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Editor's Corner Kathy Bishop

Welcome to the May/June 2020 edition of The Faith Companion. This edition is published in the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic, when our Churches are closed to public worship, we are all in lockdown and suddenly all we took for granted, including life itself, is no longer a given. Due to this ongoing situation we will only be publishing this current edition online. We pray our readers' safety and may you all find many blessings during these trying times. God is always near even when we can't feel his presence.

As always in The Faith Companion, the presence of God has revealed itself. A golden thread was discovered running through all our theological articles. Fr Conrad OP's article talks of the "something of God" residing in each of us due to the "Great Exchange" ... God became human so that humankind could become like God. Martin Ryan explains that as we are the chosen of God, we are all imbued with an infinite worth, something which is echoed in Dr Pia Matthew's article "Yes to Life". Life is a gift even in the unborn child, who shares this identity as a person of immense value. So - three articles, written by different authors in two different countries, but each complementing the other and all written without the others' knowledge!

In our Scripture section Fr Larry Kaufmann focuses on the Magnificat. He reflects on Mary's Holy Week, reframing her Magnificat in the light of Christ's Resurrection. Brian McDonogh examines the Old Testament meaning of "knowledge of God", which is so much more than a merely intellectual knowledge. In Considering Prayer I share my experience of consecration to Mary on 25th March 2020 using Fr Michael Gaitley's 33 Days to Morning Glory. Teresa O'Driscoll offers us a guided meditation from her book 9 Days to Heaven. Fr Kevin O'Donnell revisits the Q&A from our last edition, the devotional practice of not eating meat on Fridays, to explore the wider psychological and spiritual aspects of this question. In Saints and Spiritualities Dr Roddy Campbell Guion tells us about the life of Maximillian Kolbe who features in 33 Days to Morning Glory and informs our preparation for Marian Consecration.

In our faith sharing section we have an amazing faith story from Joanna Goyaram about her recovery from serious illness and two stories of direct mystical experiences of Mary Our Mother. Finally, a very special story by Brenda Bent, which we publish posthumously since Brenda passed away on 25th March 2020. She tells us about her last conversation with her dying mother and how she tried to alleviate her mother's anxiety about facing death.

We hope this story helps to console Brenda's family after her passing. We will always be grateful to Brenda for choosing to share this last conversation with us. May we please ask our readers to pray for the repose of Brenda's soul and for her family to find consolation. This edition of The Faith Companion is dedicated to Brenda's memory.

Rest in peace, Brenda.

CORRECTION

In our Mar/Apr 2020 edition of The Faith Companion the article on starting on page 8 "Touching Mercy" was attributed to Fr Larry Kaufmann CSSR when in fact it was written by Fr Kevin O'Donnell. We apologize unreservedly to Fr Kevin and Fr Larry for this error which occurred during production.

DISCLAIMER

The opinions and beliefs expressed in our published works are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or beliefs of The Faith Companion or its associates and Editors.

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Sharers of the Divine Nature – II Peter 1:4

by Richard Conrad, OP



Fr Richard Conrad OP joined the Dominican family in 1979 and now teaches dogmatic and sacramental theology at Blackfriars, Oxford where he is also the director of the Aquinas Institute.



The Church's Faith

In the Collect for Christmas Day, the Church prays "that we may share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity." A similar prayer is said at every Mass while a small quantity of water is mingled with the wine. The old Preface for Ascension Day (now Preface II of the Ascension) praises God because Jesus "was taken up to heaven... that he might make us sharers in his divinity." Other official prayers say the same thing. The first antiphon for Vespers of 1st January declares lyrically: "O wonderful exchange! Taking an ensouled body... and coming forth as man... the Creator

of the human race has bestowed his divinity on us."

This idea of a "wonderful exchange" was expressed around 180 AD by St Irenaeus: "the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ... become what we are, that he might bring us to be even what he is himself."¹ *God became man so that man could become god!* All the Fathers of the Church agreed. In the 4th Century St Athanasius argued against some people who had objected to the Church's Faith that Jesus is true God; then against others who had objected to her Faith that the Holy Spirit is true God. One of his arguments ran: If (as we all believe) Jesus shares the Divine

Nature with us, he must possess it so as to have authority to share it with us. If (as we all believe) the Holy Spirit shares the Divine Nature with us, he must possess it so as to have authority to share it with us.ⁱⁱ Athanasius could take for granted the Church's belief that a key part of God's saving work is to *divinise* or *deify* us, that is, to share his divine nature with us.

This idea of a “wonderful exchange” ... God became man so that man could become god...

False Ideas about Divinisation

What does it *mean* for us to be divinised? It does not mean anything like the pagan legends in which heroes like Hercules were turned into gods. Those legends went with the idea that there are many gods. The worship of such non-existent “gods” is idolatry. There is only One true God, who alone possesses being, and alone can grant it; everything else depends totally on God for its existence.

The difference between the highest Angel and a speck of dust is as nothing compared with the difference between God and the highest Angel. No creature can justly claim divine honour.

In times past, various kings and emperors claimed to be gods, and commanded people to worship them as divine. We don't believe in that kind of “divinisation.” no one should pretend to occupy God's station.

Sharing God's Glory, Reflecting His Goodness, as a Gift

So, in the Old Testament we find that God will not tolerate people putting other “gods” in his place. That is because false “gods” enslave us, they jostle for space in our lives. Unlike the pagan “gods,” who even competed with each other, the true God does not compete with his creatures. As Creator he generously gives them their being, their powers, their activities. He does not take away our freedom, he enhances it. God is more generous still: as



Friend he does invite angels and human beings to the immense dignity of sharing his divinity! – not as a right, but as a grace-filled gift.

What does Scripture say about this gift? II Peter 1:3-4 speaks of knowing God. He speaks of his precious promises that through his own glory and excellence we may escape decay and *share the divine nature*. So, part of what divinisation involves us sharing God's own goodness and dignity now, and journeying towards an immortal life in which we know him and reflect his glory.

Jesus calls us to be "sons of the Most High" (Luke 6:35), in a passage where he asks us to *imitate* God by our kindness – in fact here, he is also telling us to be *divine*! For in the idiom of his own Jewish languages, "to be a son of X" could mean "to be an X kind of person." Humorously, Jesus refers to James and John as 'sons of Thunder' (Mk 3:17) probably because they have, or imitate, the quality of thunder in their temperament and forthright style. More seriously, in the New Law Jesus gives us, he tells us how to act (as peace makers) so as to be called "sons of God" (Matthew 5:9) – that is to say, he tells us that engaging in peace-making is *how to be divine*.

Jesus calls us to be "sons of the Most High" (Luke 6:35)

Being Adopted in Christ as God's Children

When Jesus calls us to be sons of God, he is not only telling us to be divine, he is inviting us to *share his own relationship with God the Father*. Nothing less than that. He told Nicodemus that we must be born "from Above" (that is, from God)

by water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5). In Baptism, we go into the water with Jesus, and what was said to him – "Thou art my beloved Son" (Mark 1:11) – is said to each of us.

So, we are adopted in Christ; we are entitled to say the Lord's Prayer! As St Paul exclaims (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-7), it is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to call out, "Abba! Father!", and in this way makes it clear that we are children of God the Father and fellow-heirs with Christ.

The privilege of being God's adopted children struck St John, too (I John 3:1). He reserved the title "Son" for Jesus and used the title "child" for those who share Jesus' sonship. *In his Commentary on St John's Gospel*, on John 1:13, St Cyril of Alexandria wrote of how "the Word... who is by nature God... joined to himself all that is human." That made it possible for us to share in God's true Son, and so be "promoted to the rank that was his by nature... through faith we have received new birth by the Spirit... and are begotten of God."

Augustine says, "we have also been made gods: but this is the effect of grace adopting, not of nature generating."

Likewise, St Augustine explained that human beings can be deified by God's grace. Jesus Christ is the only Son eternally born of the Father, hence he can give us "power to become children of God" (John 1:12). "If we have been made sons of God," Augustine says, "we have also been made gods: but this is the effect of grace adopting, not of nature generating."ⁱⁱⁱ Christ generously shares his inheritance with us! – but in Christ's special case, his glory is not reduced by

being shared, it is enlarged.

Becoming Like God by Knowing and Loving Him

Jesus promised to share with us his knowledge of his Father (Matthew 11:27). When that promise is fulfilled, St John tells us, “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). St Thomas Aquinas held that when we know something or someone, we “have them in mind” – it’s as if our mind is shaped by them. When we love someone, we “hold them in our heart” – it’s as if our will is shaped by them. Something like that happens between God and us. Each of Father, Son and Spirit gives himself to us to be known and loved, possessed and enjoyed, now and forever! – for God’s purpose in creating human beings is for us to be in his image and likeness as fully as we can be. By nature, we bear God’s image. By grace we receive some knowledge of God, by Charity we love him in a divine way, and so we become “God-shaped.” When faith is replaced by sight, and Charity rejoices in possessing God, then the image of God that we are will come to its perfection.^{iv}

Our Life is Hid with Christ in God

To sum up: we are called to be channels of God’s kindness, we are privileged to know and love God, we hope to become

immortal and glorious. But there is more to divinisation than that! Writing about the Holy Spirit’s gifts, St Basil the Great ended the list: “abiding in God; likeness to God; and, most desirable of all, **becoming God.**”^v Can we fathom this reality, put it into words? No: St Thomas says we share in the Divine Nature “in the essence” of our souls^{vi} – so to speak, in the *depths* of our being. This life of grace comes to the surface in acts of Faith, Hope and Charity; but we cannot put *it* under the micro-scope. So, St John tells us we *are* God’s children *now*, but we cannot yet see what we shall be (1 John 3:2). St Paul says our “life is hid with Christ in God” while we await Christ’s appearance (Colossians 3:3-4). There is a dimension to the Christian life which is beyond words, beyond our present experience. We are divine – but we don’t really know what that means! Yet...

i Adversus Haereses, Book V, prologue.

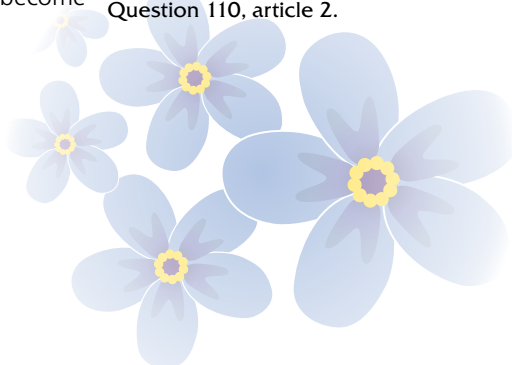
ii For example, Oratio Contra Arianos 1, 3, 9; 2, 21, 69-70; Ad Serapionem 1, 24; De Synodis 51.

iii Enarrationes in Psalmos, On Psalm 49, §2.

iv Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars, Questions 43 and 93.

v De Spiritu Sancto, IX, 23.

vi Summa Theologiae, Prima Secundae, Question 110, article 2.



Nothing You Can Do by **Martyn Ryan**



Martin Ryan was a Redemptorist for fourteen years, ordained in 1983 and left to get married in 1989. Now sixty-two, he has never lost his faith nor ever stopped his Catholic practice. He was born in London and has a first-class honours degree in theology. Now living in Scotland, Martin is an IT professional. He also expresses his faith through poetry published to his own website:
<https://www.poemsforpilgrims.com/>



St John tells us in his first letter that **God is love** (1 John 4:8). How do we react to those words? Perhaps they warm the soul, or maybe they're so direct that they leave us somewhat nonplussed?

It might be stating the obvious, but God is not like us. God is perfect. We humans are not perfect. And unless we are narcissistically deluded, we would surely have to admit that we are by nature fallible and fundamentally self-centred, or to put it another way, we are a complex mix of giving and grasping.

And so, when it comes to considering the love of God – not our love for Him but His love for us - we struggle to comprehend it. We love imperfectly and are loved by others imperfectly, and so our role models and experiences of love are always tainted to one degree or another. There are always strings attached with human love. There are even people who question the very viability of love. Christians however proclaim God's unconditional love, but is it not also true that we struggle to fathom it, let alone feel its force?

