. I miss the intimate setting of the small chapel, being so close to the life-sized crucifix, and the camaraderie of the very devout, caring people. For so many years we braved the elements, road

construction, traffic, and life circumstances to come together and "have breakfast with the King."

I was charmed all over again by the Mass in the place I held so dear. Mass was almost over when God told me that I had His permission to return and visit any time I wanted. What a sweet moment that was as God informed me that our transition to our new parish was complete, and that was the something He had wanted me to finish.

There is more to this story. Ten years ago during a time of tremendous trial, I asked the good Lord to send me a sign to let me know that a new era was beginning in my life. I never got the sign. Every once in a while as the years went by, I thought about my request and wondered why He had never addressed that particular issue.

Then one day almost ten years later, I was at daily Mass in the chapel of our former parish, just before receiving the summons from God to change parishes. Holy Mass was almost over and I felt that someone was trying to get me to look up at the altar. Was it my guardian angel? I had not noticed and it had to be pointed out to me: There was my sign, in duplicate, on both sides of the altar. I was stunned, for not only was the sign I requested unusual, I had never seen it in the chapel before. There it was on both sides of the altar, and I hadn't even noticed it. I knew without a doubt that the new era in my life had finally begun and I am deeply affected knowing that it was not manmade but rather, it was Divinely orchestrated.

Soon after that I was driving through downtown Rochester on my way to daily Mass when God told me to finish work on the book of a dear friend I met at daily Mass nine years ago. Exactly one week after that, I was driving to daily Mass through the same area when the good Lord told me to take my two youngest children out of their Catholic school and take them to Holy Mass on weekends at what is now our new parish.

That was quite a surprise, as was God's invitation nine years before to attend daily Mass, as was His request that I also receive His Precious Blood during Holy Communion, as was His instruction while I was dating that there was something He wanted me to finish first, as was His sweet, loving notification that we are now at the parish where He wants

us. He knows of my difficulties with the transition and gave me permission to return to our former parish for Mass any time I wanted. Not only that, He so kindly referred to it as my "home."

Oh, what a kind and concerned God we have. He looks out for us, and guides us towards our greater good. He knows what we need before we do. Not only does He love us, He wants us *unified* with Him. We need to be open to His promptings and summons, and recognize and accept the fruits of the Holy Spirit, that He may best work through us.

Once during daily Mass, I was listening to the homily when I felt Him leave the altar and come toward me, and as He did so, He drew me toward Himself. We sort of met in the middle. All through the homily I fought back tears of gratitude and joy while experiencing this uniting of the soul with its Creator, having become a part of His eternal and tremendous love in such an intimate way.

I used to wait in the car line to pick up my children from school, and one day years ago God invited me to come sit with Him in the chapel instead of waiting in the line. For years my routine included daily Mass in the morning, and then sitting with Jesus in the chapel before picking up my children. The peace and calm was so very nice. During one of my final days in the chapel before removing my last child from her Catholic school, I knelt in the pew and said goodbye to this special part of my life in that place. The circumstances of our transition were very painful, and on that day, Jesus left the tabernacle, came to me where I was kneeling, and gave me a hug.

Even though HE knew that great things were ahead for me, I didn't, and He comforted me with His tremendous love and mercy.

If you ever doubt that God cares about you, or wonder if He hears your prayers, or think that they don't matter or that what you do is irrelevant, I can assure you that your life matters to God down to the smallest detail. I can assure you that He not only wants you to know, love, and serve Him, He wants your soul UNITED with Him. *United forever*. Imagine that.

The first day I took my children to Catechism at our new parish,

Eucharistic Adoration was taking place in the church. Jesus was there to welcome me, and I had never experienced anything like it, ever. His goodbye hug in the chapel led to His astounding and immensely loving welcome to our new church.

My family absolutely loves our new parish and we never knew there was a place on this planet like it. The Masses there are extraordinarily beautiful. Everything there is extraordinarily beautiful. There are no words to describe the beauty and holiness of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Corpus Christi, Pentecost, and the Tridentine Masses, except to say that they are heavenly. Eucharistic Adoration is so powerful. Jesus is always there, waiting for us to accept His love so that we may exist in union with Him.

Being at our new parish has been of incalculable spiritual benefit to us, and is of vital importance to the mission that God has for us to accomplish. The fact that God led us there makes us feel very loved, valued, and well cared for.

Is there something God is asking you to do? Love much, live obediently, do what He tells you, and be unified with Him. God is at work in you.

—Michele Elena Bondi

The Amniocentesis

God answers prayer.

A friend and I had occasionally attended the Touch of Mary prayer group at a local parish on Wednesday evenings. One such Wednesday was January 19, 1999. The March for Life on Washington, D.C. was to take place in three days, on January 22. Our oldest daughter was due to have her first full-term baby by caesarean section the following morning, on January 20. Her obstetrician asked her to arrive early for an amniocentesis test. She was being pressured by her husband and mother-in-law, who was a nurse, to have the amniocentesis to determine if her baby's lungs were developed enough. I begged our daughter not to have the test done. Knowing the test can cause brain damage, birth defects, and even death made me fearful of the danger to her baby. She already had one amniocentesis test administered about four months prior and everything appeared normal at that time.

She succumbed to the wishes of her husband and mother-in-law. I was so anxiety ridden that I sought help and consolation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the prayer meeting. I explained the situation to the priest in the confessional, and told him about my anxiety and fear for the safety of her baby. I told Father that I had been praying for quite some time about this but the procedure was still scheduled for early the following morning. Father said amniocentesis was morally wrong and should

not be administered. I asked him, "How can I stop it?" He offered to lift this intention up during the Holy Mass. I felt comforted.

I slipped into the pew next to my friend. After we prayed the 15 decades of the Rosary, Holy Mass was celebrated. During his homily, Father talked about the upcoming March for Life in Washington, D.C. He said abortion for any reason was a grave sin, and so was amniocentesis. He went on to explain why both were an abomination before God. He said they were basically the same sin. I nudged my friend whom I had confided in and she nodded in agreement. The next morning, the obstetrician attempted the amniocentesis procedure on our daughter but was unsuccessful in finding a spot to insert the needle safely. So, thanks be to God, the procedure was not done. Our daughter was prepped for her first of many c-sections.

The doctor's associate was standing beside him, observing. As he made the incision, she saw other hands superimposed on the doctor's hands guiding the c-section. She later told my husband privately that she never saw a more beautiful cut. I was waiting in the visitor's lounge while my husband visited with our daughter. He came back to get me and remained in the waiting room because only one family member was allowed to visit at a time. I kissed our daughter and congratulated her on her beautiful daughter who looked just like a little Eskimo, with mounds of straight jet black hair. Then I got to hold our granddaughter.

Our son-in-law showed us her one tiny foot that had a scar on it from the previous amniocentesis. I was shocked. Just think what another test might have done to our beautiful grandbaby. I was filled with gratitude for a prayer answered. I attended the prayer meeting the following week and told Father the good news. God answers prayer. Our granddaughter is turning 12 later this month. She is so beautiful, and God is so good.

—Anonymous

Have You Ever Wondered Who God Is, Exactly?

Do you know of the very special place where you can find out?

Have you ever asked God Who He is exactly? Have you ever asked Him to show you Who He is? These are very wonderful questions to ask, for such inquiries mean that we are striving for greater intimacy with the Divine.

Who is God, and where can we find Him?

I have been asking God in prayer to reveal to me Who He is. I already know where He can be found, and constant proof of His loving existence is granted to us every single day. The proof cannot be missed for it is all around us! My request did not involve doubt, but rather was the result of my heart's desire to know Him more intimately and to be closer to Him.

God is found within the Bible, His living Word. He is truly present in the Eucharist we receive during Holy Communion: Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. During the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we obtain His mercy. He is found in His house. God is everywhere, always, for He is not limited to time and space.

For many days He remained silent as I prayed, and then when I was suffering, He told me that I would come to know Him well by joining Him on the Way of the Cross. We come to know God in a very deeply personal way when we live in imitation of our suffering Savior.

Walk in union with Him along the Way of the Cross. Keep forgiving. Live morally, love heroically. Allow His will to be accomplished through you. Accept, return, and share the eternal and immeasurable love He has for you and for every person, without exception.

Thank You, most loving God, for answering my prayer. Thank You for leading me down the harder, better road, for it is the very road that brings precious, eternal souls to You. May we be comforted by the understanding that it is through our trials that we come to know Who God is in a very, very special way.

—Michele Elena Bondi

Chapter 4 ~ Gentleness

Gentleness is mildness in disposition and behavior. It is a perfection of love that tempers justice by avoiding any unnecessary action that might provoke anger or resentment.[14]

God Can Use Us Any Time, Anywhere

Catholic Outreach

Hunger Behind the Iron Curtain

My Introduction to the Tridentine Mass

The Wind Chime

Lord, Take All My Liberty

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"Remain humble, remain simple;
The more you are so, the more good you will do."[15]
—St. John Vianney

14. John A. Hardon, S.J., *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life, 2008), p. 350.
15. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 33.

God Can Use Us Anytime, Anywhere

All we need to be is willing.

In June 2000, I was called to jury duty. It was the busiest time of the year in real estate and I was not happy about the timing of the summons. I arrived at the courthouse on Monday morning and the room was filled. One of our neighbors was across the room from me. My husband and I knew her casually but not well. At the break we talked, and at the end of the break she asked me to pray for her daughter who had been diagnosed with Hodgkin's Disease. She was 26 and was planning on getting married in September. I took my neighbor's hand, said a short prayer, and then we headed back to our table.

On the way back, I thought of St. Faustina and Divine Mercy. St. Faustina had just been canonized. I mentioned them to my neighbor as we walked, and when we got back to the table, one of the other ladies heard us and pulled a novena book on Divine Mercy out of her purse. A gentleman sitting there was wearing lapel pins of Our Lady and an angel. The lady mentioned that there was a Healing Mass scheduled the following night at Our Lady Queen of Peace parish. The celebrant was a priest from Chicago who has the gift of healing.

We encouraged her to bring her daughter and she did. They were just amazed. When the priest prayed over her he put his hands on her neck where the lymph glands were enlarged without knowing what was wrong with her. Of course they were blown away.

The next day, our neighbor called and asked me to come over and

pray over their daughter. I asked if my husband could come and she said no. So I went and explained that it is Jesus who heals, and invited her parents and fiancé to join us in prayer. I also told the young lady that she would tell her children what God had done for her. Then I went home.

The following day, we were dismissed from jury duty. The next day was a Friday. A colleague came into my office and mentioned she wanted to show me the flowers she had picked for her wedding bouquet, although they were wilted because they had been on the back seat of the car for a while. She brought them in and as she was walking out, she turned around and handed one to me. Immediately, I felt prompted to give it to the young woman with Hodgkin's Disease, so I wrapped a wet paper towel around the stem and brought it home. It was wilted and I felt rather strange about bringing it to her.

I went, rang the doorbell and all of a sudden realized that the pale yellow rose with pink edges were the colors of Divine Mercy. I handed the rose to her mother, feeling a bit uncomfortable, and explained that I felt the Holy Spirit had led me to give it to her daughter. She was very gracious, thanked me, and said she would put it in a bud vase.

The following Tuesday, my neighbor called me over. She showed me the rose and it was so beautiful, in full bloom and in perfect condition. She was amazed, and I was also amazed. The most shocking thing is that the rose lasted for 18 days. She went to a florist who told her that roses typically last four days.

My neighbor's daughter was treated with chemotherapy and did very well. She did not miss much work at all. She married the following June and now has a 7-year-old son. The cancer has not returned.

I can't imagine what would have happened if I had ignored the promptings of the Holy Spirit. I'm sure that not only touched the young woman's life, her parent's lives, and her fiancé's life, but our lives, too. God is so good.

I'm still blown away; who would guess that a call to jury duty would lead to such an experience. God can use us anywhere and anytime as long as we are willing, even it if looks stupid or annoying. As Mother Angelica says, "If we're willing to do the ridiculous, God can do the miraculous."

—Rejeanne Buckley

Catholic Outreach

We are on call every moment of every day.

Yesterday I enjoyed a working breakfast at my favorite coffee shop. Shortly after I arrived, a woman sat town at the next table and said hello. She reminded me what her name was and remarked that we had met once before, right there at that same spot. I remembered her. Just as she did during our initial encounter, she sipped her drink and read the paper while I did some work before Holy Mass.

Just before it was time to leave, I was worked diligently to finish an article when my new friend turned to me and began speaking. She had something on her heart and had to share the significance of the occasion with someone.

My new friend proceeded to tell me that her son was leaving that morning for Ireland to start a new job, and he would possibly remain there for two years. Very soon she was going to pick him up and drive him to the airport. As mothers of sons, we shared a mutual understanding of what such a moment means to a mother.

She was so happy for her son, and yet it was clear she would miss him terribly. What a wonderful mother. How blessed he is to have such a loving mother.

I encouraged her to turn throughout the morning to Our Lady, who knows very well the sorrows of a mother's heart. She, too, was separated from her Son. My friend sat quietly for a moment.

Then she asked me where I go to church. I told her.

I asked if she planned to visit Ireland during her son's stay there. She described with gratitude what has been a wonderful life, which included traveling with her husband all over the world. Then she said that she and her husband would have to travel to Ireland to visit their son separately, because someone had to remain home to care for their other son. Usually when they traveled, the son she was taking to the airport took care of his brother while their parents were away.

Then, she shared another story.

When her oldest son was born, he was so beautiful. She shared the joy of his years growing up and described his achievements, most notably as a young adult. His life was filled with achievements and held such promise for the future. Then, when he was in his early twenties things changed, and the entire family suffered tremendously. How much they love him! That son was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

I shared her sorrow and explained that my family also suffered in a similar way. As I packed up my things, we spoke of our many years of suffering.

Our conversation was less than ten minutes long. Just before I left, the woman added one final thought. She told me that she was raised Catholic. I asked her if she made her First Communion, and she replied with a smile on her face that she had.

As we parted ways, her final comment was, "Perhaps I will go back."

I replied with a big grin, "You should!" There, we find and receive Jesus truly present Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, in the Eucharist.

How many opportunities we have to practice Catholic outreach. How many times we can share the love of Christ with others. He sends His beloved to us and we are to guide them, lovingly, to His Precious Body and Blood, for He is our spiritual food and the source of life and love. "God is Love and love is his first gift, containing all others."[16]

On the way to Mass I could not help but think that it was my tremendous suffering that led me right into the arms of Christ. Perhaps this woman's struggles and pain have led to her thinking about returning to the immense and infinite love of God in the church founded by Jesus Christ: the One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

Amazing to think that the greatest suffering of our lives leads us to Jesus. How humbling to consider that He is willing to make use of us as instruments of love in His plan of salvation, through our presence in the lives of each other. He can, does, and will make good come out of any situation. That's Mercy. That's our Jesus! We are on call every moment of every day. Witness His great love and mercy to all those you encounter.

—Michele Elena Bondi

16. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), # 733, p. 211.

Hunger and God Behind the Iron Curtain

I'll never forget her look or her words.

The year was 1951. After the communist takeover of Albania in 1944, I had spent over a year in jail. I was released, worked as a physician's assistant, but was eventually fired from my job and was assigned to do manual labor. Together with a handful of men and one woman, we were building a two-story school. At the center of the construction site was a 20 x 20 x 20 ft. pit where the woman was mixing mortar with a shovel. I was moving mortar, stones, brick and other construction materials in a wheelbarrow.

One day she brought three of her children to work. The two girls, both under ten, were playing with pebbles. The two-year-old boy was sitting forlorn near the pit where his mother shoveled mortar. His face was without expression, his eyes unfocused. He was there like a little heap of unhappiness, with sagging shoulders and his mouth half-open. It hurt me seeing him like that. I spoke to his mother.

"Is it OK if I give him a ride in my wheelbarrow?" She nodded.

I picked up the little guy. He looked frightened but did not cry or resist. As I put him into the wheelbarrow, he sagged, hunched over, just as before, his face frightened as he held on to the sides of the wheelbarrow. I ran around the pit. Nothing. I tried to tickle him—again nothing. I was frustrated.

Then it occurred to me. I always kept a little piece of bread in my pocket for when my hunger pangs got too strong. I would bite off a chunk and chew on it as long as I could before swallowing. Usually, it helped. Today I decided to offer the chunk of bread to the little guy. I was sure that would make him smile. I offered him the bit of bread. He looked at it, then he looked at me but did not reach or smile. I brought the bread closer to him and put it into his little fist. Again, nothing.

Frustrated, I said to his mother, "Doesn't this child ever smile?"

She looked at me, "Obviously, you have no children. Hungry children don't smile."

I'll never forget her look or her words. It was an apt description of the 'Workers' Paradise' behind the Iron Curtain.

There existed another reality in Albania, side by side with hunger, fear, and persecution. In 1946 I got a job as a physician's assistant at the Military Hospital in Tirana, the capital of Albania. I was assigned to work in surgery. One evening around 8:00 p.m. a VIP patient by the name of Nako Spiru was brought to the hospital suffering from a gunshot wound to his chest.

Comrade Spiru was well known throughout Albania. He was born into a wealthy Orthodox family and had studied at a university in northern Italy. He had joined the communist party early on and had risen to the rank of head of the five-year plan, a most important economic position. He was also placed in charge of the war on religion.