We love imperfectly and are loved by others imperfectly, and so our role models and experiences of love are always tainted to one degree or another.

As I write this, I'm conscious that there are no human words that can begin to properly convey God's love. Words are after all signs that try to describe a reality. What words can really capture something as ordinary as a rose flower? And here we're trying to articulate the greatest force and nature in all existence – the love of God and the God of love.

Anyway, God loves a try-er, so here goes.

Have you ever asked yourself the question: "How much does God love me?" Imagine the love God, the Father, has for His own Son Jesus. Surely something beyond all telling. Consider then that God has that very same love for each one of us; that He loves us with the same love and the same strength of love that He has for Jesus? We might feel that that's going a bit too far. We might surmise that He probably loves the great saints a huge deal, but putting them on a par with Jesus, no way! And as for little old me...

We began by saying that God is not like us, and that He is perfect. This is hard for us to comprehend but when love comes from a perfect heart, it cannot admit of degree. When God loves, He loves with all His Almighty heart. He cannot do otherwise. He wouldn't want to even if He could. That's what God does after all – He loves. HE IS LOVE. And He loves with an intensity and a purity that is total. God doesn't do half measures. And neither does God have favourites.



When God loves, He loves with all His Almighty heart. He cannot do otherwise.

If God loves us, then it is with all His heart. He has to love us with the very same love He has for Jesus, eternally celebrated with and through the Holy Spirit. This is, frankly, why God cannot be one single person. God is utterly self-sufficient, complete in Himself. And love cannot exist without the other, the object of its love. And so, God, if He is to be defined as 'love', must be a community, an eternal community of love, which Christians call the Most Holy Trinity. This community of three divine persons is a furnace of perfect love, from all time, for all time. Utterly perfect. Utterly self-sufficient. Utterly love. And this deeply personal love is never diminished by being shared.

This presents us with another awesome truth about His love for us: He did not need us. And if we exist at all, it is because He freely chooses us. That means we are the superabundance of His love – literally the overflowing of His glorious heart. Remember that – He did not need us.

He freely and gladly loved us into being. And incredibly, in choosing creation He foresaw His own suffering.

And so, we are loved by God with a total, perfect love. The self-same love He has for Himself as Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But this is simply words, nice words, possibly inspiring words, but still words. Ultimately, we need to experience this love, to be enfolded in it, and we have to accept that the fullness of this love experience will only come when we see God face to face in His eternal Kingdom. So much of religious life should be the celebrating of His mystery to the point where we can, to some degree, experience His great love. Sadly, it seems that often times our religious practice falls short of this and our liturgies stress our side of the relationship.

Let me try and express the magnificence of God's love for each one of us in another way.

There is nothing you can do to stop God loving

There is nothing you can do to stop God loving you. There is nothing anyone else can do to stop God loving you. There is no power on earth or in heaven that can stop God loving you. Even if, as it were, the angels were to go behind your back and tell God bad things about you, even then, God would not stop loving you. You, sister, brother, are crowned with His love, now and always, and there is nothing you can do about it.

There is nothing you can do to stop God loving you – and even if by some terrible outcome you should end up in hell itself, even then, God would not stop loving you.

When I was growing up and being taught

about my faith, the message I got loud and clear was: be good and God will love you and reward you. No, no, NO! That's baloney. That's worse than baloney – it is contrary to the Good News of Jesus. My being good is not the condition of my receiving God's love. My goodness can only be the response to being loved by Him, and not the other way around. And my response does matter! As much as He loves me, indeed, because He loves me, He will not force His love on me. That's why there is a hell as well as a heaven. We are radically free to accept His love or to reject it. He will not, He cannot, force our response. He loves us too much to ever attempt that.

And as for being good in order to merit eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven – again, this is back to front: He is delighted to give us eternal life. We *today* are heirs of the Kingdom. He has already reserved a place for us in His heavenly home. Eternal life is now! His gift, gratis. So, there's no room for human pride here. It's been said that we can only enter heaven on piggyback, carried across by Jesus Himself. And so, before, and more important than Original Sin, is Original Blessing: God's resounding and irrevocable yes to each one of us from the moment He initiated the human drama.

We are radically free to accept His love or to reject it. He will not, He cannot, force our response. He loves us too much to ever attempt that.

We need to understand and affirm this. When our life began, and regardless of the circumstances of our conception and birth – whether we were greatly wanted and loved by our family, or whether we were an 'accident' or worse – by virtue



between them and God, and how His pro-active love continually touches the core of our being? It may dent our pride and our sense of justice but Jesus Himself made it clear that the eleventh hour is still the *kairos*, the moment of redemption – indeed Jesus emphasised that late comers were most warmly received in the Kingdom of Heaven. And even if someone should hold out against love and dedicate their days to hatred,

of the fact that you and I draw breath, we were chosen by God with a warm YES, and an eternal commitment that He will never revoke. And in that sacred moment He saw all our days and knew our final destiny, and still He said yes, a profound and unconditional yes, and committed His tender fatherly love to us for all eternity. Yes, the aborted, the miscarried, the stillborn, the disabled and abled, the short lived and long lived, all of us are numbered in that society where every hair of our head is counted. His yes means that every human person is imbued with an infinite worth. You and I are truly precious in His eyes. And as for human status, whether it be power, wealth or even religious standing, this makes no difference to His love and the eternal commitment of that love. Indeed, it is the least who get fast tracked, for the last will be first.

Think of the most evil of men, and sadly there are numerous candidates for that title: realise that God has loved them with all His heart and always will love them. And we cannot un-canonise them, as it were, declare they are in hell, because in the mysterious moments of a person's death who knows what transpires

to the point that they effectively choose eternal damnation – even then God will not stop loving them. There is surely a deep mystery here that goes beyond our comprehension.

And so, we can rightly talk about God's unconditional love – a love that loves the other for themselves regardless of how they might act. It is hard for us to comprehend this love, and few humans perhaps ever come near to feeling its force in this life. But let us be in no doubt, this is the nature of His love for us. Nothing we can ever earn or merit. Nothing we can ever constrain or terminate.

Our response to this awesome love, our key task, our whole vocation is to say yes to love, and even more importantly than religious practice, to say yes to love by living in love all our days. And as St John assures us, living in love is indeed saying yes to the God of love (1 John 4:12). And then our death is but a moment in a continuum of eternal moments, when we pass to that blessed state where "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered in the mind of man, what good things God has prepared for those who love Him".

Saying 'Yes' to Life by Dr Pia Matthews



Dr Pia Matthews is the programme director for MA in Bioethics and Medical Law at St Mary's University, Twickenham, London. She also is the managing editor of the journal "New Bioethics". Pia lives with her husband and disabled daughter.



In May 2019 the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life held an important conference with the title 'Yes to life! Caring for the precious gift of life in its frailness'. A dicastery is a department of the Vatican and this Dicastery was established by Pope Francis on 15th August 2016 with members from both the clergy and the lay faithful. It is responsible for the pastoral care of young people and families, and for the support and protection of life. The Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life has a website where you can find out what it is and how the Church is supporting people at difficult times in their lives (<http://www.laityfamilylife.va/content/laityfamilylife/en.html>).

The theme of the 2019 doing conference was the frailty of very young life and the struggles with life and health that many small babies and children have before and after birth. Even for those who have not had actual experience of these difficulties, or who do not know families that have gone through this, most of us might be

familiar with accounts in the media of surgery on babies still in the womb or the stories of the families of Alfie Evans, Charlie Gard and Tafida Raqeeb.

The theme of the 2019 doing conference was the frailty of very young life

In these heart-breaking cases it is often very difficult to make sense of what is happening, and to work out what is the best thing to do. Since we are not involved in the actual situations, more often than not, we simply do not have enough information at hand to come to any firm conclusions. However, there are some things that we can say in principle, and as Church one of our most helpful insights is always to give the option for life: we cherish life.

When we cherish life, we recognise that life and health are gifts, even when that life is at its most fragile. To give an example: when parents are first given

the difficult news that their unborn baby may have a problem or a disability or even may not survive for long, perhaps the question to ask is not what do the parents want to do (and often this suggests that termination is the best answer), but instead to ask 'what are you going to call your baby?'. This shows that there is already a person here, albeit very young, who is also already a patient.



When we cherish life, we also recognise that people should not be left alone with their struggles. It is up to us as church communities, and indeed communities in general, to offer support to families so that they do not feel alone or abandoned or left to their own devices. Indeed, loneliness and a sense of powerlessness seem overwhelming for many parents who face a devastating diagnosis during pregnancy or shortly after the birth of their child or for families who face bereavement. Caring for very young and fragile lives before and after birth and caring for bereaved parents should be the work of all those involved, medical practitioners, extended family, friends and church communities. And of course, priests and healthcare chaplains have a truly significant role here.

The principle that all life should be cherished is often challenged at the very beginning of life, the early life of the unborn child. Technology can be a wonderful thing. Scans let parents into the secret world of their unborn baby. They can catch a glimpse of their baby dancing in the womb or sucking a thumb. They can count their fingers and toes, watch the heart as it beats, see the spine. Scans usefully measure how big and how old the baby is. Parents can even see whether this new life is a boy or a girl. Usually parents come away with a scan photograph. It does not matter that the picture is grainy, black and white. It is the first photograph of hopefully many in this new adventure of a human life. Modern technology really is wonderful and gives us an insight into the miracle of early human life.

When we cherish life, we recognise that life and health are gifts, even when that life is at its most fragile

Nevertheless, technology also has a more problematic side. People are often wary of tests because of the pressures parents may be put under to terminate their pregnancy. Scans and blood tests are routinely offered to pregnant women at different stages of pregnancy and for many parents these technologies are simply part and parcel of pre-natal care. However, technology can also reveal things that would otherwise be hidden until the baby is born. Prenatal scans and testing can pick up on unexpected potential problems such as any unusual build-up of fluid. Now some hospitals offer a SAFE test which involves taking a sample of the mother's blood. This non-invasive prenatal test (NIPT) looks out for different genetic conditions such



as Down's Syndrome. A non-invasive prenatal test is a prognosis, and this means that it suggests the likelihood of an outcome, it does not diagnose a condition. If the result of this simple screening test suggests a high risk of a particular genetic condition, the mother may be offered a diagnostic test. Some tests may be described as highly accurate. Still, the actual situation of the baby may not be at all certain and it may remain that way until the baby is born. Moreover, some conditions are fatal, some serious, and some may require surgery or other treatment; in some cases, for instance in a diagnosis of Down's Syndrome there is no telling how the baby will be affected. This is not to say that scans or tests are bad technologies. There is much to be said for identifying issues with, for instance, the heart or spine so that the hospital team can work out the best way to treat the baby either before or after she is born. A prognosis that there is a chance that the unborn baby has a particular condition allows parents to prepare and to think

ahead so, for instance, the baby can be baptised in good time when she is born, and families can be present to say good-bye.

Cherishing life calls us to hold the option for life but not to cling onto life as if earthly life is all there is

Sometimes the prognosis is that the unborn baby's condition is 'incompatible with life'. This statement can be confusing for parents and they may feel that they are left with no choices. These words send parents into a future they can hardly imagine, and it becomes easy to lose any sense of hope. For some parents these words make them want to get everything over and done with as soon as possible and it may lead to choices made in trauma and haste. 'Incompatible with life' usually means that the baby has a life-limiting condition. The sad reality is that often the baby will not survive for long after birth; she may even be still born.

But some babies do exceed expectations and they require additional levels of specialized support. Some work has been done on providing good hospice care or perinatal care (for babies shortly before or just after birth) for babies with palliative care needs. In the very many situations where children are expected to have short lives, hospices can help children and their families make the most of the time that they do have together. Time gives the opportunity for clarifying the situation, for proper communication and reflective decision-making on appropriate treatment. Time also allows people to try and come to terms with letting go of their much-loved child.