Those accompanying him to the hospital explained that he had accidentally dropped his gun in his office. It had struck the floor and had fired, wounding comrade Spiru in the chest.

The story was untrue. Had the events taken place as described, the entrance wound would have been lower than the exit wound. In his case the opposite was true. The chief surgeon of the hospital, a Dr. Guglielmo Augi, immediately ordered a blood transfusion. Soviet surgeons summoned from the nearby Civilian General Hospital recommended a few more transfusions that had no effect as the patient was obviously bleeding profusely internally. Comrade Spiru lived until 10:00 p.m. During those

two hours he kept repeating incessantly, "Lord save me, Lord save me, Lord save me…"

The next day, right after the funeral, the communist youth at the Military Hospital started dancing without abandon. When challenged that they had just returned from a funeral, they blithely replied that comrade Spiru had lost his life accidentally and not in battle fighting for the communist cause.

Nako Spiru was not the first to die with God's name on his lips. Many priests had preceded him into death, after incredible tortures, always obedient to their faith and commitment to God. The road to Golgotha would be followed by many in Albania. Despite every communist effort, despite most cruel persecutions, the Church would survive underground until the dawn of freedom, when faith in God could again be proclaimed publicly and the faithful could freely partake of the sacraments.

PRAISED BE THE LORD.

—Gene X. Kortsha

Gene arrived in the United States in 1955 and became an American citizen in 1961. He earned a B.A. in Chemistry and an M.S. in Industrial Hygiene and Health Sciences from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. Gene worked for General Motors for 29 years, serving the last 13 as corporate director of Industrial Hygiene. He was also elected secretary and subsequently president of the American Industrial Hygiene Association, and served as president of the American Academy of Industrial Hygiene. Gene is an Adjunct Professor at Wayne State University and is the award-winning author of *One Man's Journey to Freedom: Escape From Behind the Iron Curtain* (Rochester, MI: Joseph Karl Publishing, 2010). He and his wife, Margaret, have three children and eight grandchildren.

My Introduction to the Tridentine Mass

The adventure continues.

One evening I dropped my boys off at the front door of our church so they could get dressed in their altar boy cassocks before Holy Mass. Then I parked our vehicle and my daughter and I walked across the parking lot to the front doors of the church. Just as we got there, I was surprised to see that my two sons were walking toward us, back out the doors.

They told us with excitement that there was going to be a different type of Mass that night! As we entered, I asked them if they would still be able to be altar boys, and they said yes. While walking into the vestibule of the church, I wondered what was next. I thought we were getting a good handle on learning the ways of our extraordinary new parish. Recently I had even started singing in Latin during the Wednesday morning Latin Mass, until realizing that I still didn't know the words. At least I was feeling more comfortable! So there we were that evening, once again facing the unfamiliar.

We saw our wonderful pastor in the vestibule and approached him, perplexed. He told us that the next Mass was a Tridentine Mass and asked if we had ever been to one. I said that we had not. As my sons left to go put their cassocks on, Father said to me, "Stay right here!"

All kinds of thoughts ran through my mind at that moment. I knew something different and significant was about to happen. That year had been so unique as God continued to expand our Catholic horizons in ways

I never could have imagined or thought possible. My constant companion was the feeling of being swept away by the phenomenal and majestic tide of Catholicism. What was going to happen next.

Father explained a little about the Mass and again insisted we "Stay right here!" Even more perplexed, I looked through the window of the entry doors and saw that there were people already sitting in the church. So I asked with wonder while pointing to the doors, "We can't go into the church?"

How funny. Father said that yes, we could go into the church; he simply did not want us to leave if we were intimidated or didn't feel comfortable with the unfamiliar Mass. We stayed, and although we were quite lost throughout the entire Mass, we absolutely loved the Tridentine Mass, are richer for having participated in this Mass, and now we go every Saturday that we are able to.

How beautiful Catholicism is; how meaningful, how loving.

How many beautiful Catholic stories abound within our families and among our friends: encouraging stories, inspiring stories, life-changing stories, funny stories.

I'll share one more with you.

What seems like a lifetime ago, we were called to our former parish for what would be a ten- year stay. One day I took my daughter, who was very little at the time, into the chapel to pray. The chapel was empty, except for us. While praying I noticed that my toddler was staring intently at the life-sized crucifix behind the altar. I remember thinking that she already had such a deep faith to be staring like that at the crucifix.

As we were leaving, Alyssa said to me, "Mama, *are they going to do that to **us***?

That poor little girl had probably been thinking the whole time, "What are you sitting here for, get us out of here!

One thing she recognized correctly as she stared at an image we sometimes take for granted is the barbaric nature of the suffering and death that Jesus endured because of His tremendous love for mankind.

Make it a point to go to Holy Mass.

—Michele Elena Bondi

The Wind Chime

In the spring and in the summertime,
There's a chime that hangs from my rose vines,
That swings and rings when blown by the wind,
Or when it's touched by my fingertips.

The wind chime hangs with balance and poise,
And at night lends to the stars a voice;
As the white stars begin to shine through,
The chime chimes a pure and wondrous tune.

Like a good secret that is not kept,
Or a butterfly that eludes nets,
Or the delightful scent from a rose,
That fills the air when my garden grows;

The chime is a charming garden bell,
with a cheerful sound that does not tell,
Where the borders or boundaries are,
As it rings joy through my neighbors' yards;

And reminds us with worthy notice,
That we live lives with holy purpose;
And defend the values we treasure,
And focus on what really matters;

And spend some time, some meaningful time,
Beneath the chime, beneath the rose vines;
And memories, like flowers, gather,
When loved ones in our gardens, gather.

—Belinda Bondi

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Lord, Take All My Liberty

A moment of mercy in a snowy alley.

Father John A. Hardon, S.J. used to teach at the Missionaries of Charity on Trumbull Avenue in Detroit every Thursday when he was in town. We had an especially lively discussion in our class one particular day that caused us to run a little later than usual. Father had more appointments that day; we could not be late for them.

I could see the snow falling outside the window and I grew concerned that the drive back to the office would be slow and slippery. There was another lady with us; she was our driver that day. I asked her to go and warm up the car so that when Father left the Missionaries of Charity he would be able to get into a warm car. Father Hardon was in his eighties and had been fighting an illness and it was important that he remain warm and not be chilled.

As we were leaving the Missionaries' house, the snow started to fall really fast, with big white, fluffy flakes and gusts of strong wind causing the snowflakes to dance and swirl around.

Father got all bundled up, put his scarf around his neck, put on his hat and gloves, buttoned up his overcoat, and out the door we went to fight the bitter cold.

As we opened the door in the fence surrounding the property, Father

spotted a street person hiding from the wind in the alley. Father immediately said, "Go and wait for me at the car; stand near the car door."

I replied, "Yes, Father."

Father went over to the man, who then stepped out of the shelter of the alley. They spoke and then the man knelt down in the snow. It seemed that the snow was falling so much faster that Father Hardon and the man became obscured, and visible only as dark patches in the alley. The snow slowed down as quickly as it had started, the man got up after Father gave him a blessing, and then Father came to the car.

"Father, are you okay?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "That man needed to go to confession; he had not been in twenty years." That is just what God wants, that we all confess our sins and go forward in life filled with grace and happiness.

—Susan Schoenstein

Susan is a wife, mother, grandmother, nurse, Marian Catechist, missionary, and Catechism teacher. For almost ten years, she worked closely with Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J. as his private secretary and as a proofreader. Susan is a vital colleague at Joseph Karl Publishing in so many ways, most notably as an editor who also ensures that all content conforms to the Magisterium and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church.

Chapter 5 ~ Goodness

Good is, in general, whatever is suitable or befitting someone or something. Practically, however, it is that which all things tend toward or desire. The good is the desirable, and therefore the object of the natural (or supernatural) needs or tendencies of a being.[17]

Majesty: Yes, Crown Thy Good with Brotherhood, Indeed

Sweet Tales from the Catholic Front

The Power of a Pin

Prayer to St. Anthony of Padua

You Must Be Silent

How Powerfully God Can Work Through Our Lives

"God speaks to us without ceasing by his good inspirations."[18]

—St. John Vianney

17. John A. Hardon, S.J., *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life, 2008), p. 234.
18. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 8.

Majesty: Yes, Crown Thy Good with Brotherhood, Indeed

Jesus was there, and He took no sides.

I'm not sure what it is that so defines this, this stirring magnificence. This grandeur of the Adirondacks.

This broad, beckoning, deep-blueness of the lakes? There is no name, no container for this blue. It is too crystal, too sweeping, too untainted, too breathtaking.

This fortress of old growth forests? Striking soldiers of pine against sapphire skies. Hardy maples offering quiet shade to the littlest of creatures, creating sun dappled beauty on the shoreline. Magically coloring in autumn. Fragilely disappearing in the chill.

This delicate balance of humanity and wildlife? A mallard swooping with conviction to what calls him on the lake. A great blue heron gracefully lighting among the shore reeds. A tiny box turtle moving quickly as he is able, taking refuge under the boggiest mossy meeting of land and lake, when he hears us coming. For we know that the animal kingdom, while instinctively claiming territory, has not imposed the borders on God's precious gift to us, our home, our planet, as we humans have.

These mountains that call us perennially? They sit in quiet guard always. They rejuvenate and refresh with their pureness. Their very name resounds with distinction, vastness. And for us, familiarity, a coming home. A feeling of privileged return.

This rich fabric of history? Our collective history. These mountains echo with battle cries of the brave and the mighty. Those with strong belief in their cause. Battles that pitted God's sons against each other over borders, principles, and pride. So that one asserts its dominance in the French and Indian War and then, so that one claims its independence in the Revolutionary War.

It is the story of us all, fought for them and fought for us; for we are their future.

We saw the face of Jesus in our guide at Fort William Henry, nestled at the north end of Lake George, as he ardently spreads these stories that he holds dear; as he conjures images that so aptly spring to life events at the fort. In so doing, he spreads the Word. For these stories are the key to who we are. If we were there, on these battlefields 250 years ago, we would have seen the face of Jesus there as well.

He was there. He carried each soldier. For Jesus takes no side. He was there, encouraging, guiding, and providing perseverance. He was there. And in their final moments, He was there. Consoling those left behind. Escorting the others Home.

Shrouded among the stately mountains and indigo lake, reflecting the pines, the junipers, the aluminum rowboat, and the bobbing dock, we are in what could be a scene on a postcard. My husband and older son chat comfortably while casting their lines, and bobbers are configured onto brand-new-just-this-Christmas, Santa-gifted fishing rods.

My younger son is splashing happily, already submerged in the icy lake and halfway to the dock. He is yelling, "C'mon guys!" It is a day full. Boys on the loose will find enough nature to explore from dawn to dusk. And it is made all the brighter by togetherness.

Later, after a hot dog and s'more feast around our dwindling campfire, sheltered and snug in the pine-scented nylon of our tents, the boys become immersed in our current before-sleep novel and my husband's voice trails off as he reads aloud. They settle under cozy camp blankets and the neon of dollar store glow sticks and tons of hugs.

"Wait, Mom, one more quick prayer," he blurts as the enormous, dark eyes, heavy with happy exhaustion, reach out.

"I know we should be praying for others, but I have to ask God for another day like this tomorrow. This was the BEST." He hunkers down further in his sleeping bag and whispers, "Oh and thanks, God, for all of this. I'm so lucky."

Yeah. Well, me too.

He certainly HAS shed His grace on thee. On all of us.

—Christine Capolino

Christine writes monthly columns at www.amazingcatechists.com and www.catholicmom.com, which focus on her attempts at weaving together faith and her family life. She is a contributor to *Stories for the Homeschool Heart* (Waterford, MI: Bezalel Books). Christine earned two honors degrees in Education from St. John's University, taught for 14 years, and feels that the most meaningful learning occurs at home, in the heart of the family. Chris grew up in Queens and now lives a beautiful homeschooling life on eastern Long Island with her husband and their two lively boys, who continuously color their lives with an unbridled enthusiasm for baseball, basketball, John Wayne impressions, Legos, pirates and all things action/adventure.

Sweet Tales from the Catholic Front

I just love being Catholic!

I went to my "office" at a local coffee shop one morning to do some writing. It was crowded; there was only one spot available near an outlet, which I needed so I could plug in my computer. The woman at the next table was just delightful. She and I have a friend in common, and he introduced us and had a petition for us both to sign. After we both signed the petition, our conversation steered toward politics and the judiciary system in the U.S. I mentioned my wish that Jesus were the judge in every courtroom. My neighbor at the next table said, "Well, He WILL be."

Jesus is our Just Judge.

I went to another local coffee shop on a different day to treat myself to a working breakfast and had to kneel on the ground by my table to plug in my laptop computer. A woman said to me, "On your knees already?"

I smiled and remarked, "Any time is the right time for prayer."

Jesus, thank You for listening to and answering my prayers.

One morning during spring break my children and I were walking around the mall. Two gentlemen passed us; they were traveling in the opposite direction. As they approached, the second man looked at me and his greeting was so kind that I thought he knew me. I was certain that I did not know the man, and wondered what our connection was. As he

passed by, I recognized that he was a priest, realized that he had seen my monstrance pin, and made the connection. Both of us know Jesus.

Most loving and thoughtful Savior, thank You for instituting the Priesthood. Thank You for sending us loving, caring priests who bring You to us and help us get to heaven.

I hope that you have some delightful stories from your everyday life. What a tremendous gift our Catholic faith is! *Treasure it, practice it, develop it, share it, nurture it, and be grateful for it!*

God is at work, in each one of us.

—Michele Elena Bondi

The Power of a Pin

I wondered what was on me.

One Friday, after a very emotional morning of family issues, I stopped to cheer myself up with ice cream. Who doesn't smile when they have ice cream? As I was looking at the tempting selections, while fighting my good angel who told me, "You don't need ice cream," the young man who was the ice cream scooper kept looking at me—bending and leaning over, straining to look at my left shoulder.

I thought, *oh my, what is on me? We are painting at home, so maybe a big glob of yellow is on me*! The young man finally asked "Excuse me, I'm trying to read what your pin says." Then it dawned on me—I wear my "Pray to End Abortion" pin on all my coats and sometimes I forget that I have it on. (Whew! It wasn't paint!) He asked me if I had any extra pins. I didn't, but I gave him the one on my coat.

We talked for approximately 15 minutes. He shared how pro-life his mother is and told me that she has five children. His mother had a problem pregnancy with his sister and the doctors told her to consider abortion; she refused and his sister was born early, weighing one pound. Today, she is 19 years old. He was so excited to bring the pin home to his mom. Actually, he wanted to put it on but was afraid he would get in trouble. I suggested he keep it in his pocket until he got home. We talked about 40 Days for Life and I told him where he could get more information nationally and locally.

There was a girl behind the counter who was listening to us…so I pray she gleaned from our conversation. I did end up leaving with a smile and a small pumpkin ice cream, and the sweet young man refused to charge me or take a tip. Thank You, Jesus, for the opportunity to speak about Your gift of LIFE!

—Maribeth Criscenti

Maribeth is the 40 Days for Life Coordinator in Sterling Heights, Michigan

Prayer to St. Anthony of Padua

Ask this beloved saint to help you find what you seek.

St. Anthony has been indispensable to my relationship with God and to my apostolate, most especially when my work for God is going well and Satan's harassment intensifies. He and I are a team. Who is on your team?

Oh, if only we made it a point to seek the intercession of the saints, our allies in heaven, more often! They are eager to assist us in our efforts to carry out the will of God.

St. Anthony has been vital to my work and constantly helps me locate pictures, names, discs, files, papers, information, and opportunities. He helps me find the right words, e-mails, and solutions to many problems that arise. He has helped me find my misplaced coffee cup on more than one occasion, which has endeared him to me in a very special way! He even helps me find time to get things done.

Many times St. Anthony has also helped me with my holy apostolate of motherhood. He has helped me find ingredients for dinner that I thought we were out of. Often our encounters take place by the pantry! He helps my family find solutions to conflicts and is always helping my children and me locate lost items, most notably car keys, phones, electronics, cords, and my reading glasses. Often he helps us find small amounts of

money when it is needed, especially in church when someone wants to light a candle. Every single time the children want to light a candle, we ask for his help and they find the money somewhere in my purse. Thank you, St. Anthony.

Contemplate the vital help St. Anthony provides us, in the most intriguing of ways. We are wise not to limit this powerful saint! His help doesn't just focus on lost objects. He can help us find a solution to any problem, help us find out how we can serve God better and grow closer to Him, find a way to reconcile with God and with each other, and can help us find our sight so that we can see beyond the scope of our own limited vision to view things as God does. He can help us find the happiness, peace, contentment, and mercy that Jesus is waiting to bestow upon us.

Ask St. Anthony to help you find how God wants you to serve Him through the vital work of your apostolate.

One day I was delighted to return from our mailbox with a St. Anthony prayer card from our friends at the Capuchin Mission Association on Mt. Elliott Street in Detroit, Michigan. Here is that delightful prayer.

Prayer to St. Anthony of Padua

Saint Anthony, when you prayed,
your stolen book of prayers was given back to you.
Pray now for all of us
who have lost things precious and dear.
Pray for all who have lost faith,
hope or the friendship of God.
Pray for us who have lost
friends or relatives by death.
Pray for all who have lost
peace of mind or spirit.

Pray that we may be given
new hope, new faith, new love.
Pray that lost things,
needful and helpful to us,
may be returned to our keeping.
Or, if we must continue in our loss,
pray that we may be given
Christ's comfort and peace.
Amen.

~ Capuchin Mission Association

What intentions of your own can you add to this beautiful prayer? I add: St. Anthony, through the power of God's tremendous love for every person, without exception, help us find a way to end abortion and euthanasia in every nation on earth.

The saints are our friends in heaven and intercede for us most effectively when we seek to do God's will.

—Michele Elena Bondi

You Must Be Silent

In an instant, I heard His voice.

"Today, if you hear His Voice, do not harden your hearts…"
Hebrews 3:15

Have you ever heard God talking to you? He does, you know, and He longs for you to listen. Sometimes, we're so preoccupied with going here, doing that, that we don't hear it. Others hear Him, but ignore what they hear. But how can you listen, and really hear the Holy Spirit for yourself?

You must be silent.

This doesn't just mean taking the earbuds out of your ears or turning off the TV or computer. Getting rid of all external noise is a start, of course, and very necessary. But to really listen for God, you must also still your mind. Think about God, and think about how much He loves you and wants to talk to you. Be really, truly silent—with your ears and your heart.

St. Therese, the Little Flower, was good at this. She knew the importance of quieting the mind and listening for His Voice. Sometimes we are so busy talking to ourselves or hearing unimportant chatter of the day from electronics or people around us that we aren't letting God get a word in edgewise!

God can and does speak to you when you least expect it, when you aren't even prepared for it. This happens a lot to me.

I love going to book signings and meeting readers. They tell me their stories about St. Therese, their grandchildren, their parents, their teachers, their children. I've been told I have a friendly face, and I like to think that I am approachable. It must be true because people tell me, a person they have just met, their personal stories all of the time! I love to listen. They love to tell. There's something about St. Therese that brings out so much love in so many people. Some of them have much emotion when they talk about her, and some start to cry. The Little Flower has that effect on people.

At one particular book signing at a church, I sat and chatted with parishioners about my books for pre-teens, *Olivia and the Little Way* and *Olivia's Gift*. We also talked about St. Therese. I never tire of talking about her! But the day was very long, and, being human, I started to get hungry and tired. Anyone who knows me knows that when I get hungry, I can get a little...crabby. Usually all it takes is a handful of cookies or crackers and I'm back to my old self.

At this book signing, I was starting to feel the effects of a long day. I stood up to stretch and straightened up the books and St. Therese chaplets on the table, then started to rummage through my purse for a quick snack. While I was doing this, a very old woman came up to the table. Elderly and frail, she stopped and looked at me.

"I do love St. Therese," she said, her eyes red and brimming with tears.

I sat down, smiled warmly, and asked her to share her story.

She began a halting explanation of how St. Therese had touched her life in many ways. As she spoke, I couldn't help but notice that the frail woman had not bathed in a long time. While she was talking to me, a parishioner came up beside her and offered to treat her to a copy of *Olivia and the Little Way*. She was delighted to accept, and was very grateful.

I signed a book for her and watched her hobble away. I felt very saddened because I knew she was poor, but I felt very happy too that she had a loving friend in the parish. She lingered outside the entrance to the church and stared inside while I watched her quietly, feeling something in my heart I could not explain.

It was in that instant that I heard His Voice.

"Give her a chaplet."

The Voice was as clear as day. I glanced at the table, which held books and chaplets with pink rose beads.

"Give her a chaplet," the Voice said again, very insistent.

I reached over and collected a chaplet and the pretty instruction card that I make to go with it. I approached the lady and held both of them out to her.

"These are for you," I said and smiled.

The look on this lady's face was sheer joy as I placed the items in her wrinkled hands.

"Oh, thank you! Thank you!" she cried.

"Thank *you* for coming to talk to me," I said.

When I started to write my first book, *Olivia and the Little Way*, I had many doubts. Would anyone read it? Would I write it in a way that made God happy? But God and St. Therese had other ideas! I kept remembering that God had told me to write it, and I must be obedient. Because I listened to Him, He made so many wonderful things happen. I have just celebrated the three-year anniversary of the founding of my Catholic publishing company, Harvey House Publishing. I've met hundreds of wonderful, faithful people, and now have thousands of readers of my books, readers who are learning how to do little things with great love for God, as St. Therese did with her Little Way. To think that I am an author, a dream of mine since I was a little girl; I never would have believed it. And to think it all started with a Voice.

Listen to His Voice. Do what He wants you to do. Be still and hear what He wants to say to you, and you will be amazed, as I was and still am.

—Nancy Carabio Belanger

Nancy is an award-winning Catholic children's author and the founder of Harvey House Publishing (www.harveyhousepublishing.com), whose mission is to provide quality books for youths that celebrate our Catholic faith, modesty, and the gift of life. Her books include *Olivia and the Little Way* and *Olivia's Gift*. She is currently writing two more books for Catholic pre-teens. Visit her blog at nancybelanger.blogspot.com.

How Powerfully God Can Work Through Our Lives

Living up to the Gospel message.

Late one afternoon, I drove to an old high school classmate's house to drop off copies of my first four books. As I reached the halfway point in the trip, I was diverted off of the highway because of road construction. This concerned me, for I wasn't sure how to get to his house from this new path. I also was very pressed for time because he was planning to leave soon and I had hoped to get there and deliver the books before he departed.

Since I was unsure of the best way to reach his house from this route, I called him on the phone to get directions. After learning the name of the road I needed to turn down, I got off the phone and proceeded to look intently for it. As I came over a slight rise in the country road, I saw the street sign for the road I needed to take. Unable to make the turn, I quickly slowed down and prepared to turn into a driveway in order to turn around.

Rush hour traffic was coming in both directions, so I needed to make a fast move in order to make it into the driveway. Unfortunately, this caused me to run over a few inches of the homeowner's grass as I entered the driveway. I looked up and saw a man walking furiously toward me from the other end of the driveway. I immediately reacted in fear, backed my truck up, and quickly drove away.

Within seconds, I reached the road that I needed to turn down and continued on my way. While driving, I thought to myself, *It was only a little grass. It isn't going to hurt it. The guy shouldn't get upset about that. If he does, he needs to learn how to be a little more detached from things.* But then I thought, *Do unto others what you would have them do unto you*.

After thinking about it, I had to admit my own annoyance with people who turn around in my driveway, because it happens all the time. To have someone drive onto my grass while turning around would bother me even more. One of the reasons it would bother me so much is because I would already feel annoyed at the person; having them drive onto my grass would give me more reason to be mad. In fact, I knew that having someone drive on my grass would cause me to think about it over and over and bother me for the rest of the evening.

After thinking about all of this, I asked myself, "Is this a lesson to help me let go of petty things, such as caring so much about my grass or getting annoyed by the many people who turn around in my driveway?" Then I thought, *Do to others what you would have them do unto you*. I knew at that moment that I would not want to spend my whole evening feeling mentally bothered by what some rude, careless driver had done. Even though it meant I might be late and would possibly miss my friend, I knew that I had to turn around and go back to the man's driveway.

While I drove back to the man's house, I thought about the fact that I could now see more clearly how easily and subtly we as humans can talk ourselves into things, or talk ourselves out of things, depending on how it suits us. Not only would it potentially make me late by turning around, but I also didn't want to have to humble myself to apologize. This is why I originally thought that the man needed to be more detached from his grass rather than looking at myself and acknowledging my own fault in the situation.

Thankfully and providentially, the man was in the process of walking back out of his house toward the driveway as I pulled in. I could tell by the furious look on his face that he was still mad at me! He charged at my truck at a quick pace, and I immediately spoke up, "Sir, I came to apologize.

There is no excuse for my actions. I realized after I left that I would not want someone to do that to me, so I came back to set things right."

As I spoke, the man's demeanor dramatically changed. He said, "I really appreciate you doing that! People come through my driveway all the time. Sometimes I'll be behind the garage playing with my boy when they drive around the back to where we are, thinking it is some kind of parking lot. They just don't seem to care, and it really irritates me."

In response, I tried to empathize with him, and said, "I can understand how that would bother you. I know it is wrong for people to do that. I apologize on their behalf for not being more respectful of your property."

He replied, "You don't have to do that. What you have done is already enough."

I responded, "Yes, but I just wanted to do something to try to make it up to you. Are you sure there isn't something else I can do to make things up to you?" As I spoke and apologized, I could see tears welling up in his eyes. It seemed as though God touched him in a healing way. It was another example to me of just how powerful and healing repentance and forgiveness can be!

This particular experience helped me realize how important it is for each of us to overcome our fallen human nature. In this case, that involved me humbling myself and overcoming my feelings of resistance. I also had to acknowledge the error of my original thought process, when I determined that the homeowner needed to change instead of looking at myself and acknowledging that I needed to change. Upon realizing all of this, I knew that I had to take responsibility for my actions and then force myself to apologize for what I had done.

The whole experience was a great learning lesson for me to carry throughout the rest of my life. It served as a great example of how beneficial it is to overcome my fallen human nature and do the right thing. In fact, seeing how God moved through the situation to bring about healing in that man gave me a strong desire to always strive to uphold the Gospel message throughout my life. I even made it to my friend's house in time to drop off the books that night.

If I step back and think about the whole evening, I can imagine that God orchestrated the entire event. He saw the traffic diversion and knew where that would force me to go. His providence also had the man in the driveway at the time I pulled in. In addition, the cars that were coming from both directions at the exact moment I needed to turn to pull into the man's driveway motivated me to be hasty. Everything contributed to and led up to a confrontation that would frighten me. Ultimately, I believe God was working through the situation to teach me about my own humanity. He was also showing me how powerfully He can work through our lives, and our mistakes, in order to bring about a greater good! Sometimes all that is required of us is to live up to the Gospel message.

—Sean McVeigh

Sean is an author and Catholic guest speaker who provides talks, retreats, and motivating instruction for churches, schools, and organizations. He is the founder of McVeigh Ministries, Inc. (www.catholicguestspeaker.com), which strives to strengthen the Body of Christ by inspiring men and women of all ages to fervently grow in their relationship with each person of the Blessed Trinity: the Father, Jesus His Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Ministries also seeks to strengthen the Catholic Church by providing Her members with knowledge and encouragement to share their Catholic faith with others. Visit his website at: www.catholicguestspeaker.com.

Chapter 6 ~ Kindness

Kindness is the quality of understanding sympathy and concern for those in trouble or need. It is shown in affability of speech, generosity of conduct, and forgiveness of injuries sustained.[19]

Thy Will Be Done

"Wherever Did You Find This?"

Evidence of His Loving Presence Surrounds Us

Second Chances

Lessons from Speedy

Two Mothers and Their Sons, St. Anthony, and the Incredible Chapel

"We love God truly insofar as, when finding ourselves with people who differ from us, we behave graciously to them, speak charitably of them, are willing to meet them again, and to do them a kindness…"[20]

—St. John Vianney

19. John A. Hardon, S.J., *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life, 2008), 303.

20. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 27.

Thy Will Be Done

Today is the first day of the rest of our lives.

One morning last year, it happened again. We experienced another encounter orchestrated by the Divine. My 11-year-old daughter and I were leaving a coffee shop after enjoying a cup of coffee, a chocolate milk, several rounds of Uno, and each others' company before the start of the final day of the school year.

On our way out, an older gentleman smiled at us from his booth as we approached the exit door. His face radiated great peace and joy as he smiled so sweetly at us when we passed by. I was happy to be a recipient of his good nature, especially that week, especially that day.

It was the last week of school. All three of my children attended different schools and it was a very, very, very hectic year, truly a test of mental and physical endurance. That particular day was my daughter's last day attending her Catholic school, and also our final day as parishioners at the church we had been members of for ten years. Earlier in the year, God instructed me to take my two children who remained in Catholic school out, and to take them to Holy Mass at a specific Catholic church. It was a week of great change for us. Although we were no strangers to significant change, we continued our need to turn to God for guidance and strength as we followed His summons.

My daughter and I exchanged greetings with the kind and peaceful man seated by the door of the coffee shop. Then, he looked at my pin, smiled, and asked what it was.

"It is a monstrance," I replied while smiling in return, sharing the love of Jesus through a simple expression. He so kindly and *peacefully* asked me what a monstrance is. I explained as I always do to the many people who are drawn to the love of Jesus through the monstrance pin, that a monstrance holds the Eucharist. I also explained to him that more people are attracted to that particular pin than any other one I have ever worn. Jesus' love is very alluring.

The man joyfully and *peacefully* smiled, we said goodbye, and Alyssa and I went on our way.

Most compassionate Jesus, You set that man in our path on that very day to remind us of Your tremendous and infinite love for us, and the comfort and peace You provide to all who take up their crosses and follow You anytime, anywhere.

As I left the church following morning Mass, God and I had a conversation. I told Him with great love, through my tears and mixed emotions, that I was willing to do whatever He wanted no matter the cost, because that is what Jesus did for me. Then, He told me that the events of the past ten years of my life had great purpose, for they had prepared me for that very moment, for my particular mission, and for what lies ahead.

Is God preparing you at this moment for something? Are you making choices that lead you closer to God, are you listening for His guidance, are you accepting His love? Are you loving Him in return and sharing His love with others? Is there anything that God wants you to do differently? Is your life peaceful, and is it joyful?

Use me as You see fit, beloved Savior, for I am Yours. I thank You, God, for so many gifts that have been shared with us so freely. May the expression of Your love, accepted, returned, and shared, lead everyone we come into contact with to recognize You among us.

May all of humanity strive to know, love, and serve You, according to Your will, all the days of our lives.

—Michele Elena Bondi

"Wherever Did You Find This?"

I could not believe it was the same priest.

I was at St. Andrew Catholic Church in Rochester, Michigan approximately twelve years ago. I had lost one of the four books from my Divine Office Liturgy of the Hours. As I was looking around to see if my lost book had been turned in, I noticed the sign that said anything not recovered would be given to St. Vincent de Paul. The parish was trying to clear out all the lost and found articles that had been collected in the past year.

I saw another Divine Office book there on the table and looked it over, hoping it was mine. Inside was the name of a Priest: Father Blaska. I decided for some reason to take it. The thought came to me that perhaps I could find this priest, or maybe he was no longer with us.

I kept this book on my shelf and sometimes prayed for the priest that had owned it.

One day in the spring of 2008, an older retired priest was at St. Irenaeus Parish in Rochester Hills. He was filling in for the pastor, who was on vacation.

He was a very nice and pleasant person. Everyone enjoyed his homilies and his reverence at the consecration of the Eucharist. We were all so grateful to him for being there so we could have the Celebration of the Liturgy.

You know how it is: We called him "Father," and that is all we knew him by for the longest time.

One day my granddaughter Anja asked him for a blessing, and also asked him his name. He responded, "Blaska, like Alaska with a B…." He proceeded to give Anja a blessing and we went on our way.

Some time passed before this priest was at the altar again at St. Irenaeus. I believe it was around Easter, 2010. I was trying to get rid of stuff, which was so difficult because I was babysitting and people in their goodness were giving me things for the little boy to play with and learn from. The house was becoming too cluttered.

I looked through the books on my bookshelf to see what I could give away. I came across the Divine Office I had picked up at St. Andrew so many years before. I looked at the name written in the front cover: Father Blaska.

Oh MY! I thought. *Could it really be the same Father Blaska that comes from where he resides at the nursing home to celebrate the Liturgy for us?* I could not believe this was the same priest, because it was such an old book. I took it with me to Holy Mass the next time I knew that Father Blaska would be saying Holy Mass for us.

After the Mass I went to him and said, "Father, I think I have something that belongs to you."

He smiled, and said, "What could that be?" I handed him the book, and low and behold, it was his book, and he was so ecstatic.

He said, smiling from ear to ear, "Where did you ever find this?" I told him the story, and he took the book home after it had been lost for over twenty years.

God has a sense of humor and a plan for everything in our lives.

—Susan Schoenstein

Susan is a wife, mother, grandmother, nurse, Marian Catechist, missionary, and Catechism teacher. For almost ten years, she worked closely with Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J. as his private secretary and as an editor. Susan is a vital colleague at Joseph Karl Publishing in so many ways, most notably as an editor who also ensures that all content conforms to the Magisterium and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church.

Evidence of His Loving Presence Surrounds Us

He is with us every moment of every day.

Bright and early Thursday morning I was upstairs by the bathroom sink, helping my three children fix their hair before school. As I was doing so, two drops of water from my brush splashed on to my rose-colored blouse. I looked down at the droplets, expecting to see circles of water, but instead the two drops of water were in the shape of crosses.

I showed my son Nick, who happened to be closest to me, and he called his brother over to see the crosses. By the time I grabbed my camera, the water had spread outward, and when the water dried the crosses disappeared.

What a striking similarity this event has to our Good Friday miracle. Just a few months before, we had followed God's summons to leave our parish and attend a specific Catholic church. The parish is obedient, reverent, and very holy. That Good Friday, brown crosses of various sizes and shapes appeared on the front and sleeves of a pink jacket I had considered wearing on Easter Sunday. Those crosses remain on the jacket to this day.

After dropping my sons off at their schools, I enjoyed a cup of coffee and played cards with my daughter Alyssa at a local coffee shop until it was time for her to go to school. Then I took Alyssa to school and journeyed on to daily Mass. While there, I was thrilled to keep the company of a two-year-old in the narthex of the chapel during the Mass. What joy flooded my soul as I went up for Communion with the little boy, meeting Jesus while in the company of the little ones that He loves so dearly, as

He calls me to do more to defend the lives of the unborn and vulnerable. As the Host was held up and we heard "The Body of Christ," the little boy reached for our Savior. What a precious, beautiful moment.