We are not obliged to use medical procedures that are burdensome or dangerous or futile. Sometimes there is confusion over the meaning of futile: life is good and worthwhile and so sustaining life is not futile. However, in situations where the patient will never recover, the benefits of the treatment may be reduced and be outweighed by its burdens. In the UK people cannot demand treatment but a patient with mental capacity for this

particular decision can refuse treatment. In the case of babies and other people without capacity decisions about treatment are made in their best interests by doctors (and if necessary, the courts, as in the cases of Alfie Evans, Charlie Gard and Tafida Raqeeb) in consultation with parents and carers. Certainly, reasonable people may come to different conclusions, and often it seems that not sufficient attention is given to parents who make a reasoned decision. After all parents have the first responsibility for their children.

In summary, one aspect of how we cherish life is the way in which we approach decisions about medical treatment. Cherishing life calls us to hold the option for life but not to cling onto life as if earthly life is all there is. We respect life but we also understand that our life on earth is limited. Every single life is to be cherished. However, not every treatment is to be pursued: this would be to make an idol out of our life here on earth. Nevertheless, in order to decide well, beginning with a yes to life should be the foundation for such decisions from a Christian point of view.



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The Resurrection of Jesus Prompts Mary's Magnificat Anew by Fr Larry Kaufmann CSsR



Fr Larry Kaufmann, a Redemptorist priest based in Rustenburg, South Africa, has a licentiate in systematic theology from the Catholic University of America in Washington DC, and a doctorate in moral theology from the *Alfonsianum* in Rome. Currently director of Redemptorist Pastoral Publications, he is also frequently on circuit preaching missions and retreats.

The Magnificat which Mary exultantly proclaimed during her visit to Elizabeth was deeply rooted in the collective memory she shared with her Jewish people through their inspired books – what we now call the Hebrew Scriptures or “Old Testament”. Mary’s prayer echoed phrases from the song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10):

*My heart exults in the Lord,
my mouth speaks boldly against my enemies,
because I rejoice in Your salvation.
There is no one holy like the Lord,
nor is there any rock like our God.
Boast no more so very proudly ...
for with God all actions are weighed.
The bows of the mighty are shattered,
but those who were hungry cease to hunger.*

Repeating words from Psalm 113 (verses 7-9) which Mary obviously knew by heart, she too proclaimed that God...

*...raises the poor from the dust,
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
he seats them with princes,
with the princes of his people.
God settles the childless woman in
her home
as a happy mother of children.*

Mary’s Magnificat reveals her to be a

true daughter of Sion, a sister in faith to the many biblical women that had gone before her, like Sarah, Ruth and Esther. What they all have in common is their election by God – chosen to be special instruments in the mystery of salvation. But they have something else in common. There is in their respective narratives an element of suffering, of confusion and uncertainty, and of insecurity. Mary’s own question to the angel captures this sentiment: “But how can this be?” The response she received resonated with the experience of her biblical sisters: “The power of the Most High will overshadow you.” It is all God’s work, not ours!

Mary’s Magnificat reveals her to be a true daughter of Sion

Fresh from her encounter with the Angel Gabriel and with a heart still pondering the implications of her “Yes” to God, and, from Matthew’s account, also troubled and humiliated that in the eyes of people she had conceived out of wedlock, Mary makes haste to be with her relative in need, Elizabeth, herself a surprising instrument in the ways of God’s providence, not least because she had passed child-bearing age and had lived for many years with the public humiliation of being called barren.



What these two God-chosen women experienced next, each in their own way, was a creation-like moment. As in the beginning the Spirit of God hovered over an empty formless void, breathing into it the first burst of life, so the same Spirit moved Mary and Elizabeth to burst into expressions of their own maternal and life-giving ecstasies: the child in Elizabeth's womb leaping for joy; the child in Mary's womb prompting her by his divine presence to exclaim her Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55):

*My soul magnifies the Lord!
My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.
He has looked upon his servant in her
nothingness;
henceforth all ages will call me
blessed!*

In the face of nothingness – praise; in the face of public humiliation – warmed by God's gaze of love; in the face of ignorance of the future – trust; in the face of fear – love; in the face of littleness – called blessed for all generations!

Mary's Magnificat bursts forth with praise

for the greatness of God which surpasses every human limitation and resistance. It is ultimately a song of life – of God's life – in the ambiguities and tilted structures of our very fallen world. God who raises the lowly from the dust. God who fills the starving with good things. God who casts the mighty from their thrones, not to destroy them completely, but thereby to give them the grace to learn trust; to learn not to rely on assumed superiority or worldly achievement, but instead to learn to "do whatever He tells you", as Mary instructed the servants at the wedding of Cana (John 2:5).

Mary's Magnificat was not a once-off prayer. It became her permanent disposition. She lived it, daily. Every day she "held God's name holy". (Could it have been that Jesus learned on his mother's knee to say, "hallowed be your name"?) Every day she gave thanks for the mercy of God to her people, "to Abraham and to his descendants forever". Immersed in her constant praise of God, trusting in "the power of his arm", Mary's ever-pondering and trusting heart saw God's plan at work even in the

circumstances of “no room at the inn”; of giving birth in a stable; of shepherds and kings visiting; and of presenting her child to the Temple. It was there that she learned from Simeon that her child’s passion would be her passion too, that in his suffering “a sword would pierce her own soul too” (Luke 2:35).

Mary’s Magnificat... is ultimately a song of life - of God’s life - in the ambiguities and tilted structures of our very fallen world

What must Mary’s own Holy Week have been like? We know she was present at the crucifixion of her son, so it is likely she was in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus’ entry into the city on Palm Sunday or soon after. Did she have a last quiet moment in conversation with her son on the Monday or Tuesday of that week? Could she have been at the Passover meal Jesus shared with his disciples? It’s possible. A Jewish Passover meal always has a mother lighting the candles and pronouncing the prayers of light. Where did she keep vigil later that night when her son was brought to trial before Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate? One can already sense that for Mary, the sword about which Simeon prophesied was beginning to feel sharper and sharper, piercing her to the very core of her love for Yeshua, her beloved son.

And then, finally, Calvary. A small anecdote is all I would want to share here. The shortest sermon I have ever heard was preached by a German missionary in South Africa. His nationality is important in this little narrative because it allows for the German syntax that unwittingly provides the impact. After reading John 19:25-27, he said: “Mary stood at the foot of the cross. Where stand you?”



That was it! Nothing more. But notice this: I can repeat that sermon verbatim nearly forty years later. Nor has its message – its probing question – ever left me. As a matter of personal commitment whenever I pray the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary, I always add to the fifth mystery the words, “and the sorrows of Mary” – or, simply, “and the pietà”, picturing the magnificent sculpture by Michelangelo. Simeon’s sword of prophecy had finally pierced Mary’s heart right through.

Mary’s Magnificat was not a once-off prayer. It became her permanent disposition. She lived it, daily. Every day she “held God’s name holy

As a Jewish mother, Mary would have been required to enter a formal state of mourning. Holy Saturday – the day between death and life – is a day we tend to pass over too quickly. Grief, like hope, needs to bide its time. A pondering heart such as Mary's could do that. She felt her son's death as her own. There are no words to describe any parent's loss of a child. I've heard a mother say, "my heart was ripped out". Silence. Silence is the only response, the very silence of the "formless empty void" (Genesis 1:2) at the beginning of creation. But that's where the Creator Spirit is most at home. And ever so slowly, with the gentleness of moving wings, new life is breathed into death. The resurrection of Jesus is no less an act of God as mighty as that first spark of creation. "Let there be light!" (Genesis 1:3) But now light has new meaning. "That Light was the life of people, a Light that shines in the dark, a Light that darkness could not overpower." (John 1:4-5)

As soon as that new Life and Light burst forth in resurrection, a new Magnificat arose in Mary's heart. Just as Jesus' human life had taken shape in Mary's womb for nine months, so his risen life had taken shape in the dark tomb of death. Just as Mary anticipated his birth with every kick and movement of the divine foetus, so she anticipated his new life through the pain of her grief. And as his Risen Life broke through the walls of Mary's sorrow, so a new Magnificat burst forth from her lips:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked upon the darkness of my grief.
Yes, from this day forward all his disciples,*

*those present with me:
John the Beloved, Mary Magdalene,
Mary of Cleopas,
and even the ones who ran away;
and those still to come in future generations,
will know my joy,
for the Almighty has done a great thing for us all!
The Almighty has restored his crucified Son to Risen Life,
a Life that endures forever,
a Life that gives new life to all things.
This Life reaches from age to age for those who love him.
Holy is his name!
He has routed the arrogance of evil,
he has pulled the prince of darkness from his throne
and exalted the lowly.
Those hungry for goodness and truth
he has filled with the Bread of Heaven: his Beloved Son.
He has come to our help in the desolation of our souls,
remembering his mercy
– according to his promise fulfilled in his Son –
his mercy to every generation*

in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever.



Knowledge of God - what it meant to the Hebrews in the Old Testament by **Brian McDonogh**



Brian is co-editor of The Faith Companion. He supports the Catholic viewpoint by promoting a better understanding of the Jewish roots of our faith and the wider meaning of many Hebrew words in Holy Scripture that can be “lost in translation”. He enjoys learning Biblical Hebrew and singing Messianic songs of worship.



Two well-known Old Testament scriptures speak of the “knowledge of God”.

Looking at Hosea 6:6 we read:

“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings.”

In Isaiah 11:2 we read:

“The Spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit

of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.”

“For I desire steadfast love and devotion, rather than sacrifices and burnt-offerings.”

We know that ‘fear’ of the LORD means to hold Him in awe and reverence. We also know that ‘spirit’ means breath. So what is the breath of knowledge? Does the term ‘knowledge of God’ mean that we should strive to learn as much as we can about God, or does it have some

other or additional deeper meaning?

Looking at the Jewish Publication Society's translation of Isaiah 11:2, we see that "the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD" is written quite differently.

"The spirit of the LORD shall alight upon him: a spirit of wisdom and insight, a spirit of counsel and valour, a spirit of devotion and reverence for the LORD."

In Hosea 6:6, the Lord tells us that he desires our steadfast love. Jesus taught us that the greatest commandment is this: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Anyone achieving that would surely be devoted to the Lord.

Reading Hosea 6:6 with our new understanding would look something like this:

In English, 'devotion' and 'knowledge' have very different meanings. So, how does one arrive at such a different translation? The Hebrew word for

the verb 'to know' is *yadah*, which means knowing from experience, from relationship, knowing information, and to act on that knowledge. When used in terms of knowing people, *yadah* means to care for someone and even to be intimate sexually. One remembers verses such as Genesis 4:1; "Now Adam knew (*yadah*) his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain". Therefore, the Hebrew understanding of the term "knowledge of God" means having a life in relationship with him. It is not just knowing about Him intellectually, but also being intimate with him, being devoted to him, listening to him, and feeling his breath.

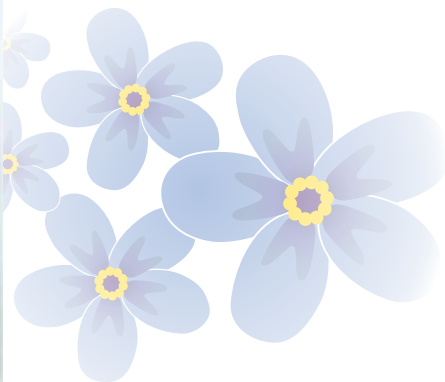
My prayer is that we may all draw closer to the Lord and grow in a loving, intimate, devoted and reverent relationship with him.

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Spiritual Art Journal Pages by Erica Evans



A Wind from the East (Mark 10:46-52)

A Story by Corinna Turner



Corinna Turner is author of many faith-based novels aimed at Catholic teens including the Carnegie nominated "I Am Margaret" series. Her latest novel is 'BREACH!' a pro-life adventure particularly suitable for boys and young men. She is a Lay Dominican who lives in the UK.



There was a wind today. That always made things worse. A wind from the East. They say that is the wind of change. The only change it ever brought me was in the amount of sand that blew down my neck and up my sleeves.

I sat unmoving; moving just made the sand rub more. The heat was sweltering, but I had found shade. Still, it was hard to summon much energy for anything. I forced myself to hold out my begging bowl and rattle it suggestively, but the

action was half-hearted. Despite my hollow belly, the heat was just so bad.

People were running. My head jerked up. I'd been almost drowsing in the warmth. I felt quickly inside my bowl and found the few coins still there.

A lot of people were running, kicking up clouds of dust. I coughed and tried to listen. Was there danger?

"What's happening?" I called.

"It's Jesus of Nazareth," someone said.

Jesus of Nazareth! The great healer, the teacher! My heart beat faster as my chest filled with an agonizing hope. I drew a breath,

"Bartimaeus," a voice said, "What is it that you want of me?"

"Jesus! Son of David!" I shouted, "Take pity on me!"

"Quiet," hissed someone.

"Stop making such a spectacle of yourself, Bartimaeus!" said someone else.

I ignored them. Jesus might not come here again.

"Jesus! Son of David!" I yelled just as loudly as I could. "Take pity on me!"

A sudden silence fell, a murmur of conversation. I waited with bated breath.

"Cheer up," said the friendlier voice that had told me it was Jesus in the first place.

"And get up, he's calling you."

Jesus was calling *me*! For a moment I remained paralyzed with shock, then I stumbled to my feet, throwing my cloak aside to escape its attempts at entanglement. I heard my bowl strike the floor, the ring of the escaping coins, but I ignored it. I blundered forward, arms outstretched, my ears useless in the din. Fingers poked me on my way, until two hands came to rest gently on my shoulders, halting me.

"Bartimaeus," a voice said, "What is it that you want of me?"

"Rabbi," I whispered, my voice shaking, "I wish to see."

"Go," said the voice, a smile in it, "your faith has healed you."

And a face was suddenly before my eyes, and there was indeed a smile on it. My head swum with shock, but my heart sang with joy.

But I did not go. Like a lost duckling I followed him, the first thing I saw, and I follow him still.

ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

*To be used when participating in Mass virtually
when priest receives Holy Communion*

My Jesus, I believe that You are in the Blessed Sacrament.

I love You above all things, and I long for You in my soul.

Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though You have already come, I embrace You and unite myself entirely to You; never permit me to be separated from You.

Brimful (Luke 9:11-17)**A Story by Corinna Turner**

People, people and more people arrived as the day drew on, all making a beeline for Jesus. He welcomed them and welcomed them and welcomed them, unconcerned by the swelling crowd. He spoke to them about the Kingdom of God, breaking off regularly to heal the sick and crippled. All day long the sounds of joyful laughter and tears surrounded him as yet another person threw aside a crutch or tore old bandages from their body.

As the Twelve approached at dusk, a grown man stumbled away from the crush around Jesus, sinking down on a boulder, staring at his outstretched hands and sobbing in delight. The crowd nearby shushed him—Jesus had begun to speak again and they wanted to catch his words.

Determinedly, the disciples forced their way through to their master—someone had to think about practical matters!—and tried to speak firmly. “You must dismiss the people so they can go to the nearby settlements and get food and

lodging—this is such a lonely place we’re in.”

Their hearts sank as Jesus turned to them with a little half smile they knew too well. Now what?

The Lord spoke very deliberately. “Give them a meal yourselves.”

They sighed and exchanged looks. The spokes-disciple spoke up gamely: “We have nothing other than five loaves of bread and a pair of fish. Are you suggesting we should go and *buy* food for everyone here?” He gestured expansively at the teeming throng and his fellow disciples laughed, who wouldn’t? There were now around *five thousand* men present.

Jesus set the basket holding the five loaves of bread and the two fish... and looked up to heaven, holding his hands over the food as he pronounced the blessing

Jesus’s turn to sigh. But the half smile

didn't budge from his face, and his eyes gleamed. He pointed his finger from the disciples, to the crowd. "Get them settled on the ground in parties of around fifty."

Groaning under their breaths and rolling their eyes at each other, the disciples hurried to obey. What was the master up to now? Come midnight, all these people would be tired and hungry and cross and looking for someone's ear to bend. No prizes for guessing whose ears would catch it!

The people followed the disciples' directions, some sitting down promptly, even eagerly, staring towards Jesus in expectation, others reluctantly, measuring the distance of the sun from the horizon and frowning to themselves. But almost all sat, bar the cautious—or least believing—few who gathered their families and began to walk away.

When the huge assembly was calm and organized, Jesus set the basket holding the five loaves of bread and the two fish on the boulder the weeping man had now vacated and looked up to heaven, holding his hands over the food as he pronounced the blessing. Then he took

each loaf and broke it in two and passed it to his disciples to hand out to the people, then did the same with the fish.

*They filled twelve,
right to the brim*

Half an hour into the food distribution, the disciples were growing puzzled. How could it possibly take twelve men this long to distribute a mere five loaves of bread and two measly fish? It felt like they'd been walking from group to group, thrusting bread and fish into eagerly grasping hands, forever—or at least all evening. Contented quiet reigned over each group they'd visited, broken by a little happy talk or laughter as everyone munched.

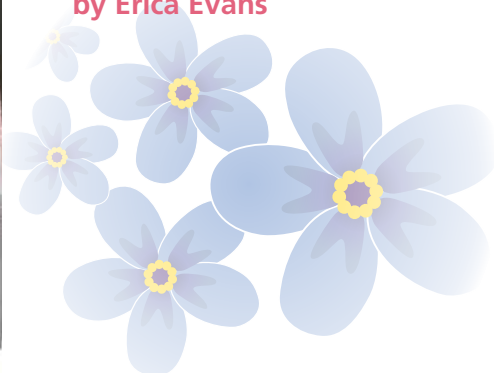
When, finally, each group had been fed and people had stopped raising their arms and beckoning eagerly for seconds—or thirds—the disciples trudged around again, collecting the scraps into baskets, thoroughly bewildered by now.

They filled twelve, right to the brim.

Jesus watched—and smiled.



Spiritual Art Journal Page
by Erica Evans



Rededication and Consecration to Mary

by Kathy Bishop

Kathy Bishop is founder and editor in chief of The Faith Companion. She has a BA(Hons) in RE, an MA in Pastoral Theology specializing in Christian Spirituality and has trained for 2 years as a spiritual director at the London Centre for Spiritual Direction. She works as a registered practice nurse.



The Wilton Diptych

Based on Fr Michael Gaitley's 33 Days to Morning Glory

On the 29th March 2020 the Catholic Church re-dedicated England to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, England being described as the Dowry of Mary. Behold2020.com, the website from the Walsingham National Marian Shrine says that Mary's words at the Annunciation "... Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to Your Word" echoed in the heart of King Richard II

when he was the first to declare in 1381 of England "This is your Dowry, O Holy Virgin, therefore, do thou rule in it." This first dedication given at a time of great turmoil was the inspiration for the new, great act of re-dedication which followed upon a national tour of the Slipper Chapel statue of Mary to each of the Catholic English Cathedrals. On this re-dedication day we accept God's gift of His Mother by both a personal promise and communal entrustment of ourselves and the heart of the country to Mary's protection and guidance, so that we can

build in ourselves and communities, our own Holy House where Christ may dwell - just as Richeldis did at Walsingham (Behold2020.com).

In parallel to this momentous event in the life of the Church, a preparation for individual and group consecration to Jesus through Mary, also known as Marian consecration, was undertaken too. Most commonly this was undertaken as a prayer retreat, which I myself took part in, culminating in individual consecration on the feast of the Annunciation on 25th March 2020. Therefore, for many in the Catholic Church this has been a very significant time.

On this re-dedication day we accept God's gift of His Mother by both a personal promise and communal entrustment of ourselves

Archbishop Bernard Longley, in his homily during the Rededication Mass of England to the Immaculate Heart of Mary held at the Walsingham National Marian Shrine (which was live streamed and can be found on their website Behold2020.com or on their Youtube channel), explained the difference between dedication and consecration. He said one is about giving and the other receiving. In dedication or, in this instance, re-dedication, we are the gift we give to Mary – we give ourselves. In consecration to Mary we freely accept the love of God given via graces received through Mary. This is an unconditional gift that resides in each person or country. Archbishop Longley says that dedication embraces that gift received at consecration and draws it from the heart to allow it to shape our lives and communities as we put this love into action. He points out the words of John 15:13: "Greater love

has no-one than this; than for someone to lay down his life for his friends." This is the ultimate dedication. So, in tandem with our country being Re-dedicated to Mary on 29th March 2020, some people consecrated themselves to Mary on the 25th March 2020 allowing them to receive special protection, guidance and graces through Mary in order to grow closer to her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.



The Dowry Painting by Amanda de Pulford

"... dedication embraces that gift received at consecration and draws it from the heart to allow it to shape our lives and communities..."

The preparation for this individual consecration across England has been in the form of a retreat booklet by Fr Michael Gaitley "33 Days to Morning Glory", a do-it-yourself retreat for Marian consecration. For 33 days prior to the feast of the Annunciation on 25th March 2020 (or indeed any Marian feast, as this consecration can be completed at any time as long as the final consecration day coincides with a Marian feast), Fr Michael's booklet guides you through the retreat. Fr Michael is Director of Evangelization for the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception based in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. He wrote this book in order to help make Marian consecration more accessible to all.

The foundation of this retreat is that you read and learn about four great saintly giants of Marian Consecration day-by-day over 33 days and, in identification with Mary, you ponder their message in your heart. I found, in my own experience, that daily exposure and prayer allows the material to seep into your heart gradually reshaping your picture of Mary. I found that I did end up pondering upon what I read the night before throughout my day. The first week you follow St Louis de Montfort, second week, St Maximilian Kolbe, third week, St Mother Teresa and finally St John Paul II. I won't go into details here about the content as the delight is to uncover it for yourself.

In the introduction, Fr Michael discusses how the first to produce a popular format for Marian Consecration was St Louis de Montfort in his book True Devotion to Mary (1843). In essence, Fr Michael is updating this foundation for modern Catholics, making it more accessible and practical. Here he summarizes Marian consecration, firstly pointing out how Jesus wants to include us in His work of

salvation laboring in His Father's vineyard spreading the Gospel message in a way suitable for each. Fr Michael points out that at the foot of the Cross Jesus says to Mary, looking at the Apostle John, "Woman, behold, your son" and to John, "Behold, your mother" (Jn 19:26-27). In this act, Mary didn't just become John's mother, but our spiritual Mother too. She protects, nourishes and guides us until she births Christ in each and every one of us, spiritually nurturing us in holiness. As the spouse of the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:31-35 and Lk 1:38) Mary has an intimate union with the Third Person of the Trinity who Fr Michael says is pleased to work and act through His spouse, Mary.

"So, it's Mary's great God-given task, in union with and by the power of the Holy Spirit, to form every human being into "another Christ", that is, to unite everyone to the Body of Christ and form each person into a fully mature member of this Body. Therefore, every human being is invited to rest in the womb of Mary and be transformed there, by the power of the Holy Spirit, more perfectly into Christ's own image. Yes, if we want to become more fully Christ, then we need to belong more fully to Mary."

Gaitley, M (2012: Pg 5)

We belong more fully to Mary by simply saying "yes", giving her our full permission as she did to God; consecrating ourselves to her. Therein lies the crux of the whole prayer retreat (Gaitley 2012: Pg 4-5).

I fully recommend this prayerful, pondering retreat and consecration to Mary. In it I learned from these four saints directly. I benefited from St Louis De Montfort's passion and emphasis on the renewal of Baptismal vows and



Crucifixion Triptych by Rogier Van Der Weyden

on consecration, giving everything of ourselves to Mary including our interior and spiritual goods. By doing this we give Mary the right to distribute our prayers and good graces (merits) as she sees fit, making sure these will be used in the best possible way.