How much God loves us!

After Mass I had much work to accomplish, and asked the Good Lord to send me where He wanted me to work. I pulled into a favorite a coffee shop but the parking lot was full, so I went down the street to a different coffee shop to work there instead.

The place was very crowded but there was one small unoccupied table by an outlet, which I needed to power my computer. Unfortunately, both plugs were being used. I was going to leave, but two gentlemen offered to unplug their computers, which were operational by battery power, so I settled in to do my work.

The gentleman next to me kindly offered to plug my cord into the outlet, and took it upon himself to patiently untangle the very knotted and twisted cord. He was strikingly calm. Through the morning he made small talk and kept commenting on how his computer was not working. I found it intriguing how he did not become frustrated and maintained a peaceful disposition, and he smiled often. After a while he went to his car, got his lunch, brought it in, and peeled an orange. The man's actions resonated with patience, gentleness, and kindness. After several hours I began wrapping up my work, and again he commented that all morning he had been unable to connect to the Internet. I suggested he pray to St. Anthony.

He looked surprised by my suggestion, and I was surprised, too, when he asked me who St. Anthony is. I told him about St. Anthony, the finder of lost things, a powerful intercessor we can go to for help finding a solution and even a way to get on to the Internet. We talked about where the saint was from in Italy and lo and behold, St. Anthony hooked the man up to the Internet! As soon as he was online the man looked at me, then reached for his General Motors identification badge. He showed me the badge bearing his name. His name is Anthony.

Believe! Evidence of God's loving presence surrounds us. He is with us every moment of every day.

—Michele Elena Bondi

Second Chances

I knew she was on her way to meet Jesus.

My mother, with whom I had a close relationship until her passing in 2007, had cheated death two different times. The first was when she was 33 in March of 1967. She had been sick for weeks before the doctors diagnosed her with kidney stones. Surgery was later performed, but because she was so sick for many weeks, she quickly deteriorated, even after the surgery. I was only seven years old at the time, but I recall her being in the hospital for two months and my aunt coming to assist my father in taking care of me and my three siblings.

On one particular evening, I awoke to the sound of crying. I quietly got out of bed and crept into the hallway. From the landing, I could see my father sitting in an arm chair, sobbing. I didn't know what to do, so I just watched him. I knew that he was sad because of my mom. I initially couldn't understand what he was saying, but later it sounded like he was praying that my mom would get better. Soon after that, she made a complete recovery. I was so thankful that God had spared my mom's life.

In 1978, my father passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. My mother remarried and at the age of 47, she was faced with an unplanned pregnancy. The doctor urged her to have an abortion because of the risks associated with a pregnancy at her age. She refused. She chose life and later gave birth to my youngest sister in 1981 (who is currently a postulant with the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia in Nashville).

Many years later, in 2004, my mother, who had already been diagnosed with emphysema from years of smoking, came down with a particular virulent form of pneumonia. She quickly became unconscious, then progressed to a coma. A week later, the CAT scan revealed no brain activity, so the doctors recommended that she be taken off the ventilator. We waited and tried to discern what we ought to do. We asked for a second opinion but we were told that another opinion would be the same. With heaviness in our hearts, we all agreed that Mom should be taken off life support the following day.

During this time, I beseeched God to allow my Mom to come out of the coma. I knew what they had said, that there was no brain activity, but I didn't care. I had to ask. I couldn't bear to think of my mother dying. Perhaps I was being too selfish, but because I had lost my father as a teenager, I really wanted more time with Mom.

The next morning, as we were leaving to go to the hospital, we got a phone call from the doctors saying that Mom had woken up and she was asking for us!

She had a long road to recovery, nearly nine months in the hospital and rehabilitation centers and when she was finally released, it was necessary for her to be on oxygen full time.

Three years later, she contracted pneumonia again during the spring of 2007. Thankfully, this time, she did not lapse into a coma. Her doctors told her there wasn't anything else they could do and released her to hospice care. They initially gave her a month or two at most, but her will to live was strong and she lived for five more months. Since I reside in Canada, I made the trip down to New Jersey every few weeks to spend time with her and to help with her care. She and I had many opportunities to talk at length about death and dying and I never missed a chance to tell her how much I loved her and how much I appreciated everything she had done for me. One day, when I was assisting her to go to the bathroom, she kept thanking me. I replied, "No, Mom, thank *you*. It's an honor to be able to give back even a small portion of all you've done for me." She cried.

A month or so after that, her health worsened and my sister called to tell me that I ought to come, that Mom was near death. I drove as quickly

as I could. Unfortunately, traffic was heavy; there was a long wait at the Canada/U.S. border. When I reached Cortland, New York, I stopped and called my sister to tell her that I was halfway. I could hear Mom shouting from across the room, "She's only in Cortland? Tell her I love her."

I told my sister "Tell Mom I love her." Those were the last words we said to one another because a few moments after that call, she slipped into another coma.

I arrived at my family home in New Jersey at 11:00 p.m., and mom was unresponsive, but still alive. I spoke to her and told her I loved her. Then my sister and I prayed the Litany of the Saints and the Divine Mercy Chaplet. She died early the next morning. I remember the moment clearly. Her pulse was weak and her skin was becoming cold to the touch. She seemed to be quietly slipping away.

All my siblings, my stepfather, and a few other relatives had gathered at her bedside. At one point, I had the feeling that my mother was on the ceiling looking down at us and, in fact, I glanced up at the ceiling. A few minutes later, my brother turned to me and said, "I feel like mom is on the ceiling looking down at us." And I knew that she was on her way to meet Jesus.

I miss her terribly, but I'm so grateful that we had three additional years to spend with her until her death in August of 2007. Most especially, I'm thankful that we had the chance to make her death a holy death.

I still have to stop myself from picking up the phone and calling her when I have some wonderful news because I realize she already knows.

—Ellen Gable Hrkach

Ellen is the wife of James, mother to five sons, award-winning author of two novels, Emily's Hope (www.emilyshope.com) and In Name Only (www.innameonly.ca). Her blog is called "Plot Line and Sinker" and is at http://ellengable.wordpress.com. She is a reviewer for Catholicfiction.net, a monthly columnist for CatholicMom.com and a monthly columnist for www. AmazingCatechists.com. She is a frequent contributor to *Family Foundations* magazine as well as co-creator of the "Family Life" cartoon. She and her husband are a certified NFP teaching couple for CCL and are active in marriage preparation in their diocese.

Lessons From Speedy

My Loyal Teacher and Companion.

"And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good." Genesis 1:24-25

Anyone who knows me knows that I love animals. Ever since I was a child I remember having a unique fondness for these creatures whom God created. However, living in the city didn't bring with it cattle, livestock, and such, but rather many household pets, one of which was my little buddy Speedy.

Speedy was a good dog. He was the runt of his litter, which came from a family of show dogs. He wasn't "perfect" enough to make the show dog cut so he was disregarded. At the time my sister was dating a guy whose family owned Speedy and his siblings. Since Speedy didn't make the cut, my sister's boyfriend decided to give Speedy to her as a gift. We grew up owning cats, so getting a dog was something new for all of us. We never really knew what to expect, but God knew all along why Speedy came into our lives.

Speedy was a little tan Shih Tzu with a crooked jaw. Nevertheless, we all bonded with Speedy right away. After Our Lord delivered me from alcohol addiction, I always took long walks around the neighboring streets and throughout our community. Those were the days! Just me, Jesus, and

Speedy spending quality time together soaking in all of His wondrous creation and praising Him for His goodness.

After Speedy had been with us for a few years, Our Lord began to show different aspects in Speedy that dealt with how God was calling me to live. God knew that I loved animals and so, in His kindness, He knew exactly how to get my attention! It may sound strange, but Speedy taught me a couple of lifelong lessons that I will honestly never forget.

Like every pet, Speedy would oftentimes get into trouble and we'd have to scold him. He would bark in the middle of the night at something he heard and scare the daylights out of us! We'd come home from being away for a good portion of the day and Speedy sometimes left a mess for us to clean up. Sometimes Speedy would get loose and wander the neighborhood looking for other buddies to play with, which, by the way, were usually big dogs and he'd get himself into a world of trouble! For Speedy thought that HE was a big dog, too!

But no matter how many times we had to discipline Speedy for his actions he would always run (yes, literally RUN!) back to us, jump on our laps and go belly up! He knew he did wrong but he also knew we loved him, forgave him, and would continue to love him no matter what he did. He wasn't afraid to come back to us even when he knew he did wrong. Instead, he would remain closer to us in those times.

Speedy taught me that no matter what we've done, no matter how many times we fall, God, in His love for us, chastises us but never stops loving us. We need to be like Speedy and RUN back to our Father once we've recognized the error we've committed. God will embrace us just like we embraced Speedy after he had done something wrong. We need not fear our most loving God and Father!

Now, what do Speedy and Blessed Pope John Paul II have in common? They both taught me how to love my neighbor! Blessed Pope John Paul II always emphasized the importance of seeing Christ in others. He taught us to recognize the dignity of every person by seeing them as being preciously made in the image and likeness of God. Speedy, on the other hand, taught me how to practice doing this!

You see, Speedy would always greet strangers with love. No matter who came to the house, Speedy wasn't afraid to greet them with a wagging tail and if they allowed, he would jump on their laps and insist on a belly rub! As they were leaving, Speedy would stand on his hind legs and look out the front window and watch them go away. These characteristics of his were even more intensified with us, the ones he lived with! Upon coming home from work or even if we made a ten-minute trip to the store, Speedy would race around the house in utter joy at the fact that we had come home! He'd bathe us with doggy kisses and make sure we knew we were missed!

God didn't show me that we ought to bathe one another in doggy kisses or ask for belly rubs from one another, as funny as that would be, but He taught me that we need to appreciate every single person as authentically as Speedy did. We should be joyous when meeting others and love them. We need to show them that they are special to us and to God. Greet everyone with a loving smile and show them that you really do see Jesus in them.

Unfortunately, Speedy had to be put down before his time due to a recurring tumor. But his lessons, his loyalty, and his love will always be with me!

—Paul A. Ray

Paul is a Catholic writer, speaker, Creative Director at Joseph Karl Publishing, and member of the board of *True Love Leads to Life.* Following his miraculous deliverance from alcohol addiction by Jesus Christ in a Protestant community, Paul was led to discover the fullness of the Christian faith in the Catholic Church. Visit Paul's blog, *Tongues as of Fire!* at www.tonguesasoffire.blogspot.com.

Two Mothers and Their Sons, St. Anthony, and the Incredible Chapel

Our experiences draw us into closer union with God.

On a recent Saturday morning I had just returned to my pew after having received our Lord in Holy Communion. I basked in the splendor of the beauty of that moment, having God within me, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, surrounded by people who also received our Savior, with my 11-year-old daughter by my side. My two teen sons were on the altar, each holding a paten as our holy priests distributed the Eucharist.

While kneeling down, I looked up to take in the remarkable sight of my oldest son Andre, so elegant in his black cassock, assisting at Holy Mass by reverencing the Precious Body and Blood of our beloved Savior.

Next, I cast my gaze downward to spend a moment with God. Suddenly, without knowing why, I stopped and looked up. Immediately I realized that someone on the altar was missing.

People gathered in a circle in front of the Communion rail. I scanned the scene again as my intellect confirmed what I already knew. My son Andre was the one who was missing. I got up and rushed to my son who was lying on the floor. So many kind people from our new parish were there to help that I could only get as far as his shoes. What a moment that was as I stood by my son's feet and called out his name.

The love between a mother and son is extraordinarily powerful and oh, so beautiful. God determined that our Savior would be born of the Virgin Mary. While Jesus was being Crucified, He gave us His mother to be our Mother, too. Imagine the love that Jesus has for you, add the love of our Blessed Mother to the equation, and think for a moment how very loved you are. It's incredible.

As I called out my son's name, I experienced what I call a "parallel moment." Such moments are meant to teach us and guide us into greater Divine intimacy. I thought of Our Blessed Mother standing at Jesus' feet as He hung on the Cross. Ponder what that moment was like for Mother and Son, as they set their own agendas aside to do the Will of God, all for our benefit, all because They love us that much. They showed us that we are worth loving.

Andre regained consciousness and was helped to his seat in the altar boy section. I sat beside him and loosened his collar. What wonderful people in our new parish! Someone immediately brought a wheelchair, a nurse came to help, and I was most grateful to see Barb, the daily Mass coordinator from our former parish who came over to help, too. It was so comforting to see someone that we knew.

People were still receiving Communion and so Andre agreed to move to the chapel. God love the boy, he refused the wheelchair and walked out under his own power, although a nurse remained by his side. Once in the chapel, the wonderful people helping us had him lie down. People brought him lollipops, lemonade, granulated sugar, and soon I was holding handfuls of candy. Everyone was so kind to us it was overwhelming. A nice woman who brought candy helped Andre remove his cassock.

We had been preparing for an eight-day trip out east which was to include participating in the Catholic Writer's Guild Conference and Catholic Marketing Network's International Trade Show in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. My children and I experienced tremendous persecution before embarking on this trip. One person in particular persecuted us terribly. I will call that person "Conversion," because we are praying that person is converted, soon.

What a moment, to see my son lying on the floor just before we were to embark on this trip, after he had endured opposition and persecution that targeted this trip so specifically. I was convinced that our trip would bear much fruit for God's glory, and got a glimpse of the fruit while on our trip.

St. Anthony has been so instrumental this year in our mission to encourage, inspire, and continue the faith formation of Catholics worldwide and lead souls to Christ. Our mission in particular involves instructing people that they are loved by God Who has a mission for them to accomplish. Why this particular saint has taken it upon himself to be our advocate from heaven so profoundly this year remains a mystery to me, but his help has been invaluable. Thank you, St. Anthony.

Catholics faithful to the Magisterium have their work cut out for them in our culture where Satan works so hard to convince people that arrogance, disobedience, and pride are good things. As a result, obedient Catholics have countless opportunities to lead souls to Christ every day.

We must live in imitation of Jesus and Mary, whose example reminds us through every age of the infinite value of our obedience to God's most perfect Will.

Before my children and I left on our trip, I began working on an article about the life of St. Anthony. Shortly before we left, I happened to come upon an article about a remarkable place called St. Anthony's Chapel. On a hunch, I said to my children, "Let's see where the chapel is." We discovered that the chapel is in Pittsburgh, right where we were going to stay overnight on our way to the convention in Philadelphia. There were no tours on Mondays, but there would be a tour on Tuesday, the day we would be there.

I knew for certain that we were supposed to visit the chapel, and so we made plans to check out of our first hotel and arrive for the first tour of the day, from 1:00 - 2:00. We would embark upon the five-hour drive to Valley Forge after the tour.

Andre programmed our GPS, which helped us easily find our way to the chapel through the streets of Pittsburgh. We arrived on time for the 1:00 tour. Immediately upon entering the chapel I was absolutely taken aback. The chapel was incredibly beautiful, but it was the supernatural beauty that

made it absolutely breathtaking. I wanted to take pictures inside the chapel to share with you, but it was not allowed. Obedience trumps personal desire. So, I will attempt to paint you a picture using words instead.

The chapel consists of two sections, with rows of pews running down the length of both front and back parts. The wider back half is flanked on both sides with life-sized Stations of the Cross that are carved out of wood. These particular Stations of the Cross are one of only two sets in the United States. The side and front walls of the front half of the chapel are filled with thousands of relics, all of which are documented and have been cataloged. Jesus was Present in the tabernacle resting on the altar in the front of the chapel.

My children and I stood in the back before entering, absorbing the magnificence before us. That moment was similar to the moment when I first saw the Grand Canyon. My thoughts on both occasions turned immediately to our Creator, Who loves us more than we can ever imagine.

We slowly and reverently entered the chapel, still awestruck. It was impossible to process all there was to see and experience. We slowly walked toward the front of the chapel while viewing the life-sized Stations of the Cross in the newer back half of the chapel. Life-sized statues are so very profound, for they help make events seem more real. It was very difficult to look at the life-sized Jesus represented in the various stations and attempt to consider the indescribable suffering He endured for each one of us. We are loved so very much.

As we continued to the front, I could hardly even look at the stations anymore, there was so much spiritual sensory information to take in! Then I looked to my right anyway without knowing why, and found myself standing at Someone's feet. They were not the feet of my son, they were the feet of Mary's Son. I stood at the feet of the Son of Man, who was laying on the ground and being nailed to a cross.

My children kept going and so I followed. We walked around the front half of the church and then took a seat in the pew to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. Soon Sister Margaret arrived to start the tour. Her explanation of the history of the chapel, of the physician-turned-priest

who had it built and was responsible for the collection of the relics, made the experience even richer. She led us around the front of the chapel and pointed out certain relics.

Inside the chapel there are slivers from the True Cross, a piece of St. Joseph's staff, a piece of Mary's mantle, and relics of Mary Magdalene, the apostles, and St. Therese, among so many others. Sr. Margaret pointed out relics of several saints martyred for believing in God, and also showed us St. Anthony's tooth.