St Maximillian Kolbe seeks to help us focus on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, with our consecration making us part of the militia for Mary giving God the greatest glory. St Kolbe also helps us focus on love. We ought to love Mary, Fr Michael says:

"By relying on her powerful intercession, experiencing her tender care, speaking to her from our hearts, letting ourselves be led by her, having recourse to her in all things and trusting her completely."
Gaitley, M (2012: Pg 30)

St John Paul discusses entrustment, which is the act of taking our spiritual Mother into our lives just as the Apostle John did at the foot of the Cross

Mother Teresa teaches us about Christ's thirst for souls, Jesus' real and deep longing for each of us and for the poor. Her two prayers were; one of asking Mary to lend her her heart and to keep her (St Mother Teresa) in her most pure heart (Mary's) which was the basis of Mother's vocation. Mother Teresa gives us a covenant spelling out our duties and Mary's towards us, showing in detail what is expected of us in consecrating ourselves to Mary.

Finally, St John Paul II points out how Mary's maternal mediation as our spiritual Mother lovingly nurtures our growth in holiness which should be the backdrop to Marian consecration. St John Paul

discusses entrustment, which is the act of taking our spiritual Mother into our lives just as the Apostle John did at the foot of the Cross when he took Mary into His home after Jesus entrusted her to him. This is our model and what we should do in consecration as Jesus entrusts Mary to us. Finally, St John Paul tells us that Consecration to the Heart of Mary leads us to acts of trust in the Merciful Heart of Jesus; His Heart pierced for us.

To sum up, Fr Michael Gaitley MIC says Marian consecration is all about:

"A new way of life in Christ. The act of consecrating oneself to Jesus through Mary marks the beginning of a gloriously new day, a new dawn, a brand-new morning in one's spiritual journey. It's a fresh start, and it changes everything." Gaitley, M (2012: Pg 3).

It is said, once consecration takes place you will be flooded with special graces from Mary and life will never be the same again. I have experienced this remarkable gift myself and commend our readers to undertake this prayerful, pondering retreat too. 33 Days to Morning Glory is available from Amazon.

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3 minute reading and meditation by Teresa O'Driscoll

'God is both refuge and strength for us, a help always ready in time of trouble; so we shall not be afraid though the earth be in turmoil.' Psalm 46:1-2

1. Read Psalm 46:1-3
2. Sit up straight and close your eyes. Breathe in deeply through the nose. Hold a few seconds. Breathe out through the mouth and as you do so feel the whole of your body relax.
3. Now meditate for a few moments on the truth of the Holy Spirit dwelling within you. Feel deeply strengthened by the knowledge that no matter what you are called upon to endure His love is constantly surrounding you.
4. Now say this prayer - or one of your own - 'Dear Lord Jesus, I believe that You are with me always. Please will You remind me of this fact

whenever I feel scared or bewildered as I see this global crisis unfolding. I ask this through the same Christ our Lord. Amen'

5. When you are ready breathe in and out deeply as before. Then open your eyes and have a big stretch.

Praying the above helps you to feel the empowerment brought about by the awareness of Christ's company.

Teresa O'Driscoll is the author of 9 Days to Heaven

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How Much Do You Trust Him? by Teresa O'Driscoll



Teresa O'Driscoll is a writer, presenter of spiritual-development and Christian writers' workshops, and the author of the inspirational *9 Days to Heaven, How to make everlasting meaning of your life*. Email: teresa@teresaodriscoll.co.uk



Let Biblical Inspiration Fire Your Imagination!

A 3 minute reading and meditation with Teresa O'Driscoll.

You will need a bible, a chair, and few minutes alone.

*'But I trust in Thee, O Lord, I say,
"Thou art my God." My times are in
Thy hand...' Psalm 31:14*

How Much Do You Trust Him?

Perhaps you will agree that when things are going well in your life it is easier, much easier, to say that you trust God. Maybe your faith could be described as vibrant. You may even have got to the point in your spiritual development where a crisis in your life can be viewed – sooner rather than later – as the test it is. But, when you are ill or in pain, or feeling overwhelmed by life, it is human to have a bit of wobble. Even saints have admitted as much. If you are going through a dark valley at the moment, I hope that the meditation below will help you circle back to 'Jesus, I trust in You!'

1. Read Psalm 31:9-16
2. Sit up straight and close your eyes. Breathe in deeply through the nose. Hold a few seconds. Breathe out through the mouth and as you do so feel the whole of your body relax.
3. Now meditate for a few moments on the mysterious nature of God. Then focus on the fact that though, in this life, we will NEVER have all the answers to the most difficult questions, God asks us to trust Him. And though that is especially difficult when we are suffering, in some way, that is precisely when our trust is most necessary. Otherwise, how can we prove our trust?
4. Now say this prayer – or one of your own – 'Dear Lord Jesus, without You I am nothing. So, I beg you to be patient with me if I become impatient with a painful situation in my life. Please remind me of my promise – made in a happier time - to turn everything over to You; to trust all outcomes to Your loving hands. I ask this through the same Christ our Lord. Amen'
5. When you are ready breath in and out deeply as before. Then open your eyes and have a big stretch.

Prayerfully hoping the above meditation helps you through your toughest tests of trusting God.

God bless

Teresa

For more on the above topic please see Teresa's blog: <http://teresaodriscoll.blogspot.co.uk/>

Praying the Rosary at the Grotto in Lourdes

by **Kathy Bishop**



As this is the month of May, we could not forget about praying the Rosary as we place special emphasis on devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, during this whole month. In one of our earlier editions we explained how to pray the Rosary, how this prayer is special and how, because of Mary's closeness to Jesus and indeed the Trinity, she can intercede for us. However, how much more potent would be this prayer if said at special times and in special places?

This is vital for all those who can't afford to go to Lourdes or who are too unwell to travel

One of our readers told us she prays the Rosary virtually at the Grotto in Lourdes. I was fascinated by this concept wanting to experience this myself as I have never

managed to get the Lourdes. Many would be in the same position. So, she sent me the link to the live webcam, and I was away! This is a wonderful way of being included in the graces that flow from Lourdes and the intercession and motherly love of Mary. This can be of immense value in praying the Rosary during this month of Marian devotion.

Here is the on-line link:

https://www.directfromlourdes.com/lourdes_live_tv



Penance in the Resurrection by Fr Kevin O'Donnell



Fr Kevin O'Donnell has a background in education and chaplaincy when he was Anglican. A Catholic priest since 2011 he is now a priest in the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton and is currently completing a PhD on attitudes to spirituality in society and postmodern thought.



Following on from the question in the last edition of *The Faith Companion* with regard to abstaining from meat on a Friday, I would like to dig a little deeper into the Bishops of England & Wales' reintroduction of this Friday penance. I want to ask some honest questions that I hope will be helpful in exploring this topic not only from the point of view of canon law, but also in its psychological and spiritual dimensions. Many people find the practice of abstaining from meat helpful as a personal devotion and discipline, but for others there are problems that deserve addressing.

The reintroduction itself has been disturbing in two ways for some of the faithful. For some it seems like a harking back to pre-Vatican II days that is a little scary; the interpretation of 'pre-Vatican II' here is of an externalised, rigid and legalised approach. For others, it is a cause of spiritual, moral and psychological angst. The case of someone feeling that they had to go to confession before receiving Communion because they had (out of politeness to a host, not indifference or defiance) eaten meat on Friday, as reported in the last issue of *The Faith Companion*, is a classic example. I hear many similar ones from penitents.

The technical, canonical answer given in the previous issue was exact and caring. It was indeed correct to state that in no way is it ever claimed that not following the Friday penance is a mortal or serious sin. It should also be said that the Bishops' statement itself explains that no one must have a troubled conscience if they are given meat in a meal by their host. Be charitable and eat it. That's OK.

As stated, I would like in this article to address the spiritual and psychological issues around this topic. Before taking this any further, let me add that we are in the presence of, in the Body of, the Risen Christ. This, I would argue, has a bearing on our understanding of all spirituality, including any form of penance.

There are two particularly relevant questions we might ask.

(a.) *Is it really relevant to abstain from meat in this day and age?*

(b.) *What is the purpose of penance?*

To take the first point; time was when meat was a special meal unless you were rich. People did not eat meat every day but maybe a few times a week on average, apart from special feasts. Some of those ordinary meals were made using left over scraps in broth or stews. To abstain from meat meant to go without something special that meant something.

"... time was when meat was a special meal unless you were rich. People did not eat meat every day..."

Eating meat today is nothing special unless it is the best fillet steak, a fine joint of lamb or prime beef, especially at a posh restaurant or a special celebration. In fact,

not eating meat is becoming more the norm with vegetarians, vegans and the more common flexitarians. So why this old form of penance? Is it antiquated?

In a sense, yes, but it can be argued, of course, that it remains true that abstaining from meat on a Friday still makes most of us pause to consider what we are going to have for supper, rather than just pulling the first thing that comes to hand out of the freezer. That act in itself can be seen to remind that God's will always come before our preferences and we can offer our extra little bit of thought and care to Him. Should we be going out to eat in a restaurant, it can be a penance for some to concentrate only on the fish or vegetarian sections of the menu. In a sense, actions have the meaning we want to give them. True, but is this little 'Stop and Think' the best or only way to achieve this? For years the abstinence was removed. It is not therefore essential but one example that can be followed. Vegetarians and vegans are not exempt for some 'Stop and Think' time to give thanks, though, but they can find their own form of penance. Not eating meat is not essential as an act of Friday penance. It is about a 'Stop and Think', a gratitude for Christ's death and redemption. Different parts of the world have different practices about meat on Fridays. It is not universal and I would see the practice as a strong encouragement that the Bishops gave for all the above reasons.

One thing that emerged from the Bishops' statement is that the reintroduction was a good way to mark our identity as Catholic Christians. Is that the way we wish to be recognised, we might ask? Could it not give the impression that our faith is about little laws and rituals, a form of Old Testament Judaism? Is making sure that we have cheese, Linda McCartney



burgers or fish and chips on a Friday really the best way to witness to our faith in a largely secular or multi-cultural world?

“... it remains true that abstaining from meat on a Friday still makes most of us pause to consider...”

It is worth considering that however secular and rule-averse our world may be, it understands the concept of giving something up for a greater gain, be that a fitter, stronger body, animal welfare or the environment. Discipline hasn't gone completely out of fashion, as may be witnessed in any gym. It all depends on what we do and why, how we present our case and that is where good catechesis and formation are so vital for Catholics. If we see Friday abstinence as the imposition of a law in order to please an exacting God, we will chafe against it and have no hope of presenting it favourably to the wider world. If we see it as a spiritual discipline helping us to develop our spiritual muscles and wean ourselves off what is good for the sake

of something that is far better, those who do abstain from meat have a fair chance of offering the world an understandable witness.

But does it need to be meat? I would argue that in today's world, it is without attentive, witnessing force. It is not a disciplined effort like going to the gym to the *outsider* as so many choose not to eat meat all of the time or some of the time. However, it works for the individual believer, it does not 'speak'.

Another aspect of the question is that of obedience to the teaching magisterium of the Church. This obedience, this offering of faith and trust in God through His Church, is itself a form of penance. It is a liberating one, for – as we will discuss in a minute – the way to resurrection freedom is through the Cross. Is it trusting that these rules are not arbitrary, invented by men to control us or to please a capricious God, but that they point the way to spiritual health and peace? Yes, it is, but some customs are culturally conditioned, relevant to their time and other teachings are eternal, essential and foundational.

There lie debates sometimes. Accepting everything like little sparrows with open mouths does not produce adult believers but unthinking devotion. Growth includes being able to distinguish what is essential from what is secondary, time conditioned even, no matter how useful. There is 'Tradition' and there are 'traditions': but they are different, even if they overlap.

The second point: penance is about saying sorry, facing up to, letting go, making up for. Penitential acts can take many forms to cover all these reasons. Why a Friday penance? This is surely to mark the fact that Our Lord died on that day. It is to show sorrow that this happened, and it should also mean gratitude. Any act of penitence must allow for both repentance and renewal. That is reconciliation; the

Cross was all about reconciliation and thus the resurrection followed. Giving up something, a little time, an activity, should have a meaningful reason otherwise it is neutral or negative or even a form of masochism.

A Friday penance should always involve time to give thanks for what Jesus did for us and to reflect on the condition of our souls. To allow that time itself means giving something up somewhere, but always for positive purpose. If some should see a little sacrifice of meat as a pause to consider what we are going to eat tonight, in this light then it is positive. It is about a 'Stop and Think'. If meat abstaining, then how about using that time of Friday meal planning to meditate on why you are doing this and, if at all



possible, extend it into a little extra time of prayer?

There are many ways of stopping to meditate upon the redemption through the Cross, though. Say the sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary, walk the Way of the Cross, pray quietly in front of a crucifix, the Holy Face or a suitable image. Of course, giving up meat doesn't need to be the only penance you perform on a Friday! Even taking the earphones out on the tube or bus or putting your phone down for a few minutes to pray is penance. So is having a quick snack and sitting on a bench to pray rather than enjoying a canteen lunch.

Fasting can take many forms and giving up something to allow for something better to arise is not only about going without some food. We can fast from screen time, for example, switch off the TV after 9.00pm or avoid certain types of TV programmes or films. The reason we take some form of action as well as pray follows on from our gratitude for God's mercy and our personal stock-taking and sorrow for sins. Any extra penitential effort we make can be very personal and creative. One person, for example, tries to provide a sandwich, biscuits, fruit, some small piece of food for a homeless person begging on the street each Friday if they can. A little thing, but a compassionate action. They feel no sense of guilt and condemnation if they cannot manage this for some reason, though. They can do another 'Stop and Think'. It was a personal discipline and not imposed.

It is a trusting that these rules are not arbitrary, invented by men to control us... but that they point the way to spiritual health...

This is 'penance in the resurrection' where there is life and renewal in any form of repentance, sorrow or stocktaking. The resurrection allows all these penitential acts to go further into gratitude and compassion. If we can give a little time, a stillness and a personal prayer that carries a lightness and a smile, a 'smile' that can reach out in some small way, then that is another way to mark our identities as Catholic Christians. Are we happy in what we are doing, or do we seem burdened?

I express all this from the heart in order to assist parishioners who are overly disturbed by eating meat on the wrong day. I express it because I believe we all have the right to question, to struggle and to speak – to 'ask honest questions to power', wanting a voice, and having the right to a caring, careful reply rather than silence.

As I write this, the announcement has just been made that all public masses will be cancelled for the foreseeable future during the coronavirus pandemic. In such a situation practices such as not eating meat on a Friday may well have an extra value by helping some to hunker down and keep the roots of their faith refreshed through patience, integrity and hanging on to certain devotions. May it be so. Remember, though, any Friday abstinence is an act of devotion and love, not a law that we follow out of fear and subservience.



Maximilian Kolbe by Roderick Campbell Guion OCDS



Dr Roderick Campbell Guion is a Secular Carmelite who teaches Ecclesiastical History with the Carmelite Institute of Britain and Ireland.



Once again, we find ourselves in the month of May, the month which in the Catholic tradition we dedicate to the Blessed Virgin Mary and which even in the depths of troubled times is still a season that promises the hope of growth and new beginnings. For myself, being an ecclesiastical historian working in the field of Carmelite studies, one is never far from the thought of Teresa of Avila whose Order has over the centuries provided us with some of the most important teachings in the Christian mystical tradition. However, we need to remember that her Order's corporate identity was always the Order of the Discalced Carmelites of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel. Of course, devotion to Our Lady is not reserved to Carmelites and this brings me to the subject of the present short article: St. Maximilian Kolbe.

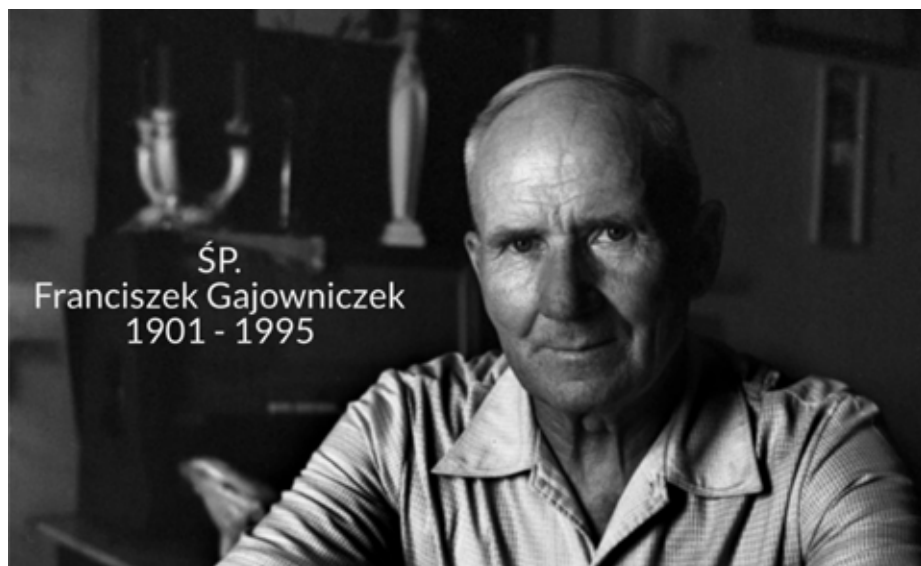
Over the period of Lent many of us might have found ourselves reflecting on John 15:12 where Jesus, immediately before his arrest, gives us a commandment to love one another as he has loved us. The test of this, as the KJV makes clear in language that transcends both time and confessional difference, is that: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'. Of course, throughout the oft-troubled history of humanity many have been called to make this same sacrifice, but one particularly poignant example that stands out for me in our recent history is the story of St Maximilian Kolbe. It is a story that is still able to evoke a strong emotional reaction within me even though years have passed since I first heard it.

'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'

Maximilian was a Polish Franciscan who, having been arrested in February 1941, was sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp. A few months later he found himself in a situation where he felt that he had no choice but to take Our Lord's instruction literally. At a roll call a prisoner was shown to be missing and as a reprisal the camp commandant ordered ten men to be randomly selected for death by starvation, to deter the other prisoners from further thought of escape. When Franciszek Gajowniczek was selected as one of those who were to die, he let out an agonised cry, stating that he was a man with a young dependent family. The German officer making the selection remained unmoved and it was at this point that Maximilian stepped forward and said: 'I am a Catholic priest and I wish to die for that man, because I am old, and he has a wife and children'. The officer

accepted the exchange and it is surely impossible for us to imagine the pain suffered by the prisoners chosen for this vicious reprisal. Throughout their agony Maximilian continued to provide support and to lead the group in prayer until only himself and three others remained. The Germans, meanwhile, were waiting to use the building for further victims, so on August 14th 1941 Maximilian was finally put to death with a lethal injection of carbolic acid. The final bitter irony of this whole tragic story is almost beyond belief: It turned out that the prisoner the Germans believed to have escaped was later found to have been drowned in one of the camp latrines.

So, what does this have to do with the month of Mary? To understand this, we need to go back over the whole of Maximilian's life story. Born in 1894 as Rajmund Kolbe in an area that was at that time part of the Russian Empire, he was the second son in a family of five brothers, two of whom died young. His mother was Polish and his father was a German who had become involved in the fight for



Śp.
Franciszek Gajowniczek
1901 - 1995

Polish independence, subsequently being captured and hanged by the Russians. Rajmund made the decision to join the Conventual Franciscans. In 1910 he managed to escape over the border from the Russian controlled zone and enter the Franciscan novitiate, before moving via Kraków to Rome. He made final Franciscan vows in 1914 and was ordained priest in 1918, taking the name Maximilian Maria as a particular mark of his veneration of Our Lady; it is this detail that brings him to our attention in the month of May. In fact, Maximilian had a strong personal reason for this veneration. At the age of twelve he had

experienced a vision of the Virgin Mary, in which he was asked to make the choice that would map out the direction of the rest of his life. It is perhaps best to let Maximilian relate this momentous event using his own words. He would later say:

'That night, I asked the Mother of God what was to become of me, a Child of Faith. Then she came to me holding two crowns, one white, the other red. She asked me if I was willing to accept either of these crowns. The white one meant that I would persevere in purity and the red that I should become a martyr. I said that I would accept them both.'



St Kolbe with his white and red crowns given by Mary

I am a Catholic priest and I wish to die for that man, because I am old, and he has a wife and children'

Having made this momentous decision, we should not be surprised that this would now become his destiny. After his ordination Maximilian took forward his personal consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary by founding the Militia of the Immaculata, an institution dedicated to drawing souls to understand the importance of the Immaculate Conception and, in particular, how every soul could be drawn into this mystery by making a

personal Act of Consecration. Returning to Poland he established Niepokalanów, a Franciscan centre, which was itself also dedicated to the Virgin and whose mission was broadcast through *Militia Immaculatae*, a magazine which at its peak enjoyed a monthly circulation of over 45,000 copies. In 1930 Maximilian undertook the first of a series of missions to the Far East, founding a friary at Nagasaki in Japan, along with a seminary, where he would also set up another newspaper.

By 1936 his original community at Niepokalanów had grown to the point where it was housing more than 760 friars and so Maximilian was called back to Poland to become its Superior. Of course, by this time war clouds were gathering over Europe. With the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939 Maximilian immediately realised that the community was at risk, so he sent most of the friars away. Undaunted, he himself carried on, opening up Niepokalanów for several thousand refugees amongst whom there were a considerable number of Jews. Although he must have understood the risks that he was taking he still continued to criticise the Nazi administration through his publications, which by now had grown to include a radio station. It was almost inevitable that this should culminate in his arrest in the February of 1941. He was briefly imprisoned at Pawiak before being transferred to Auschwitz, where the white crown that he had first accepted from Our Lady was now to be accompanied by exchanged the red.

‘That night, I asked the Mother of God what was to become of me a Child of Faith. Then she came to me holding two crowns...’

The positive outcome of this story was that Franciszek Gajowniczek survived Auschwitz and did not die until more than half a century later. From that fateful day he spent his life honouring the man who had chosen to take his place in the infamous Block 13, saying that it was his duty to tell people about what he described as ‘an heroic act of love’. But how are we to interpret this act of love in the present day?

If Maximilian could speak to us today, my guess is that he would want us to come to understand that for the Christian there must be an underlying unity between the two crowns that he was offered in his vision. To be sure, his relentless dedication to a life of mission was an enactment of what Mary asked of him with the white crown, but what was in his mind when he made the decision to step forward and lay down his life for a stranger? We cannot know for certain, but interpretations of his action might range anywhere from seeing this as the fulfilment of the choice he made in his boyhood vision, through to seeing this sacrifice as being a brave yet tragically insignificant death amongst millions of others. Except for one final detail. For some reason it was not until 15th August, the day after he died, that Maximilian's body was finally sent to the camp crematorium for disposal. But 15th August is also the day on which we celebrate the bodily assumption of Our Lady into Heaven. With this I mind, I think that we can be confident that whatever the inner meaning of the mission that Mary had entrusted to Maximilian - it was now complete.

Joanna's Story by Joanna Goyaram

Joanna lives in Crawley and is married with two children. She has recently been admitted as an enquirer into her local Lay Dominican Fraternal Group, discerning the path to becoming a fully-fledged Lay Dominican with the Dominican Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Crawley, West Sussex, UK.

I belong to a Mauritian community in West Sussex and am married with two children, a son and a daughter. I have a mixed background in that my mother was Catholic and my father was Hindu. We were brought up in both cultures and religions. I was baptised as a Catholic but did attend some of the big Hindu festivals as a child. My father left when I was 6 years old and from that day on my upbringing became solely Catholic. My parents had 11 children, but three passed away so there are eight surviving siblings. Only myself and my brother practise purely Catholicism – the rest practise both religions and heritages. I came to this country in 2005; my husband is Hindu, but I bring my children up as Catholic as that is very much how I identify.