The chapel has the largest collection of relics in the world outside of the Vatican. When we sat back in the pew to learn more, I realized that we were surrounded by the history of the Catholic Church. We were in the midst of the love of God manifested through the apostolate of so many of our brothers and sisters, the saints. We, too, make up the Body of Christ, and we, too, are called to fulfill God's will through our personal apostolate and be saints.

It was inevitable that this joyful Catholic would once again be overcome with tears of gratitude. It was a very, very powerful visit. When Sr. Margaret said that she was going to bring us a relic of the True Cross to hold and to kiss, I cried. Sr. Margaret continued telling us about the chapel as tears of gratitude streamed down my face. Oh how much we are loved and valued by God, by Jesus, by our Blessed Mother, and by the saints, who are our friends and advocates.

We budgeted an hour for our time in the chapel and left after two, still way too little time to take in and experience everything the chapel offers to souls. Sr. Margaret told us that tradition has it that one should say a prayer by the tooth of St. Anthony asking for three things. I bucked tradition and asked for eight.

We also prayed for you while we were there.

As we were leaving, Sr. Margaret asked me some questions by the chapel steps. She was concerned about my long drive with the children to Philadelphia and the prospect of our arriving there in the dark. She was so kind, so Christlike! Most certainly working among the Blessed Sacrament and the thousands of relics does wonders for the soul. I assured her that

we were called by God to visit the chapel and that He would look after us on our journey.

That's not all. To conclude this story, her final questions led to the very person who had persecuted us because of this trip! We had prayed for "Conversion" while in that most incredible chapel and then, as confirmation of what had just taken place, "Conversion's" name came up as we were leaving. Satan had used "Conversion" to persecute us so relentlessly before our trip, and yet it was during this very stop at St. Anthony's Chapel that God was at work in us when we prayed there for "Conversion's" conversion.

Catholicism is so awesome, and I LOVE being Catholic! May we never take God's magnificent love for us and our responsibility to share His love with others for granted. Each one of us was willed into being because we are loved by God. Each one of us is necessary in God's plan of salvation. Embrace the apostolate God has for you.

Make it a point to visit St. Anthony's Chapel in Pittsburgh, a wonderful treasure given to us by our very, very loving God.

—Michele Elena Bondi

Chapter 7 ~ Joy

Joy, in spiritual literature, is the feeling aroused by the expectation or possession of some good. Joyful emotions affect the body, but they are essentially in the higher faculties of the soul. Differs from pleasure, which may affect the human spirit but originates in some bodily sensation. Thus joy is possessed by angels and human beings, and its source is the rational will.[21]

What Matters Most

The Miracle of the Holy Rosary

A Witness to Mercy

Like Only a Mom Can

It Takes Blind Faith

Seek and Make Time for Quality Reading

"When the heart is pure, it cannot help loving, because it has found the source of love, which is God himself."[22]

—St. John Vianney

21. John A. Hardon, S.J., *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life, 2008), p. 298.
22. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 29.

What Matters Most

Make your moments truly meaningful.

One typical morning, I dropped my oldest son Andre off in front of his high school. As we parted ways, I was particularly mindful of the morning almost thirty years ago when my father dropped me off at my high school. I don't remember what we said to each other besides "Goodbye," but I do remember getting out of the car and glancing at him there in the driver's seat.

He died early the next morning.

Lately for some reason, perhaps because this has been a year of great change for us, I am especially mindful to appreciate the present moment, honor it, not take it for granted, and live it in a manner that is most pleasing to God.

The past few months my sons, daughter, and I attended Holy Mass at our new parish, eagerly awaiting the moment when our altar boys Andre and Nick would be promoted from the white alb to the black cassock.

On Sundays, as Holy Mass commenced, I scanned the church to find them among the glorious multitude of altar boys, and spotted them in their white albs. On Pentecost Sunday I spotted Nick sitting among the other altar boys during Holy Mass, and he was wearing a white alb.

Not this week, I thought to myself.

It is worth noting here that many times when my son Andre looks at

me, he doesn't just look at me. He looks deep into my eyes and studies my expression. There is nothing cavalier about those looks of his. I often wonder what he sees and am very mindful of the vital role my example plays in his formation. The stakes for my children are very high and thus I must fulfill my obligation. To do that properly, I remain very close to the Eucharist.

Holy Mass on Pentecost was so extraordinary beautiful and meaningful, but I must say that all the Masses at our parish are extraordinary. I have never experienced Masses as beautiful, meaningful, and holy as these. Jesus' love compels me to return, and I long to meet Him there.

During Holy Communion, my daughter Alyssa mentioned that Andre was assisting up at the altar, directly in front of us. He was holding the paten as the deacon gave out Communion. Joyfully I looked straight ahead to see him, *and then noticed that he was wearing a black cassock.*

I openly wept in church for the first time since my father's funeral. The scene was extraordinarily beautiful. Andre stood at the side of a deacon, reverencing the most Precious Body and Blood of our Savior by holding the paten underneath the chins of our brothers and sisters as they received Jesus. The life-sized crucifix on the altar was visible right over him. To the side of the deacon a seminarian in a black cassock knelt reverently before the Tabernacle. That moment was so deeply meaningful, so incredibly loving, and so touching, and one that I will treasure forever.

I noted to Alyssa that Andre was wearing a black cassock, and she turned to me and for the longest time studied my face. What a powerful moment between her, me, and God.

What profound examples we are for our children! They look to us to show them what is truly meaningful.

When it was our turn to go up for Communion, I followed Alyssa up the aisle, walking straight toward our dear Lord and my son, white tissue sticking out of my folded hands. As we approached the altar, Alyssa purposely chose the kneeler on the left so that I could kneel and receive Jesus by my son. Mary was there by her Son, and I was by mine.

I smiled at Jesus as Andre placed the paten under my chin while he

studied my expression to gauge the significance of the events. What does meaningful look like to a child.

A mother's joyful tears. The eyes of a mother and son fixed upon each other in an exchange of God's love, accepted and then shared through sacrifice.

Imagine the expressions of Mary and Jesus as they looked into each other's eyes while exchanging glances along the Way of the Cross and on Calvary.

A glance can tell the world what matters most.

May we ever be mindful of what we reflect to others. One expression, one gesture, one moment has the power to convey God's love in a very profound way.

After Holy Mass, Father very kindly offered his congratulations on Andre's promotion. I said, "You split them up," meaning that Andre was promoted on a different day than Nick. Then I followed up with, "Now I'm going to have to cry twice!" We live in a world that has so dramatically and tragically lost sight of what is truly meaningful.

What is most meaningful in your life?

When people look at you, what are you witnessing to them? Honor the present moment, and make your moments meaningful.

—Michele Elena Bondi

The Miracle of the Rosary

His return was the answer to prayer.

When I was about ten years old, one night after supper, I was sitting on the couch doing my homework. My parents began to argue over bills they couldn't afford to pay. Each time my mom would yell, my dad would yell louder. It made me feel anxious to see the two people I loved most in the world screaming at one another. *Don't they love each other?* I asked myself. *And why won't they stop yelling?*

At one point, Dad said something about moving out. *Oh God, please, I don't want my dad to move out.* Mom replied, "That's good." *Please, Mom, don't say that*. I looked at them, but neither of them saw me or the panic in my eyes. They only glared at each other. My father went upstairs. I ran after him and watched as he got a suitcase out and started putting clothes in it. *God, why won't you stop him*?

I passed by my bedroom and noticed my rosary sitting on the bedside table. I grabbed it, sat down on my bed and began saying the rosary. As I said each Hail Mary, I pleaded with Our Lady, "Holy, Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen." *Please, Our Lady, don't let my Dad leave us*. As I was saying another Hail Mary, my dad walked by my room and didn't notice that I was there. He stomped down the steps. I couldn't hear whether he said goodbye, but I listened as the door slammed shut. "Oh, God, please make him come back."

I continued to say the rosary, each Hail Mary becoming more fervent than the last. I prayed until my heart was bursting. *Please, God, listen to*

my prayer. I began to say the Hail Holy Queen prayer at the end of the rosary and suddenly, I heard the door open downstairs. Without finishing, I stood at the top of the stairs and I could see my dad standing in the doorway. Mom walked over to him. At first, they were silent. Then, my father started to cry. "I can't leave you. I can't leave my family." He and Mom embraced. I began to cry with joy.

Thank you, God, and thank you, Our Lady, for bringing my daddy back.

They remained married to one another until my father's death in 1978.

—Ellen Gable Hrkach

Ellen is the wife of James, mother of five sons, and award-winning author of two novels, *Emily's Hope* (www.emilyshope.com) and *In Name Only* (www.innameonly.ca). She is a reviewer for *Catholicfiction.net*, a monthly columnist for *CatholicMom.com* and a monthly columnist for www.AmazingCatechists.com. She is a frequent contributor to *Family Foundations* magazine as well as co-creator of the Family Life cartoon. Ellen and her husband are a certified NFP teaching couple for the Couple to Couple League and are active in marriage preparation in their diocese. Visit her blog, "Plot Line and Sinker" at http://ellengable.wordpress.com.

A Witness to Mercy

God's love and mercy are available to every single person, without exception.

My children and I had the privilege of hearing Fr. Donald H. Calloway, MIC speak at the Valley Forge Convention Center during the Catholic Marketing Network's International Trade Show in August, 2010, where he shared the story of his life and miraculous conversion. Afterward he signed copies of his book *No Turning Back: A Witness to Mercy* (Marian Press; 2010).

Fr. Calloway's written account of his very troubled youth and subsequent encounter with the mercy of God through our Blessed Mother is so compelling, readers will find it difficult to put the book down.

We get a sense of what his early life was like from chapter titles that include "Animal," "Burning Down the House," and "The Divine 2 x 4."

The effects of years of reckless drug and alcohol use and criminal activity had him bound and chained by the forces of evil. Then early one morning he literally ran in search of a Catholic priest and found himself at Holy Mass. During the Consecration he heard a voice say to him, *twice*, "Worship!

More extraordinary than reading his personal testimony of the tremendous love and mercy of God that saved him from disaster was hearing him speak about it all in person. Fr. Calloway is a powerful witness to the fact that God loves each one of us so very much, and reminds us that every single person has a mission. He assures us that there is hope for everyone, that prayer works (so don't stop praying!), and that we have a most loving Mother in the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Victory.

The audience was captivated by his down-to-earth approach and engaging ability to tell it like it is (in my teen son's words) that had us laughing so hard we cried and also had us crying because we were touched so deeply by the man, his mission, and the immeasurable and eternal love of God always available to us.

Fr. Calloway spoke very poignantly on man's search for happiness, a topic he also wrote about in his book. "I had put a lot of different things on my tongue looking for happiness. I had drunk a lot of different liquids looking for that eternal high, something that was *more*, something that would satisfy me forever. Here was the answer: God! And He had penetrated my world through the Virgin Mary and had drawn me to Himself and invited me to partake of His very self, the food that brings eternal life. And the drink that sustains. I was totally blown away."[23]

We spoke briefly with Fr. Calloway after his lecture. As I looked into the eyes of this remarkable Marian priest who is sharing the love and mercy of God in such a powerful way, it was so beautiful to realize that he also uses his sense of sight, which once sought the elusive joy the world promises and cannot sustain, to look into the eyes of his flock made up of all of humanity and shepherd us toward true joy which is found only in the eternal love of God.

One of my favorite parts of *No Turning Back* is his mother's letter, which concludes the book.

She wrote, ***"God, I love the boy who became a man ordained by mercy and grace to do God's will."***

If you have not read *No Turning Back: A Witness to Mercy* by Fr. Donald H. Calloway, be sure to get it, read it, and pass it around! God's love changes lives.

For more information, visit: http://www.fathercalloway.com.

—Michele Elena Bondi

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23. Donald H. Calloway, MIC, *No Turning Back: A Witness to Mercy* (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2010), p. 172.

Like Only a Mom Can

The final confirmation for my Confirmation.

When I really began studying the Catholic faith, I was floored at the gold mine of wisdom that the Catholic Church has regarding how to live a pure and true Christian life. I was absolutely captivated by the knowledge of the saints and the authentic teachings on Sacred Scripture that the Church offers. The only problem was that I was a Protestant at the time. Nevertheless, the richness of the Catholic faith so motivated me that I had to share what I was learning with my brothers and sisters in the faith, all of whom at the time were Protestant Christians. Needless to say it didn't go over very well.

Day after day I would read something that absolutely blew my mind. When that happens, one cannot simply sit back and keep it all for himself. No, I yearned to tell someone, anyone, that I had found a most beautiful example of how a Christian is supposed to look, almost shouting to anyone who would listen, "Read this! You won't believe it!" However, because of the fact that the material was Catholic, the responses lacked the enthusiasm I felt. I remember being told that I needed to read these Catholic books "with a grain of salt," basically meaning that I "had better be careful to not be led astray with the false teachings of the manmade Catholic Church."

This was very difficult for me. I had to continually reassure myself

and ask our Lord if what I was reading was, in fact, what He Himself was teaching me. It seemed so real and so authentic and so pure that I couldn't simply read only the portions that agreed with what my Protestant community taught and completely disregard the rest.

As time went on, I felt more and more resistance from my church family and also from my own family, namely my own mother, to what they viewed as my newly discovered "version" of Christianity. My mom was a devout Lutheran since childhood. After my healing, she had devoted herself once more to her Lutheran faith and to Christ and was concerned for my very salvation because of what I was reading and studying. After all, the Lutheran church, more so than that of other Protestant communities, had a unique relationship with the Catholic Church. In the 16th century the Catholic monk Martin Luther broke away from the Catholic Church and began his own version of what he personally thought was authentic Christianity. Since that time Lutherans and Catholics have been like cats and dogs or apples and oranges.

When I knew for certain that our Lord Jesus Christ was calling me into His Catholic Church, my very own mother was hurt the most. It must have been like a dagger being plunged into her heart when I told her I was being called into the very Church that her church broke away from. In tears she pleaded with me that I was headed in the wrong direction. Even when we would discuss the differences between our faiths and I offered a valid argument as to why I truly believed our Lord was calling me into His Church, it fell on deaf ears. All efforts seemed in vain.

I postponed my entrance into the Church for quite some time because of this obvious tension. It was thick and comparable to the notion of a pink elephant in the room. I nevertheless made a firm resolution to follow Our Lord in faith, and despite the cost, I vowed to enter the Catholic Church.

About two weeks before my actual Confirmation, by an act of sheer grace, my mom came to me and told me that she was now at peace with my entering the Catholic Church! She said that she had placed her trust in Jesus and had clearly seen the difference that He was making in my

life. Subsequently, her trust in His Divine Providence convinced her that I was not going astray or abandoning Christ for something manmade and false. Without question I knew she was speaking this with her heart as the tears that followed would testify! This meant the world to me and only strengthened my resolve that Jesus Christ was indeed asking me to join His family within His very own One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church! My own faith has since redoubled and I realize also that all things are truly possible for those who trust in Him!

—Paul A. Ray

Paul is a Catholic writer, speaker, Creative Director at Joseph Karl Publishing, and member of the board of *True Love Leads to Life.* Following his miraculous deliverance from alcohol addiction by Jesus Christ in a Protestant community, Paul was led to discover the fullness of the Christian faith in the Catholic Church. Visit Paul's blog, *Tongues as of Fire!* at www.tonguesasoffire.blogspot.com.

It Takes Blind Faith

He had no sight, but knew its value.

Have you ever heard of a white elephant sale? No, it has nothing to do with the zoo! It's a rummage sale of sorts, and the ones I have been to have been held at a local Catholic church during its annual summer fair. The highlight of the day, according to many, is the white elephant sale, where untold treasures can be found at a fraction of their original cost: books, toys, housewares, jewelry, and electronics. It's like a big garage sale that has been donated to the church by parishioners, who hope the parish can reap some profits. I try to go every year to search through the treasures there.

It's always fun to go through the rooms and check out the tables: DVDs for 50 cents, pretty glasses, gently used toys, and interesting books. But imagine my shock when I came across a little framed picture of St. Therese. I just knew it was meant for me! I felt so blessed to have found it. I kept it in its original frame for about a year, but eventually the curiosity got the better of me: How old was it? Who owned it? Would there be a clue written on the back? So I took it out of the frame it came in, which admittedly was not that pretty. I soon discovered that the wooden frame had been covering some handwriting. At the very bottom, it is written in ink: "Ste. Therese, The Little Flower, entering Heaven to begin fulfillment of her 'Shower of Roses.'"

I love the sentiment, but felt disappointed that, all of this time, those beautiful words had been hidden beneath the frame! I made up my mind to get rid of the old frame and find a new one that would showcase the pretty words. I haven't done it yet, because I haven't been able to find the perfect frame, it seems. But I know it's out there somewhere. Who wrote those words? Whoever the previous owner of the gorgeous picture is, he or she must have had a special devotion to the Little Flower. And you know what? I think this picture fell into the right hands, if I do say so myself!

Fast-forward to another year, another white elephant sale. I was shocked to see a large, beautiful statue of the Little Flower encased in an ornate frame. It was the first thing I saw when I walked into the room. It certainly stood out among the other, smaller items on the table.

I walked closer to inspect it further, not believing my good fortune. The lady who was volunteering there came over to me and saw my reaction.

"I think it's St. Therese," she said, studying it.

"Oh, it's her all right," I said quietly. I had to smile, thinking how every year, I find something from St. Therese at this sale. I wasn't expecting something this big, this ornate, but there it was, looking at me, begging for me to take it home.

"It's so *big*," I said, wondering where it would go. I leaned in closer and saw that it needed work: a dusting, a new paint job in places where the paint had flecked off, a chipped finger.

Yet...what if someone bought it just to make money off of it, not because they loved the Little Flower? Or what if someone bought it and it got kicked around in a dusty basement, never to be enjoyed or respected? Or... the unthinkable...what if it wound up in a trashcan somewhere? I cringed.

"It was dropped off yesterday by someone who said it was originally owned by a blind priest," the lady said. "If you want it, you should get it now, before Mass starts. I think this will be sold quickly."

I glanced at the price sticker. The lady was right; it would definitely sell quickly at that inexpensive price! Surely it was mismarked? No, it wasn't.

"I'll take it," I said. "I can paint it and fix it up good as new."

As I carried it out to my car, I still felt a little unsure, wondering where I would put it. The fancy design doesn't really go with the rest of my house, but it is such a beautiful portrait of her. I knew I had to have it, but why?

Then I realized that it doesn't really matter why, or where, or how. I thought of the blind priest who owned it. He couldn't even see its beauty, yet he knew it was her and he knew it was there, hanging in his residence, and that had made him happy.

Yesterday my son helped me repaint Therese. We painted her flowers a pretty, deep pink, and touched up the black paint on her veil and the frame. And I thought of the faith and trust that the blind priest had. He knew he had something beautiful, even though he couldn't see it. We should all have that kind of faith. We know God's love is beautiful, even though sometimes we don't see it in every situation. But we trust in Him, and we know that love is always there.

I imagined the blind priest, having such a beautiful image on his wall. He couldn't even enjoy its beauty, at least not in the sense of physical sight. What trust and love he must have had for God and His Little Flower! What faith he must have had!

As we finished painting Therese, I felt a sense of relief and happiness. I knew this beautiful statue had gotten into the right hands. I still don't know where it will go, but I have faith. Isn't that what St. Therese teaches us every day?

I wonder what St. Therese will give me at *next year's* white elephant sale!

—Nancy Carabio Belanger

Nancy is an award-winning Catholic children's author and the founder of Harvey House Publishing (www.harveyhousepublishing.com), whose mission is to provide quality books for youths that celebrate our Catholic faith, modesty, and the gift of life. Her books include *Olivia and the Little Way* and *Olivia's Gift*. She is currently writing two more books for Catholic pre-teens. Visit her blog at nancybelanger.blogspot.com.

Seek and Make Time for Quality Reading

Be encouraged and inspired as you continue your faith formation.

Do you wish that you had more time to read? Is there a stack of books sitting on your nightstand, arranged engagingly on your coffee table, or neatly displayed on your bookshelf that you long to read? Do you have a mental list of titles to investigate that have been highly recommended to you.

If only we had more time to read.

There are so many wonderful books available to encourage, inspire, pique our interest, educate, entertain, and challenge us. Within the Catholic world, books in conformity with Church teaching abound to nurture our souls, strengthen our resolve to live in imitation of Christ, and guide our souls ever closer to God as we strive to know Him, love Him, and serve Him on our path to heaven.

How intriguing are the various ways books come to us. Sometimes they are marketed to us. They come to us as gifts and as suggestions. Sometimes we discover them unexpectedly during a God moment. Have you ever spotted a book you were not looking for at the library and just knew you were meant to read it? Have you ever found an amazing book for a song at a garage sale or library book sale? I acquired my old and worn copy of the phenomenal book *The Life of Christ* by Fulton J. Sheen

years ago at a library used book sale for a dollar, will always treasure it, and highly recommend it.

Do you have a book collection? Have you ever loaned a favorite book of yours to someone and never get the book back? How difficult it is to overcome the bitter disappointment when that happens, but perhaps the book was meant to journey on and benefit someone else.

What are your absolute favorite types of books to read? Whose books do you have the most of? What books are on your wish list.

As for material goods, my Catholic book collection is what I am most proud to leave to my children, for they are of tremendous spiritual value.

I have more books by Fulton J. Sheen than by any other author. The most biographies I have of the same person are about Pope John Paul II. My favorite picture books are about Pope John Paul II. The most expensive book I own is a picture book about St. Therese of Lisieux.

Asking me in greater detail which of the books are my favorite would be like asking me to choose a favorite from among my children. It is impossible, for they are all unique, very special, and greatly beloved. I can say with certainty that one of my favorite authors is Fulton J. Sheen.

I wish I had more time to read. Do you, too? Sometimes as I move about the house I take a closer look at the many books placed in various locations throughout my home and long for the spiritual riches that await me within their pages.

Recently, I resolved to budget more time into my day for reading, longing especially to read Fr. Faber's collection, which was highly recommended by a friend, and the Basic Catholic Catechism Course by Servant of God Fr. John A. Hardon, S. J.

Currently I am reading the second book with over 400 pages to have crossed my path in the last year, *Journal of a Soul* by Pope John XXIII. My sister found it at a library used book sale and is lending it to me. While opening it for the first time late one night I asked the good Lord, as I did with the previous epic book, "When am I going to have time to read this?" and am once again grateful that He led me to another extraordinary book.

Journal of a Soul contains the spiritual diaries of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, which he began writing at the age of 14. His writing spanned 67 years and continued through his papacy. His final entry was written approximately six months before he died in 1963. The Pope gave permission for his spiritual diaries to be published after his death, and they reveal his intimate spiritual thoughts. He said of the diaries, "My soul is in these pages."

In 1928 the future Pope wrote, "The Lord does not promise me twenty-five years of episcopal life, but He does tell me that if I wish to become holy, He gives me the time I need and the necessary graces." The book reminds us that holiness is possible, desirable, and extraordinarily beautiful. The Pope's sentiments are absolutely lovely and deeply thought provoking, leave me eager to read more, learn more, grow closer to God, and love and serve Him in greater measure.

Pope John XXIII began his papacy in 1958 and died four years later from advanced stomach cancer. He had called the Second Vatican Council in 1962 but died before its conclusion in 1965. He was beatified by Pope John Paul II in September 2000 and is now known as Blessed John XXIII.

Here is an excerpt from *Journal of a Soul*.

> Not one drop of the blood of Jesus can avail the rebel angels, yet theirs was merely a sin of thought, and their first at that. For me, who sins so frequently, all the fruits of the Passion are available, not once but time and time again.
>
> And still I keep my God waiting for me! What a miracle of mercy! And how shameful for me! But enough, Lord—let us make an end of all this. From now onwards, with your help, I will seek you out always, at every moment, and I will take the place of the fallen angels in praising and blessing you forever and ever.
>
> The angels fell like thunderbolts into hell, because of a single thought of pride. And I, with my head so full of it? How easy it would be for my God to take away all my intellectual gifts, my

memory and my reason? Or confine me to my bed with sickness? So, softly: less presumption; more distrust of myself and more humility.[24]

Seek out and make time for quality reading.

—Michele Elena Bondi

24. Pope John XXIII, *Journal of a Soul* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), p. 86.

Chapter 8 ~ Patience

Patience is a form of the moral virtue of fortitude. It enables one to endure present evils without sadness or resentment in conformity with the will of God. Patience is mainly concerned with bearing the evils caused by another. The three grades of patience are: to bear difficulties without interior complaint, to use hardships to make progress in virtue, and even to desire the cross and afflictions out of love for God and accept them with spiritual joy.[25]

I Felt Like I Was Dying,
Then He Told Me That I Was

Maybe a Little Personal

Making the Most of the Time We Are Given

Seek God's Will in All Things Dating Related

God Can Make Good Things Happen Out of Any Challenging Situation

Sometimes God's "No" Works out Far Better for Us Than a "Yes"

"God does not require of us the martyrdom of the body; he requires only the martyrdom of the heart, and the will." [26]

—St. John Vianney

25. John A. Hardon, S.J., *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life, 2008), p. 408.
26. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 70.

I Felt Like I Was Dying, Then He Told Me That I Was

How is the Kingdom of God unfolding within you?

It has happened to me only once before in my entire lifetime, and while it was somewhat the same, it was entirely different. Allow me to try to explain.

Roughly ten years ago I found myself in a state that was incomprehensible and at the time unexplainable. There was no one moment when I felt it all at once; rather, I became enveloped in it over time. I remember at the pinnacle going to my husband in great pain and confusion, desperate to be rescued. I said to him, "*I feel like I am dying*." The experience was absolutely horrible.

Live in imitation of Christ.

Although I did not know the reason for my suffering at that moment, my husband did. Not long after my terrifying experience, I received divorce papers in the mail. Fascinating how I had already experienced the supernatural ramifications of the severing of our union before cognitively knowing of the divorce.

The intense spiritual agony lasted for years. Often, I felt like I was walking behind Jesus as He carried the Cross on the way to His Crucifixion. Fortunately, there were also intermittent moments of peace that flooded my

soul, a feeling that defies all human understanding. The peace was absolutely impenetrable. Those moments were very beautiful and merciful.

All the experiences of that time drew me into greater intimacy with God.

Last year I experienced a similar phenomenon, and yet it was very different. What I had been feeling greatly perplexed me because once again, I did not understand what was happening at first. I would describe it as a spiritual agony that also resonated throughout my entire physical being. There are no words that can adequately describe it.

Once, the suffering came on suddenly and was very intense. In that instant, I found myself in the Presence of Jesus. He was carrying the Cross on the way to His Crucifixion. This time, I was not walking behind Him as I had experienced many years before. Instead, He and I traveled and suffered as one. I was united with Him completely as He headed to Calvary.

At the time, I didn't understand where this experience was leading, but was astounded with the experience of being united with our suffering Lord in that way. More suffering followed and I continued to feel terrible. I went for my annual physical and when my doctor proclaimed that I was healthy, I thought he was out of his mind. I left his office wondering how he could let me leave without doing anything to alleviate my suffering.

Not long after that, I looked in the mirror and as I stared at myself, I was able to see in me what I had been feeling, and said with great alarm, "I look like I'm dying!" Hadn't anyone else noticed this? Why wasn't anyone else alarmed but me.

The following week, I continued to feel something very profound that was beyond my comprehension. After tucking my three children into bed, I found myself again overcome by what I could not explain. I felt tremendous grief and begged God for an explanation. "God, please tell me what is happening. *I feel like I am dying*!

God answered me. This is a rough translation of what He said, for His response was not in words but was rather an understanding. *I was dying to myself*. That sounded very reasonable, but I had more questions.

So I e-mailed my pastor and asked him for some information about what it means when the soul dies to itself. He responded that the terms for "dying" to self are abandonment and surrender. I was still suffering, and responded, "Are you talking voluntary? I'm not so sure that's the case." To me, those terms meant that I was volunteering for this suffering, and I knew for certain that I hadn't willingly consented to anything like that.

I also asked my friend and colleague Paul A. Ray what dying to one's self means. He wrote to me and said (used with his permission).

"God's timing is everything, this we both know. The mere fact that you asked if I knew anything about dying to one's self is astonishing and possibly prophetic. YES! I have been studying this for years now! What's more is that you mentioned that Satan let you have it last night. Haha! I laugh because he knows what's coming! The two go hand-in-hand with one another.

"In brief... Dying to one's self involves self-mastery over disordered attachments. What does that mean? I'll let St. Ignatius of Loyola explain it for me....

'Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. And the other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in prosecuting the end for which he is created. From this it follows that man is to use them as much as they help him on to his end, and ought to rid himself of them so far as they hinder him as to it.

'For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things in all that is allowed to the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it; so that, on our part, we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, long rather than short life, and so in all the rest; desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.

'It's about not allowing the things of this world to get the better of you. It's about being content in all circumstances whether in times of prosperity or in times of adversity—thanks, St. Alphonsus Liguori—so that God is truly the center of your life and, therefore, all things revolve around Him and Him alone.'

"It's like being as St. Paul said, 'I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' (Galatians 2:19-20.

"What is even more profound to me is that my new series I am going to be focusing on with my blog is on this very topic! Complete union with the will of God which can only be achieved by dying to ourselves."

I felt much better thanks to Paul, because I always like to know what I am up against (smile). I was still in the process of discovery.

One day I found myself in another state of discomfort just before retiring, still having so many unanswered questions. Again, I asked the good Lord to help me. It was then that I took notice of a nearby book and picked it up, opened it randomly, and read two passages from it. God was not giving me the full explanation yet, but provided me with great comfort and additional understanding in the two passages from *Quiet Moments with Benedict Groeschel*.

85. Take yourself to prayer.

In your life, when things begin to fall apart, apparently by happenstance, perhaps because of the ill will of others, or on the occasion or terminal illness or death or economic insecurity or the loss of a position—when things start to fall apart, for heaven's sake, take yourself to prayer. Not prayer that is going to tell God what to do. That's not very helpful prayer. God already knows what to do. But prayer that will reassure you that you are in the hands of God.[27]

88. Kingdom Growth.

Despite your destitution, your weakness, your distractions, your inner stresses and strains, do you feel the kingdom of God unfolding within you? You should, wherever you may be on your spiritual journey.

Not that this internal unfolding of the kingdom will necessarily feel like a beautiful rose opening in the morning sun, with each delicate petal touched by the dew. In reality, a great many Christians feel more like an untidy ball of yard unwinding bit by bit, as if it were being batted about by a mischievous kitten, or like a knitted sweater becoming unraveled.

The fortunate ones among us may detect something profoundly spiritual deep within, be it ever so faint. In any case, you will know what the kingdom of God is coming in your own soul because it calls you to grow in holiness.[28]

I was astounded, because God was reassuring me that I was in His hands (as we always are) and that something significant was happening. The kingdom of God was unfolding within me. Why this was taking place was still a mystery, but I was greatly comforted and felt joyful.

God was happy, Satan was furious, and I was tired.

On my way to the Tridentine Mass last weekend, the good Lord decided in His most perfect timing to provide me with a very crucial piece of information about my experience. What God told me (again, my humble translation) was that I was experiencing the purification of my soul. I understood that my suffering was in proportion to and the direct result of the sinful choices that I have made, and if this was not resolved here, it would have to be later in purgatory.

I was being purged of self and being purified. By going to Holy Mass regularly, receiving the Eucharist often, and by going to Reconciliation regularly, I had and was continuing to give my consent to this vital process.

At first, when the suffering was most intense, I found little comfort. As I progressed through this purification process, there were intermittent moments of peace that flooded my soul that defy all human understanding. Those moments were very beautiful and merciful, very similar to what I had experienced many years ago.

All the experiences of this second death drew me into greater intimacy with God.

Paul wrote to me again and said (used with his permission).

"I'm looking forward to hearing about your death (chuckle). You see how bizarre that sounds? It's no wonder the world thinks we're all nuts! But I know EXACTLY what you mean! Praise Jesus Christ! There is SO much to learn, Michele! Every time a part of us dies to self God fills the now empty space with more of Himself! Then what? You receive, in turn, a deeper knowledge of Him! A deeper love. But this knowledge and love

comes with a price. You will be held more accountable before Him because you have been given more. On the same token, the grace is all the more greater! Habits begin to drop and virtue begins to develop. Your mind gets transformed, little by little, to that of Christ's. And the world will hate you for it. 'But take courage; I have conquered the world!' (John 16:33) AMEN!

The remarkable parallel between my earlier death experience and this most recent death experience are worth taking note of. The first death was the result of one person's refusal to love, and this recent death was the result of God always loving. That sounds like something Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen would say.

How have you experienced the kingdom of God unfolding within you.

—Michele Elena Bondi

27. Father Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R., *Quiet Moments with Benedict Groeschel* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 2000), # 85.
28. Father Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R., *Quiet Moments with Benedict Groeschel* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 2000), # 88.

Maybe a Little Personal

God can turn things around in an instant.

This is difficult to share, but if it helps one person to find comfort the way I did yesterday, it will be worth it. For the past couple of weeks, I have been experiencing some great sadness. I attributed it to a couple of changes going on in my life, especially because of some very stressful economic problems. I get down as everyone does, and what I have found works best for me is to allow myself to truly feel the way I do. After a day or two, I usually feel better, actually empowered knowing that I am in touch with my feelings and can handle it.

While I always rely heavily on prayer, especially during such times as this, sometimes it is difficult to pray. I look for comfort in Scripture and take my mind off of things by reading, mostly something spiritual like encouragement from one of the saints. This two-week period was starting to frighten me though, because I had never experienced these feelings for so long without some obvious or serious trigger.

Well, I got the answer to my prayer last night—it came straight from the words of St. Padre Pio. I have always loved him and even had the great blessing of being prayed over years ago by someone who acquired one of his blood-stained gloves. I knew of his powerful intercession, just like some of my other favorites like St. Gerard Majella, St. Therese the Little Flower, St. Francis, St. Augustine—the list goes on and on. But I scrambled for relief after offering my suffering again and again.

I had actually been looking for a book of mine that I often go to by Ronda DeSola Chervin called *Quotable Saints*. I finally found it and came across a quote by Padre Pio that started this healing process. "Walk with simplicity in the way of the Lord and do not torment your spirit. Learn to hate your faults, but to hate them calmly."