In 2015 my time of illness started. I had a cold that lasted three months. I kept going to the GP, but nothing happened. One day I became very unwell and was forced to go to a Medical Centre in the evening as I was coughing so much. They advised me to go back to my GP, saying I was very unwell. I had to sit up all that night; I coughed all the time, I couldn't breathe and my tongue became purple. The next morning my husband took me to our GP who told me to go straight to hospital. I was surprised at all the attention I received in hospital, with nurses and doctors doing tests. They told me I had pneumonia, which I was treated for.



So, the next morning my husband took me to our GP who told me to go straight to the hospital

After treatment I got better. After some time had passed I was sent for a chest CT scan. After coming back from work one day I was surprised to get a call from the hospital asking me to come the next day at 9am for an appointment with a doctor. I was apprehensive. However, I contacted the hospital saying I had promised to go into work, and I take my promises seriously. I finished at 2pm then caught the bus to the hospital. I was able to meet my husband at the hospital as he works there. I made care arrangements for my children.

We were expecting to see the doctor at 2.30pm so I waited with my husband. My husband's shift finished at 3pm; it was hospital policy that at the end of a shift he had to change out of his uniform, so he left to do so. Just as he left, the doctor called me in and shocked me by saying he could see I was a cancer patient. I replied, 'No, I am not a cancer patient!' He said, 'Yes, it is on your file and you ARE a cancer patient.' I told him nobody had told me that before! He then showed me all the scans and x-rays and showed me the white areas which he said were signs of lung cancer. There were blood tests with cancer markers, too, to prove what the scans showed. After this I was in so much shock that I didn't take anything else in. When I left the room I met my husband who asked what had happened, but I couldn't tell him at the time. I told him when we were at our front door. He was very shocked. I asked him not to tell anyone, not the children or my brother.

I had another appointment later on when

they told me that if I got a fever I must call a doctor. I was also told that they would do another CT scan and would send my appointment in the post. Three months went by and I didn't receive this letter. For some reason I left it and didn't chase it up. However, one day I contracted a fever and couldn't sleep all night. I was feeling very unwell, but I didn't want to disturb my husband. I was crying all night because I couldn't sleep. I was in a bad way and was angry with God, so I threatened to stop praying. I kept asking Him what I'd done wrong - I always work hard and I am a good person. I kept saying 'Why me?' In the morning my husband said, 'You are not well!' and reminded me that the doctor had said if I ever got a fever, I should seek medical attention. He told me I should go to the hospital. I didn't want to go but did agree to visit my GP.

In order to get to the GP, we had to drive past the road where the Dominican Missionary Sister's Convent in Crawley is situated. Just as we were passing the turning that goes to the Convent, I heard a voice say, 'Turn here.' I had never been to the Convent before and didn't even know it was there... and yet I heard this voice directing myself and my husband to the Convent.

My husband became confused. He said, 'We don't need to, why must we turn here? Where do you want me to go?' I was sitting in the back of the car saying, 'I don't know where we are going!' I only knew I had to go where the voice told me to. My husband knew I was unwell and really needed to see the GP but he didn't want to upset me in my current state, so he turned towards the Convent instead of going straight on to the doctor's surgery. As we drove further up the road, I heard another voice which told us to turn into this big house. I told my husband to



turn in, but he said, 'No we can't go in there, it is probably someone's house!' He continued, 'Why must we go here, I don't want any problems with people we don't know. We don't know who lives here!' I said to him, 'I don't know, but I am telling you we must go there because I am ill.' He agreed to drop me off but would not come out of the car.

I was crying all night because I couldn't sleep. I was in a bad way and was angry with God, so I threatened to stop praying

I approached the building not knowing what to do. All I knew was that I had been called to come here, by a voice directing me to what could have been a private house. I decided to peek into the glass front door and then I pressed the doorbell. A lovely lady came to the door (who I now know was a Sister, but she was not wearing her religious veil). She opened the door and asked if I was

coming to the Chapel. I said yes, although I had no idea there was a Chapel there. She opened the door and graciously welcomed me in.

At that time there was no planned time of prayer when members of the public could join in, so I was alone in the Chapel - or so I thought. However, the Sister who opened the door was also sitting there; she at the front and I at the back. I was crying and eventually Sister came over to me and asked kindly what the matter was. I told her. She told me that from that day the Sisters would start praying for me. I realised then that I had been guided to a Religious Community of Dominican Sisters.

Since my husband and I learned of my lung cancer diagnosis he had developed high blood pressure and one day he collapsed at work. As he works at the hospital, he was seen by a doctor he knew. This doctor asked him what had been happening to cause so much stress. He told him, but also said he was

especially stressed because the CT scan appointment hadn't come after waiting and waiting. The kind doctor immediately said, 'Tell your wife to come on Thursday and I will order the CT scan myself and check it personally.' When I went to this appointment the doctor had arranged for a nurse to greet me and take me to the CT scan. I was very scared as I feel claustrophobic in the scanner. They did the scan and we waited until the doctor had finished seeing his patients. I waited an hour for him whilst he reviewed the scan. He told us IT WAS ALL CLEAR!

A lung CT would not normally show the heart as well as the lungs, but just by chance a corner of the CT scan had captured part of my heart. The doctor said there was no cancer, but that he had seen an anomaly in my heart. He referred me straight away to a friend who was a cardiologist. At a later stage I had to have heart surgery to fix two holes in my heart, following which I had a stroke.

I am no longer scared of illness because all of this has deepened my faith and trust in the Lord

I had another appointment later with a different doctor about the lung cancer and he too saw that the lung cancer had gone! He said this was amazing and asked, 'What did you do?!' I said, proudly and with faith, 'I PRAYED!' I firmly believe

that the prayers of the Dominican Sisters, in conjunction with my prayers and those of my friends and family, led to this miracle this miracle. The doctor told me that they would keep a close eye on me for two years, but before I left he called in the head of the department to show him the scans and the miracle that had occurred. They had never seen anything like it before – the cancer had been there and now it was gone with no medical explanation!

I got talking to the nurse who waited with me for the CT scan and when she looked at my file, she said 'Oh my goodness, so much illness!' My file contained a long list of illnesses I had experienced on top of this episode of lung cancer. The nurse told me I had a 'miracle body'. Because I have experienced so much, I am no longer scared of illness because all of this has deepened my faith and trust in the Lord.

During that frightening time just before I heard the voice directing me to the Convent, when I was very ill with a fever and crying all night, in my desperation I was searching on my mobile for prayers. I had been shouting at God asking 'Why me?' and threatening to stop praying. I was searching for French prayers as I pray in French, but suddenly out of nowhere this English song came up on my phone:

You are my Hiding Place

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIVC6rfX3Z8>

I listened to this song all night and from that moment on my faith came back and grew stronger. However, even though I found this song which boosted my faith when I was at my lowest and heard the voice calling me to go to the Convent when I didn't know it was there, I still wasn't sure. I still felt so weak; I just didn't have much strength, although the song



'You are my hiding place' did make me feel lighter inside. From that time until now, whenever I wake up, I wake up with a song in my mind. I wake up singing songs I have never heard of before, even though I don't usually sing in English. Another song I found very helpful was I surrender by Hillsong. The link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgsqfjRslZA>

I think sometimes when people pray they are just asking God for things. However I had started praying (in Creole) because He was doing so much for me that I wanted to know Him more - and then He gave me all these songs, not in Creole, but in English!

When I was very unwell God gave me many communications, as I couldn't sleep so stayed up praying. Now when I wake up, I often wake up with some message or grace-filled communication. It is in this way that the prayer called 'The Miracle Prayer' was given to me.

The Miracle prayer

'Lord Jesus, I come before you, just as I am, I am sorry for my sins, I repent of my sins, please forgive me. In your Name I forgive all others for what they have done against me. I renounce Satan, the evil spirits and all their works.

'I give you my entire self, Lord Jesus, now and forever. I invite you into my life, Jesus. I accept you as my Lord, God and Saviour. Heal me, change me, strengthen me in body, soul and spirit.

'Come, Lord Jesus, cover me with your Precious Blood, fill me with your Holy Spirit. I love you Lord Jesus. I praise you Lord Jesus. I thank you

Lord Jesus. I shall follow you every day of my life.

'Amen.

'Mary, my Mother, Queen of Peace, St Peregrine, the cancer saint, all the Angels and Saints, please help me, Amen.'

Fr Peter Rookey, who wrote this prayer, believed that if you say it faithfully, no matter how you feel, when you get to the point where you sincerely mean each word with all your heart, Jesus will change your whole life in a very special way - and I believe that too.

All that I have been through has strengthened my faith and brought me closer to Jesus. Many, many blessings have come from my many sufferings. Our Lord wants me to share what has happened to me with as many people as possible; I talk to people everywhere I go and, when I can, I share my story. Much, much more has happened along the way. I hope that my story has helped strengthen your faith too. I have many more stories to share ...

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Accessed on 23/3/2020



Coming Home by a parishioner of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton



One afternoon in 2002 I knelt before my bed, said sorry to God and asked Jesus to come into my life. This was the culmination of a lot of soul searching. Thankfully I had friends, Christians, who had helped me to get to this point and finally on that particular afternoon I felt convicted and knew I had to make this change. My family struggled to understand, particularly my father who had fallen out with the Church many years before.

The next step was deciding where I would go to worship; I was baptised Church of England but no one particular church community was calling. The friends who had supported me were Catholics and I had received many invitations to just come along. So, one Sunday I thought, why not? I received a fabulous welcome; one of my friends spotted me and introduced me to an older lady who guided me through the Mass (this would be the start of a very dear friendship).

In 2002 one afternoon I knelt before my bed said sorry to God and asked Jesus to come into my life

Fast forward through two Alpha courses and I found myself enrolling onto the Parish RCIA course to become a full member of the Catholic Church. The course lasted 18 months and was a wonderful time. If I remember correctly there were seven of us in the group; even now if we meet there is a common bond between us, such was the experience we all had. The team were fantastic, leading us gently and lovingly through all the mysteries, teachings and sacraments of the Catholic Church. At no time was there any pressure. It would be our decision if and when to join in full communion with the Church and to fully accept all her teachings and sacraments. New Year 2004 came along and we all began to look forward to Easter when we were to be received.

In the background of this story, however, there was a sadness. For two years my father had been receiving treatment for prostate cancer and in the New Year things took a turn for the worse. In February my brother and I were told that he had about 12 weeks to live. Dad was a pragmatic man and we took steps to help in physical ways: bed downstairs, cooking for him and so on. I also did my best to explain my faith and to suggest that he might re-



examine his (not easy). One evening he confided in me that what scared him the most was the process of death. In the war and as an ambulance driver he had seen too many people struggling in their last moments. My prayer from then on was that God would grant him a peaceful death and that he would have that last chance to meet with Jesus.

My prayer from then on was that God would grant him a peaceful death and that he would have that last chance to meet with Jesus

Easter 2004 came and I was received into full communion with the Church; a fantastic, joyous night, but one which none of my family witnessed. However, Dad was pleased for me. Ten days later, with my father in hospital after collapsing, I received the phone call no one wants. The nurse just said **'COME NOW!'** Sadly, I did not make it in time. The nurse explained that Dad had seemed ok, even joking with them after breakfast, but then minutes later suffered a heart

attack and died. I looked at him and he seemed at peace; no pain in his face. Later that day I had the realisation that God had answered my prayer. He had not struggled in death. I thanked God.

We organised the funeral at St Mary's Parish Church and my job was to choose the readings. Thinking about these made me realise that in the outward display of one prayer being answered God had answered my other prayer too – that my father had his opportunity to see Jesus face to face. There was only one reading I could choose: **'The Prodigal Son'**.

Home at last.



A Deep Spiritual Revelation by Lyn Petersen



Lyn Peterson is the author of *Royal Birds: God's Overcoming Daughters*, a book to empower women. A former news reporter, features editor and psychology tutor, she is based in the Midlands and lives with her husband, alongside his herd of Limousine-cross cows. Lyn is the founder of www.royaldaughtersinchrist.com a resource she is developing to encourage women in their faith.