I had been beating up on myself pretty bad during this time, trying to figure out how to overcome some of my challenges. So I went to the computer and found a site www.padrepiodevotions.org where I saw another quote that woke me out of my gloom. "Don't allow any sadness to dwell in your soul, for sadness prevents the Holy Spirit from acting freely." I felt so much grace and comfort from his words, which like all of the saints, point to following Jesus to the Father. I actually felt that there must have been some component of the devil preying on my weakness to incapacitate me. However, I accept the grace of God to allow times of suffering for His purpose.

I do not want to turn anyone away from professional help for emotional problems or imply that when we have depression or anxiety that it is because we allowed it. I simply am praising God today for the healing words that our friend Padre Pio gave me. I want to share that God can turn things around in someone's life in an instant when we seek Him and patiently live out His Divine Providence. The book and the website I mentioned may benefit you, too, or someone that you know.

—Sharon Cecil

Sharon is a mother, grandmother, writer, and evangelizer of God's love. Her multi-faceted lay apostolate draws people to parish life, focuses on the patron saint of each parish, conducts homeless outreach, and promotes the Rosary, especially to end abortion. Visit her blog at www.savebabies-savesouls.blogspot.com.

Making the Most of the Time We Are Given

A teenager shares his thoughts on why we are here.

Last year in September, someone dear to us was told that she had stage 3 cancer; we were devastated. Cancer was something I would always push to the back of my mind since it never pertained to me or anyone I knew. I would never have imagined anyone in my family with cancer, but it became a reality.

Yeah, I was scared. I felt like there was nothing I could do because there was no way I could help. I am not a doctor and I don't know the cure for cancer. I am just a kid. Then my mom helped me realize that I actually could help. My family member needed support, and when she needed my family and me to be there, we were.

I was dealing with the emotions. I was thinking this wasn't happening; this doesn't happen to people like her. She is healthy and she eats healthy, too. But it does. Realizing this was hard to accept. Then my mom told me, "Andre, remember that we are only here for so long, so make the most of it." When she said that, I felt like she was giving up, but my mom was determined that our loved one would be okay.

While I was freaking out, imagine how our family member was taking this in.

What my mom said affected me; I am only here for a while, so I should make the most of my life. That doesn't mean I should do whatever

I want and have fun all the time. I need to make the most of living my life, the way God wants me to live it. We waste so much time on pointless things that we forget we have a mission we are meant to accomplish. Time is ticking and there is no stopping it. If we mess up now, how can we be satisfied with ourselves?

It's now or never, so make a difference in the world today. We need to stay focused on what needs to be done instead of what we feel like doing. We should not waste much time now, for we may not have the same opportunity to cooperate with God later. It is in giving to others that we are truly satisfied.

It has been a year since my loved one was diagnosed with cancer. We prayed for her and supported her through her treatment. I learned through this experience that making the most of your life is vital. Time is passing and I do not want to waste a minute of it.

—Andre J. Bottesi

Andre is an award-winning Catholic author and high school student.

Seek God's Will in All Things Dating Related

And rely not upon your own understanding.

One evening during dinner my 11-year-old daughter's baby molar broke in half, having been finally forced out of its space by the erupting tooth underneath it.

Alyssa and I have established a relationship with the tooth fairy in our neighborhood. Her name is Gretel and she is very nice. Before heading up to bed, Alyssa put her tooth in a plastic bag and wrote Gretel her customary note.

This is what it said:

Hi.
I am sorry for having a half a tooth.
Give me half a $1.00.
Love your friend,
Alyssa
P.S. Tell St. Nick to find a boyfriend for Mom fast.
Okay I am done.

I had just finished a nine-day Novena to the Holy Spirit, having asked for counsel regarding four things. One was to discern if I have finished something in particular for Him (read on). By the end of the novena, I received answers to all of my ***other*** questions.

Twenty-one years ago I got married. After 13 years, my marriage ended in divorce and I became a single mother with three small children. I applied for an annulment right away and it was granted.

Approximately five very busy years passed and one day I met a nice man who asked me out on a date. We dated for almost a year and then the time came to make a decision. So I visited the Blessed Sacrament and had a discussion with God. Clearly the man did not believe in the true Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. We had attended Holy Mass on Sundays together, but we were separated by a huge spiritual divide. I remember saying to God, "Lord, you know that my relationship with You comes first and foremost, and so if I am to remarry, the man must feel the same way about You. This is not the man, and so please send me the man who honors You properly in the Blessed Sacrament." It didn't take long for my sorrow to turn into relief, because I knew God had other, better plans for me.

One week later, a Catholic man I met in church asked me out on a date. I really liked him and felt we had a very deep spiritual connection. He gave me a sweet nickname and carved our names into a tree. We had many interesting conversations that went on for hours. I loved him and his family. However, while we dated there was a constant nagging feeling that the timing wasn't right. But how could that be, when I finally met someone I loved so much who was so in love with our Lord? The timing wasn't right? That seemed like such a small technicality.

It was no technicality to God, however. He had a plan, and He would not negotiate. Instead of cooperating, I became more frustrated. The truth was that trying to meet the demands of single parenting, beginning a new company, and having that man in my life were proving more than I could handle.

Something had to give, but instead of listening to God, I made the wrong decision and decided that it was time for a new beginning. A friend of mine and I decided to subscribe to an Internet dating service, thinking that if we met two good men the four of us could go out together and it would all be so nice.

For a person whose mindset is to remain married until death do us

part, posting my information on an Internet dating site took some getting used to. To this day I still can't believe I did it. However, the site was very private, and subscribers are required to fill out a lengthy questionnaire. The company does a fine job matching compatible people.

I matched with several men right away, and my friend, well, God had her on a timetable, too. She didn't match with anyone she was interested in for the length of her subscription. The first person I matched with was a really nice man with many wonderful qualities. Unfortunately, he lived a significant distance away and so I made the difficult decision to not continue the friendship.

Around that time another man and I began communicating. He was also very nice and he lived much closer. I wondered why I had not pursued this modern avenue of meeting people many years before! The new man and I became fast friends, but before too long he was laid off from his job and finding a new one was his top priority. We reconnected after a while, and at that time, God made it very clear to me that He did not want me dating.

I was very surprised God made it so clear, and my disappointment was great. Then, He told me, "*There is something I want you to finish."*

So if you can just believe it, in my bitter disappointment I defiantly asked Him what would happen if I pursued the relationship anyway. He responded, "*I will not let it work out!*

And that's exactly what happened. The next time the man and I planned to meet for lunch, he didn't call. That was uncharacteristic of him, for he had been very reliable. Later that afternoon, the man called from the emergency room. I visited him there and said to the good Lord, "You didn't have to put the man in the hospital!

Apparently He did have to, because I was not cooperating.

The many roadblocks that followed every time we tried to go out together after that made it very clear that God was going to honor His word and not let the relationship work out. It also became clear that there just wasn't time to talk on the phone and date in addition to all of my other responsibilities, as much as I wanted to.

There was something God wanted me to finish.

Finally, God and I were in sync. I agreed to complete whatever it was He wanted me to finish. Every time I finished a book, I asked God if I that was what He had wanted me to finish. He remained silent. At the time, I was almost finished with books five and six, and began to understand that what God wanted me to finish had nothing to do with a book.

Just before my Internet subscription ran out, there was one final match. Although by then I was finally cooperating with God, something told me to take a look anyway. As it turned out, this very fine man and I live about a mile away from each other. We were born the same year, grew up in the same area, and we both have school-aged children. We became fast friends and I just can't say enough wonderful things about him. He is funny, creative, and incredibly bright. He is now an invaluable colleague and has been instrumental in helping me accomplish my mission. And for both of us, the timing for dating wasn't right.

So what began as my uncooperative foray into the world of Internet dating ended with a fine gift from the Lord for my eventual cooperation. I gained a wonderful friend.

Seek God's will in all things and rely not upon your own understanding.

—Michele Elena Bondi

God Can Make Good Things Happen Out of Any Challenging Situation

We are all members of the Body of Christ.

Thirteen years ago I was in Denver, Colorado for a week-long mission going door to door, for the purpose of evangelizing and inviting people to their local Catholic church. My team and I had just finished speaking with a man who had been baptized Catholic but was not regularly attending Mass. The overall conversation went very well, and I think we helped him grow closer to God. We also gave him information that would help him get more involved with his Catholic faith, and invited him to begin attending Mass again.

As we walked away from the encounter, my teammates and I gathered close together and offered a prayer for the man's ongoing conversion. Just as the prayer concluded, I noticed that my back felt very wet. I quickly removed my backpack and discovered that my water bottle had leaked in my backpack. My Bible, favorite apologetics books, and the numerous rosaries my mother had hand made for me to hand out to people throughout the mission were saturated. I immediately emptied out my bag and frantically tried to dry everything as quickly and completely as possible. As I did this, I thought to myself that the devil must have been trying to bring me down for all the good work we had just done.

It took a while, but finally everything was somewhat dry. While I was loading my books and rosaries back into the backpack, I decided to put two rosaries into my pocket in case I had the opportunity to hand them out to people along the way.

That evening, we were in the parking lot waiting for the team leader to get the keys for the van so that we could drive to a nearby parish where we would stay and evangelize for the rest of the week. The leader was delayed in bringing the keys, and a snowball fight quickly ensued. While dodging the flying projectiles, I suddenly thought to myself, "I should go say goodbye to Jesus real quick!" Immediately after having that thought, I dashed off to the small perpetual Eucharistic adoration chapel behind the Church.

As soon as I reached the chapel, I knelt down outside the double glass doors, not wanting to enter and disturb the people who were inside praying. As I looked up at Jesus in the monstrance on the altar, a feeling came over me that I should go into the chapel. I wasn't sure why I had this feeling, but chose to follow it. I slowly stood up, quietly slipped through the double glass doors, and knelt down near the back.

A lady sat a few feet away from me. She was crying, and I felt very bad for her! Wishing I had something to give her, and knowing that I was not carrying any prayer cards or rosaries, I reached into my pockets anyway in an act of desperation to see if I had anything at all that I could give her. Almost immediately, my hand came into contact with something, and I quickly pulled it from my pocket. I was shocked to find the two rosaries that my mother had made! It took me a few minutes to figure out how they got there. They were in my pocket because my water bottle had leaked in my backpack earlier in the day.

My attention turned back to the crying lady. I wasn't sure what to say. I reached out and gently placed my right hand on her shoulder. I extended my left hand and presented the rosaries to her and said, "I would like you to have these. My mother made them." Her hand immediately rose to accept them. As she looked at the rosaries, her disposition changed. Her head tilted slightly to the side as if to say, "Oh, how precious." Her tears

seemed to stop at that moment. I believe she was deeply touched by my gesture. I didn't want to interrupt the moment, and the work of the Holy Spirit in her, so I silently turned and left the chapel without looking back.

As I walked out into the cold night air, I began to reflect back over the day when the water bottle leaked in my backpack. When that happened, I thought that the evil one was trying to upset me. If it weren't for the leaky bottle, I would not have put the rosaries in my pocket. In turn, I would not have been able to give them to the woman, and she would not have been touched in such a profound way. I am confident that she felt my gesture was at least in some way a partial answer to her prayers. In addition, it helped me see how we are all members of the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is at work in all of our lives. Jesus works through each of us to heal one another. Being part of the Mystical Body of Christ is something simply amazing to think about, and edifying to be a part of.

That entire experience made me realize that I shouldn't let apparent setbacks disturb me, because God can make good and even great things happen out of any challenging or disturbing situation. The Crucifixion is the greatest example of that.

—Sean McVeigh

Sean is an author and Catholic guest speaker who provides talks, retreats, and motivating instruction for Churches, schools, and organizations. He is the founder of McVeigh Ministries, Inc. (www.catholicguestspeaker.com), which strives to strengthen the Body of Christ by inspiring men and women of all ages to fervently grow in their relationship with each person of the Blessed Trinity: the Father, Jesus His Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Ministries also seeks to strengthen the Catholic Church by providing Her members with knowledge and encouragement to share their Catholic faith with others.

Sometimes God's "No" Works Out Far Better for Us than a "Yes"

The clerk just wouldn't take "no" for an answer.

One day last year I went shopping for clothes. That is something I do very rarely, mostly because I hate it. While shopping, I remembered the time last year when I was at the same department store, weighted down by the small mountain of clothes in my arms. The goal: Find clothes so I would not have to return any time soon.

While browsing through a few final racks before trying on the pile of clothes in my arms, a sales associate approached me. She had a few applications in her hand. I had hoped she would help me with the clothes that I was considering buying, which would then help pay her salary. Instead, she tried very hard to convince me to apply for a charge card. I had not even decided to buy anything yet.

The associate was undeterred when I responded, "No, thank you" while looking suggestively at the pile of clothes I was holding.

She kept asking me over and over again if I wanted to open a charge card as I stood there holding the heavy pile. I kept responding no. Finally, I looked at her with my most rational expression and said, "What I could really use is some help with these clothes." Only then did she offer to help me. On the way to the dressing room, she continued to insist that I apply for a charge card.

A short while later I was disappointed to cross paths with the woman in another department, and she accosted me again. Annoyed, I informed her that I had not changed my mind.

I left that store and went to another popular department store, where I found an appealing skirt, tried it on, then waited in line to buy it. The sales associate was all business and never attempted to connect with me as a human being. She repeatedly insisted that I apply for a charge card. I declined the offer. She told me I would get the skirt for free. She was informed that I did not want another card, nor did I want the skirt for free. She kept asking anyway.

I thought to myself*, I came into the store to buy a skirt, and you should be selling me the skirt.* Her repeated requests disgusted me and I began to convince myself to abandon the skirt right there by the register on principle.

What are we doing.

I decided to buy the skirt after all, because leaving it there on principle would mean having to find another skirt somewhere else. That meant more shopping, and perhaps more credit card application harassment at another store. At the end of the transaction the woman, who by never making eye contact with me missed the disapproval written all over my face, told me to call the number at the bottom of the receipt and provide feedback on what a great job she did! I encouraged myself to never shop at that store again.

What are we doing, and why.

So there I was, back at the first department store one year later. While in the jewelry department looking for earrings, I was reunited with the same woman who ignored the load of clothes I was carrying last year on her quest to get me to relent and sign up for a charge card I did not want. Yup; she asked me if I wanted to sign up for the same credit card. Apparently I did not make an impression on her last year. I responded, "No, thank you," knowing quite well that I would not hear the end of it until I was no longer in the store.

I reminded myself that I just came from Holy Mass and Eucharistic

Adoration and that as a Catholic I must live in imitation of Christ. Thus, I refrained from telling her what came to my mind first. From then on I ignored her every time she asked me, over and over and over again, if I wanted to open up a charge card. It was really weird. When I was finished shopping, I asked her if she could help me pay for my earrings. She said she could, and on our way to the register she asked me if I was sure I did not want to sign up for a charge card.

No means no. Why do so many people interpret that word so differently? Exactly what are such people hearing when we say "No?" Ignoring a person's "No" is disrespectful. It says "I am not interested in what YOU want, I am interested in what I want, and I will get what I want at your expense."

What are we doing, and why.

I put my wallet in my purse while continuing to ignore still more requests from the sales associate to open a charge card. I also said a prayer. "Dear Lord, this woman just will not take no for an answer. I hope that I never do that to You. Yet so often I do. I ask You for things and when Your answer is 'No' or 'Not now,' I act just like that woman."

What am I doing, and why.

"I am so sorry for doing that to You, God! May I ever be mindful of what I ask or demand You for, and how many times I ask. May I humbly acquiesce to Your most perfect will and obediently listen to You. You love me, and You know what is best for me. .

Sometimes a "No" from God works out far better for us than a "Yes."

Thank You, most loving God, for the valuable lesson.

—Michele Elena Bondi

Chapter 9 ~ Peace

Peace is the tranquility of order. Peace is first of all the absence of conflict. But it is also the serenity experienced because there is no conflict. It is the calm that accompanies agreement of human wills, and is the foundation of every well-ordered society.[29]

"Why Not?"

Snowflakes

True Love Leads to Life

Our Prayers are Like Snowflakes

God is Always with Us!

Jesus Wants to Be Received by Each One of Us

"See, my children,
the grace of God converts everything into gold;
all our actions, even the most indifferent of them,
if animated by his Spirit, become works meritorious for eternal life."[30]
—St. John Vianney

29. John A. Hardon, S.J., *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life, 2008), p. 411.
30. Compiled and Arranged by W.M.B., *Thoughts of The Cure' D'Ars* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 70.

"Why Not?"

What's in *your* wallet?

One morning my children and I traveled to my mother's home to visit with her and my sister Belinda following Holy Mass. It was a beautiful fall day in Michigan, sunny and warm. The fall colors were absolutely breathtaking. On the way, my 11-year-old daughter Alyssa and I sang "You Raise Me Up." She also sang "Danny Boy" by herself.

Upon our arrival, my mother and sister greeted us with a warm reception. We enjoyed a delicious lunch prepared so lovingly by my mother, who is a fantastic cook. She made stuffed chicken with gravy and mashed potatoes, salad, and put out a variety of fruits.

Throughout the afternoon we shared stories and current events. We Skyped relatives in Germany. My 13-year-old son Nick carved a pumpkin.

Aunt Belinda was teaching Alyssa how to crochet, and she showed us some newly acquired crochet books that had such delightful patterns. She also helped Alyssa along on a red scarf they had started two weeks before. My sister gave Alyssa a brand-new metal crochet needle to replace the wooden one she had been given and broke the week before.

My sister had also been giving Alyssa voice lessons. She copied some songs and put them in a brand-new folder with horses on the front. Belinda played the piano as Alyssa sang "Amazing Grace" and other sweet songs.

Oma also accompanied Alyssa on the piano. Nick picked a green pepper from Oma's garden and helped prepare dinner. Later, we had homemade gourmet pizza. Andre, my high schooler, alternated relaxing in the living room and wandering in and out of the kitchen, sometimes giving out hugs and sometimes joining in the discussion.

Before dinner, Oma made tea. She got out the tea set from her hometown of Bavaria. Her parents had brought it to America and gave it to her when they visited from Germany in the early 1970s. We all sat in the kitchen and enjoyed good conversation, each other's company, and sipped tea from the beautiful gold teacups. Oma began telling us a story, and she had something very special for show and tell.

One day during the previous week, she was going through a drawer when she came upon the wallet of her husband, my father, who died suddenly from a massive heart attack on October 16, 1982 at the age of 46.

He had his first massive heart attack in 1975 in church, on his way up for Holy Communion, and almost died then. He was 39 years old at the time, and learned that he did not have much longer to live.

My mother remarked to her grandchildren that there are no pictures of my father on display in the house. For the first time, I realized that there aren't, nor have there been, visible pictures of my dad around the house. Their separation still hurts her that much.

Mom told us that she had not seen his wallet in many, many years. While slowly opening his wallet, she explained that she had found something noteworthy inside it. Several things went through my mind at that moment. I wondered if there were pictures of us in his wallet. I greatly hoped that she found something in his wallet that had to do with us, his family, and that all these years later her discovery would lead to a message of love for us from the past.

My mother explained that she had gone through the contents of his wallet and found a piece of paper among his identification and various other cards. She held his wallet in her hand as she spoke, and removed a small faded and folded green piece of paper. She unfolded it and read aloud what my father had written on the paper.

Some men see things as they are and say, "Why?"

I dream things that never were and say, "Why not?"[31]

What would someone find in your wallet, and what would it say about you?

—Michele Elena Bondi

Snowflakes

The falling snowflakes
Dance nimbly around,
As they hover and twirl
Above frosty ground;

Transforming the sky
Into foggy gray,
Snowflakes silently dim
The soft light of day;

Till the sky again
Turns bright, clear, and blue,
As the sun's gleaming rays
Turn flakes into jewels;

And blankets of snow
Reflect the bright sun,
Except for deep footprints
Just left by someone;

Who passed by unseen,
And mission untold,
But whose trek was revealed
As if the snow spoke.

—**Belinda Bondi**

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True Love Leads to Life

Life is the right choice.

I was up late one night completing the blog "Happy 11th Birthday to My Pro-life Baby." I wanted to post it on my daughter Alyssa's actual birthday as a tribute to the tremendous love God has for her and for every single person. It was almost the next day when I finished, and while packing up my laptop was granted another God moment.

St. Therese, my Patron Saint and dear friend in heaven, sent the sign for which she is known all over the world. In fact, she made her presence known not once, but three times!

When I was finished writing late that night, I was pleased with my effort and also very tired. As I was closing my laptop computer, the smell of roses exuded from my hands.

This was a very deeply moving and humbling experience, to receive affirmation of our work on God's behalf. How we please God when we love one another as He loves us, and as He commanded us!

Yet how much more evidence do we need that we are to respect and peacefully defend life from conception until natural death?

God's Word alone should be enough for us.

Earlier that same day, Alyssa had asked if she could open the present sent by her Aunt Laura a little early, and I consented. It wasn't until the next day, as I put her things away while she was at school, that I noticed the words on her birthday card. "Happy Birthday to a beautiful little flower."

St. Therese is known as The Little Flower. Alyssa's gift was a lovely yellow dress, and the manufacturer's name on the tag attached to the dress was "Sweet Heart Rose."

Such God moments are significant reminders that God commands us "Thou shalt not kill" because every person is loved and wanted by Him and should be welcomed and loved by us.

This also makes me think about our priest. The Good Lord told me that a priest will come from our family, although I was not told what generation he will come from. If our priest is to come from among my children's children, his life is already threatened by abortion. Keep in mind that this priest will be sent by God and could be the one meant to someday bring you Jesus in the Eucharist, celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage for your children, baptize your niece, forgive your sins by the power of God when hearing your confession, console you, guide a friend of yours, and is meant to lead countless souls to heaven.

Each one of us must respond to the calling to peacefully protect and defend the lives of all unborn children, our future teachers, mothers, fathers, waitresses, scientists, builders, doctors, speech therapists..., the people who are to pray for us, love us, lead us, serve us, and care about us. Let us care about them now, before it is too late. Pray also for an end to euthanasia.

Pray before the Blessed Sacrament, at every Mass you can attend, and whenever you can, for an end to abortion and euthanasia worldwide. Each of us can and should make a difference. We will be held accountable.

—Michele Elena Bondi

Our Prayers are Like Snowflakes

They add up and transform our world.

Recently I was outside playing with my children on a cold, snowy Michigan afternoon. A winter storm was blanketing us with snow.

At one point we sat, the four of us bundled up well against the elements, on our snow-covered patio furniture and enjoyed a hot cocoa break. We studied the wonders of nature that surrounded us as God painted everything white, and the thought came to me that our prayers are a lot like snowflakes.

Each one is extraordinarily unique, very beautiful, and seems very small on its own. A great many snowflakes cascaded down all around us. Some of them seemed as if they were merrily dancing in mid air as they floated downward, as if the understanding that they were contributing to something so beautiful filled them with great joy.

The scene with the falling snow was very poetic, in fact it was poetry in motion, with every snowflake having a journey all its own, so completely different than all the others, just like each of us has our own unique purpose and journey.

In every direction, the great multitude of snowflakes had joined other snowflakes to create large amounts of snow. The sight was absolutely beautiful, everywhere we looked.

Our prayers are like snowflakes. Every prayer is exquisite, just like the marvelous snowflake. While they may sometimes seem insignificant

on their own, we must never allow ourselves to be tempted to think that they are. Our prayers are mighty because each one is fueled by the infinite and eternal love of God. Just when it seems that alone the snowflake accounts for nothing, we see that when they accumulate the world is absolutely transformed by them. Our collective prayers also transform our world.

The children used the snow to create many grand things, including huge snow forts, snowballs, and several slides. We laughed as we played, sliding down the mini snow mountains on our sleds and snow tubes. To think that all the joy began with one tiny snowflake. Like the snow that transformed our entire neighborhood that day, our prayers can also lead to beautiful transformation in ways we can never even imagine..

The next time you see a snowflake, or the next time it snows, or the next time you view a winter scene in a picture, think about the immense potential of the tiny, beautiful snowflake, and remember that our prayers, like the snowflake, can and do transform our world.

—Michele Elena Bondi

God is Always with Us!

How beautiful to know that God is the One sending the message.

God speaks to us in many different ways, sometimes through other people, through the actions of others or situations that arise, even through something we are listening to on the radio one day or watching on television, etc. Other times he speaks to us through our hearts and our conscious. We just know inside that it's God speaking to us.

No matter how God chooses to speak to us though, there is nothing more beautiful then knowing deep down inside that it was definitely God sending us a message. It's often hard to explain to others how you know that it was truly God and not just your own thoughts or imagination, but it's not really important if others believe you. The bottom line is you know that it was truly God!

I have had many moments in my life where God has spoken to me as I'm sure you have had as well, one particular moment stands out to me though and I know I will never forget it. It wasn't anything major or life-changing, but it touched me so much and it was at a time where I truly needed to hear from God, and to hear what it was that I believe he told me.

It was the fall of 2001 and I was living in Phoenix, Arizona. The year 2001 was rough for me as unfortunately more often than not most years

have been. That year I had a relationship with a girlfriend end and I took it very hard and it took me a while to get over it, I also dealt with being unemployed most of that year and had financial struggles. I had moved to Arizona in 2000, and so aside from a sister of mine who lived there I really did not know very many people. I began to grow comfortable there though and after the relationship I had ended I really started to take the time to enjoy Arizona and what it had to offer, so Praise God I was starting to find some peace in the midst of some very difficult times.

As the fall of 2001 arrived I really felt like I was getting close to putting my life back together for the better. I was interviewing for a decent number of jobs, the excruciating heat that Phoenix experiences during summers was ending, and the beautiful fall weather in The Valley Of The Sun had arrived. It just seemed like things were starting to come together slowly but surely. At the time I did not have cable television in the apartment I was living in, so I used an antenna to receive some of the local channels. One of the local channels that came in clear was KPBS, and 2001 happened to be the final year that the television show Mister Rogers' Neighborhood was recording new episodes. I think most of you know about Mister Rogers, and whether you liked his show or not you have to admit that he certainly brought some great quality programming to children for many years. Well, by now you might be wondering what an adult was doing tuning into Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, so to answer that there was nothing else on at that moment that I wanted to watch, and I would watch Mister Rogers sometimes as a kid and so I felt comfortable leaving it on as I attempted to take a nap.

I've always been very sentimental towards my childhood, and so I have to admit that the show was definitely soothing for my soul as I was lying there on my futon. So there I was paying attention to the show, and Mister Rogers began talking to his television audience as he would sometimes, and he would then go on and say something that touched me so powerfully that I began to cry. Now I may not remember the exact discussion that led him to say what touched me so deeply, but the only thing that mattered was what God wanted me to hear. So

as Fred Rogers looked into the camera he said, "You know I'm really proud of you," Mister Rogers himself of course was meaning to speak that to his audience of children, but for me I knew right away that it was God speaking, and speaking to me!

It was a time of my life where I certainly needed love and comfort, and I was not receiving much of either from anyone. And knowing that God was truly speaking to me through this television show, I knew that it was his way of comforting me and letting me know that he saw how hard I was trying to improve my life. He knew the heartache I had been through, and he was so proud of me for not throwing in the towel, and for getting back up whenever I was knocked down, and continuing to move forward and do what I could to succeed.

So as I shed tears which were needed and somewhat healing at the time, I also felt so happy that God took the time to speak to me in a way that I would not miss, and in a way that I would not doubt. Going back to something I mentioned earlier about others not always understanding how we can be so sure when God has spoken to us at times, many would say regarding this God Moment of mine that it was just a coincidence, and that since I was going through hard times that I wanted to latch onto anything that might have made me feel better. In this case believing that it was God himself speaking to me through something I saw on TV, would be what many might have felt I was latching onto for comfort.

I knew at that moment though, and I still strongly believe now that it was truly God. My life didn't become cut & dry after that moment, nor did all of my problems go away instantly, etc. However, think about when a loved one comforts you when you are going through hard times, the comfort means so much to you and helps you to feel better even if whatever it is that your going through might get a lot worse before it gets better.

The real moral of this story is that God never abandons us, he feels our pain and wants to be there to comfort us, but we must be open to this and invite him into our lives so that he can be there for us through each day of our lives, whether they are good or bad days. And sometimes, such as the story I have just shared with you, he leaves a lasting

imprint in our hearts by even doing something as little as speaking to us through someone or something. And often that imprint that is left in your heart is what helps to remind you from that moment forward that God is always there.

Keep an eye, or an ear, or both open in your daily lives, you never know if God is trying to tell you something!

Blessings!!

—Jerry Weber

Jerry is the host of *"The Catholic Revolver with Jerry,"* a Catholic podcast that can be found at www.catholicrevolver.com.

Jesus Wants to be Received by Each One of Us

Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity: He comes where He is welcomed.

I am not kidding you. This is how it went down.

More than five years ago but less than ten, my children and I moved into our new home. The name of our street has Mary in it. St. Joseph helped us find the house.

Just a few years before that, while we still lived at our other home, the good Lord invited me to attend daily Mass. He didn't command me to attend. Instead, He gently and very lovingly invited me. Even though I was a cradle Catholic, and strange as seems to me in hindsight, attending daily Mass was not something I had ever thought about or considered. However, I did have a great desire to draw closer to God, so participating in Holy Mass each day made so much sense.

One day soon after we moved into our current home, I happened to look at the big tree in the backyard. I so enjoyed being in the yard and looking at all the trees, plants, and flowers. I kid you not, there on the trunk I saw the image of a chalice. Behind the chalice was another chalice, and behind it was another one, and behind that one was another one, etc. The chalices went on forever. It was sort of like the effect you see when looking at an object reflected from one mirror into another; the image seems to go on forever.

I knew this for certain: God wanted me to receive not only the Body of Christ during Holy Communion, He also wanted me to receive His Precious Blood. Again, it seems strange now, but I had never even considered it.

Not long after that I was working at my computer and there on the screen was the command to type the words that were visible in the box in order to proceed. The words were "cup blood."

When God knows I am in need of confirmation or clarification, He always confirms what He wants me to do.

Does He do that with you as well? How has He invited you into greater Divine intimacy? Was that something that you, too, never even considered doing until He brought it up.

God our Father is always present in our lives loving us, guiding us, consoling us, and helping us, as a loving Father would.

Just last year I was at a funeral, and during Holy Communion, after receiving Jesus' Body, I approached the person holding the chalice with His Precious Blood. As I raised the chalice, something happened that I had never before encountered. Warmth emanated from the chalice, and I could feel that warmth on my face.

Later I shared the experience with a dear friend and Marian Catechist, and asked her what it meant. She replied, "He is living." Jesus wants to come to each one of us, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, during Holy Communion.

—Michele Elena Bondi

IN CONCLUSION
The Immensity of the Reward

Be a little greedy for Heaven.

Thomas Mulcahy

I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. John 11:25-26

In evaluating our lives, we should not discount the length of eternal life. What God is offering to us, ETERNAL LIFE, is simply stunning, overwhelming and unfathomable! Certainly a fundamental part of the Ignatian Exercises is simply to do the math: to reflect on the shortness of life and the incredible length of eternity. And then to choose wisely, which is why we pray to the Holy Spirit for the gift of Wisdom. To miss out on Heaven—and all that Heaven is—simply cannot be an option. Who could endure the loss?

As to death, it is a great grace to realize that we are going to die. In essence, our lives are but a preparation for death. God, in His providence, already knows the day and moment of our death, and He has already put in place the graces we will need to be saved. We need to cooperate with those graces, and all will be well.

Unfortunately, so many people live their lives without much thought

about their impending death. They realize that other people die but they sort of see themselves as a bystander to the death of other people, somehow convincing themselves that it won't happen to them.

And although attending someone's funeral may make such a person anxious about death, it is also the case that we are quite adept at putting into place psychological defense mechanisms that quickly assuage such thoughts and turn our attention back to the world.

As I see it, there is a gigantic cultural conspiracy in place to convince us that we are not going to die. The plan is to outlive death by taking the right vitamins, wearing the best make-up, and seeing the best doctors. And yet everyone still dies. We are all on an absolute collision course with death. Only God knows for sure how much time we have left. And the clock keeps ticking.

I think it is interesting that in Mother Teresa's mystical life the Virgin Mary told her to tell families to say the rosary[32]. This prayer not only helps us to contemplate the life of Christ, including his death and resurrection, but it continually reminds us of the two most important moments in our lives—the present moment and the moment of our death.

We ask Mary to "pray for us now and at the hour of our death." It is in the "sacrament of the present moment" that we can choose to conform our will to God's grace, and it is at the moment of death that we need all of Heaven (that great cloud of witnesses, Hebrews 12:1) interceding for us to persevere to the end. It is important to pray for the grace of final perseverance and for the fortitude to die a good death. It is reassuring to *know* that we are asking Mary's help in this regard when we pray the rosary.

"*What no eye has seen, or ear heard,*
Nor the human heart conceived,
What God has prepared for those who love Him." 1 Corinthians 2:9

Don't put your trust in the passing things of this world (those idols have no power to save you). Be a little greedy for Heaven, and in the process transform that greed into love and gratitude for a God who, after dying for our sins and humbling Himself to be our very eternal life-giving

food, has prepared for us such an immense reward that the magnitude of the joy and love we will experience in Heaven is beyond our narrow understanding, lasting for endless ages, in the glory of the "ever-blessed" life of God. In short, to say that Heaven is going to be awesome is an incredible understatement.

—Tom Mulcahy

Sources of inspiration: Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (chapter 48); *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*; and Father William Faber's *The Creator and the Creature,* from where I derive the title and I am otherwise heavily indebted to him for the tone and content of this note.

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31. "Some men see things as they are and say, 'Why'? I dream of things that never were and say, 'Why not'?" Robert Kennedy made this quotation famous during his 1968 Presidential campaign. Although he apparently used it on several occasions as a kind of slogan, the only occasion for which we have been able to find documentation is his speech at the University of Kansas on March 18, 1968. In its original form, the quotation was said by the serpent in George Bernard Shaw's play *Back to Methuselah* , and was used by President Kennedy in his Speech to the Irish Parliament on June 28, 1963: "Speaking as an Irishman [Shaw] summed up an approach to life: 'Other people,' he said, 'see things and say: why - but I dream things that never were and say: why not.'"-http://www.jfklibrary.org

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God is at work in you!

Most sincerely,
Michele
Holy Week, 2011

"My children,
we are in reality only what we are in the eyes of God,
and nothing more."[33]
—St. John Vianney

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Michele Elena Bondi, M.A., is a mother, award-winning Catholic author, psychologist, and publisher at Joseph Karl Publishing, whose mission is to encourage, inspire, and continue the faith formation of the more than one billion Catholics around the world and to lead souls to Christ.

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