I am a Christian and a writer; in November 2019 I flew out to Rome to attend an ecumenical conference at the invitation of Catholic friends. I knew God had a purpose for the trip, but I was absolutely amazed when I had a deep spiritual revelation involving the Blessed Mother.

I was on the plane heading for the Eternal City when Mary introduced herself to me. I can't describe it in any other way.

It began when I was given a rosary by one of my travelling companions, a gentleman called Philip Illsley who has led many pilgrimages to Medjugorje over the years. Philip had been given this rosary by Marija, one of six Medjugorje visionaries who has been seeing apparitions of Mary since her childhood. But he felt prompted to pass it on to me as an act of kindness.

I was on the plane heading for the Eternal City when Mary introduced herself to me

He gave the rosary to me in the departure lounge at Bristol Airport and I put it in my hand luggage and retrieved it when we were on the plane and had safely taken off. As a Protestant I was not very familiar with rosaries and I noted the crucifix and a medal showing the Virgin's face, along with a single decade of polish wooden beads.

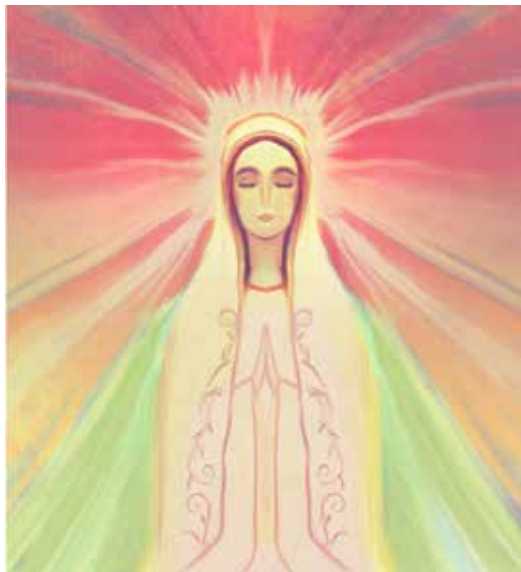


And as I looked at the image of Mary's face, I was hit by a wave of burning, passionate love. In that special moment, I believe I was allowed to glimpse Mary's pure, immaculate heart. It seemed as if the veil separating earth and heaven had been torn away and this profoundly mystical experience lasted for about half an hour.

I have felt the warmth of God's love on many occasions when I've been praying, but I had never experienced such a powerful manifestation of it. The love I was feeling was divine and sublime.

And then I received a message from Mary directly into my heart. It wasn't as if I heard a voice or saw a vision, but I knew exactly what she was saying.

"...as I looked at the image of Mary's face, I was hit by a wave of burning, passionate love..."



*"I am the Mother of the Church and you are one of my children. I am **your** mother. I know you have lost your earthly mother. Let me comfort you"*

I can't overstate how amazed I was that the Blessed Mother should have spoken to me.

Months later, I am convinced that God touched my life in a very special way through my encounter with Mary. I am now sleeping soundly like a baby every night, which was not the case previously.

"I am the Mother of the Church and you are one of my children. I am your mother. I know you have lost your earthly mother. Let me comfort you". There was a sense of homecoming in my heart as I heard these words, and at the same time, feelings of grief about losing my mother ten years earlier rose to the surface.

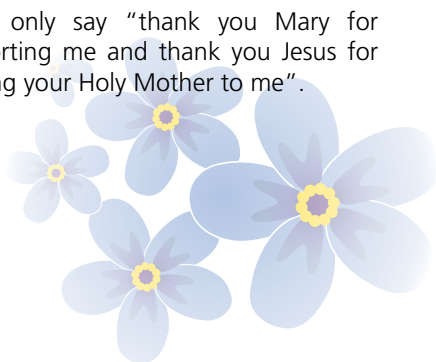
In retrospect I can see that that my normal sleep pattern had been disturbed ever since my mother's death in 2009.

As these sorrowful feelings surfaced, it seemed as if Mary immediately dispelled them as she conveyed her maternal love to me. I felt a huge sense of release and comfort. She was bringing God's mothering love and a deep healing. Silent tears of joy rolled down my face. Waves of this love and intense joy seemed to fill my soul for the next few hours, and then I was left with a deep peace.

When I saw Mother's Day cards in the shops this March, I did not experience a painful sense of loss, as I would have done previously. Over the past ten years I have always turned my face away from Mothering Sunday messages but this year I looked at all of the cards and thought to myself: "I wonder which one of these cards I would have bought for Mum if she's been here?". I felt completely peaceful.

I can only say "thank you Mary for comforting me and thank you Jesus for sending your Holy Mother to me".

A couple of days later, I was praying in St Peter's Basilica and I had a similar experience, but this time it didn't involve contemplating the rosary. I was simply kneeling at the altar when once again I experienced a message from Mary, promising that she would help another member of my family.



Look at My Son – He is Here by a parishioner of the **Diocese of Arundel and Brighton**

My husband and I responded to the invitation by our Parish Priest and the Eucharistic team to take part in the perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. I was very keen to be part of this, spending one hour each week with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

On the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, I was deep in prayer and contemplation and just meditating on the fact that Jesus was really present as Man and God in the monstrance on the altar.

The silence and the beauty of the sun rays coming through the stained-glass windows into the church on a cold February day was so special – sacred. During this meditation, I saw a beautiful vision of Mary our mother looking straight at the monstrance. It was a side view of the left side of her face. She was by the monstrance on the right side. Her face, light olive in complexion, middle eastern with strong features and beautiful eyes, was looking directly at Jesus. She was also looking at me. I thought she seemed to be about 48 or 50. What intrigued me was the colour of her veil or cloak. It was a very dark grey, not the usual blue as it is often depicted. She looked serious, but not solemn, not like an icon image.

*I saw a beautiful sight of Mary
our mother looking straight at
the monstrance*

I closed my eyes, thinking ‘this is all in my imagination’, but did this twice and she was still there. The three times I saw her lasted about 10 seconds. I felt very much at peace; her serenity was palpable. On reflection, the message to me was clear.



She was encouraging me to look at her son. I thanked God for this beautiful vision.

I wouldn't describe it as an apparition and it certainly wasn't frightening. It was a beautiful gift for a few seconds and hasn't happened during subsequent visits to the blessed sacrament. The real focus was on Our Lady directing me to Jesus just as she did at Cana: 'Do whatever he tells you'. Perhaps she was directing me to recognise that I have my own path in God's plan and I must fulfil that call to the very best of my ability. Mary's 'yes' to God was unconditional; no reasoning, she simply said 'yes'.

*I felt very much at peace, her
serenity was palpable*



Pope Francis notes how the gospel repeats the image of Mary 'keeping all things in her heart' and he goes on to say, 'Mary rejoices because of God ... she teaches us to rejoice in God, because he does great things.'

'We are no less fortunate than those who knelt beside his crib at Bethlehem or heard his youthful voice at Nazareth or accompanied him on the weary journeys of his public life. He is there, with us, just as he was there with them.'

Canon Francis J Ripley

Hagiosynthesis by Martin Ryan

<https://www.poemsforpilgrims.com/welcome-to-poems-for-pilgrims/contents-100-199/hagiosynthesis/>

Subtly in us works
The Spirit's grace.
Not grasping,
Straining,
Or abusing,
Nor should we
Find that confusing;
He who made us
Knows our nature's
pace.

On a seedbed
Rich in willingness,
Worms of woe
Can break our crust,
With humbled,
Crumbled,
Fertile trust,
We may allow Him

Into our mess.
The rain of pain
And affliction's squall,
Can moisten
And pierce our shell;
To burst forth
In germination's swell,
New life sprouting
Where death was all.

Performing
hagiosynthesis,
The Advocate
Works with creator's
care;
Core deep
In our soul's dark lair,
A delicate seamless
osmosis.

Sweet sacramental sap,
Surging,
Coursing through our
Christ-joined stem,
Enables us to bloom
And grow like Him;
Real nourishment
For witnessing.

Thus the Holy Spirit's
Profound caress:
Laden with Kingdom's
fruits,
How He longs
To bring on shoots:
Faith-tall,
Hope-lush,
Ripe with loving
kindness.

Two Last Conversations by Brenda Bent RIP



Brenda has written three articles for The Faith Companion, wishing to share her experiences to inspire others' faith. We published *A Journey for the New Year* in Jan/Feb 2020, *A Good Friday Inspirational Encounter* in Mar/Apr 2020 and this article May/June 2020. She submitted this article in January 2020, but sadly passed away on 25th March 2020. We would like to honour her by dedicating this edition to her memory. We wish to thank Brenda's family for allowing us to share this, her last conversation with us.

Eternal rest grant unto Brenda, oh Lord, may perpetual light shine upon her and may she rest in peace. Amen.

I remember well the conversation my mother and I had before she passed away. When I arrived at her home that day, she was sitting up in bed dressed in night attire with a headscarf on her head, tied in a bow under her chin! "It is to keep my head warm," she announced in response to my enquiring comment. I thought the scarf gave her an amusingly whimsical appearance while at the same time causing her to look sadly frail and vulnerable. I sat on the edge of her bed as I talked, telling of my husband's and my journey and talking about our garden.

Suddenly my mother interrupted with a question: "What will happen to my soul when I die?"

Even now in my memory, I can see her face as she asked this question. Her eyes glistened and quickly filled with tears and as they spilled down her face, the thick lenses of her spectacles magnified them. I was taken aback by her question and I took hold of her hand as my thoughts raced about trying to find a starting point with which to respond.

"What will happen to my soul when I die?"

I told her I did not know what would happen to her soul or what would happen to my soul, saying that none of us knew the answer to that question. She had no comment to this but her tear-filled gaze remained firmly fixed upon my face, communicating that she was waiting for me to say something else. I asked if she would like to talk to a priest, adding that although a priest would not be able to answer her question either, his knowledge and understanding about the meaning of our souls would be more than mine which she could find more helpful.

She remained silent and more tears welled up in her eyes. I gently squeezed her hand to convey reassurance and hoped she would squeeze my hand in response, but her hand remained limply resting, encircled by mine. I could feel her unease and in her unwavering gaze saw the anxiety in her eyes. She wanted answers! I felt she needed simple answers

that made sense to her and although I understood her having such a need, I was unable to give knowledgeable answers or the level of reassurance she sought. Sadly, I believed no one could. I felt somewhat overwhelmed by my thought that my mother was talking of her death!

Whatever her process of thinking had been for her to arrive at this question, it had created worry, anxiety, even fear for her. At that particular moment, her need was for answers, not questions, and I chose not to query her about how she arrived at this question. Her distress was upsetting to see and as I composed and organised my thoughts, I quietly continued to speak with her.

As I talked with her, I suggested that if she talked to God, she might find the answer to her question. "Talk to Him as you would to a dear Friend," I suggested. "Tell Him what your hopes and wishes are for your soul." I told her that I believed God would listen to her and for her to remember that He loved her very much and wanted her to be at peace with herself.

She continued struggling to put her thoughts into words and articulated a worry about what would happen if, after she died, her soul would not know where to go! Her tear-filled gaze locked onto my eyes and a silence hung in the room.

Feelings of sadness for my mother, and a surprising sadness for myself, flooded through me because my mother was talking about her death and sharing with me her worry that her soul would get lost. I felt powerless to console her or to provide the information she sought. I felt that her fear was expressed with a level of innocence and with a child-like manner.

Wanting to project calm for her benefit, I controlled my tears and said for her to

try not to worry that her soul would not know what to do, but that when the time did come, perhaps what she could do was to stretch out her hand in her mind and God would do the rest. I said that perhaps it is as simple as that!

"Talk to Him as you would to a dear friend", I suggested.

"Tell Him what your hopes and wishes are for your soul"

That was the last conversation my mother and I shared. I had no answers for her questions and worries, but wished I had. I do not think that definitive answers exist for such questions; I believe it becomes simply a matter of faith and trust. I believe my mother's faith and trust in God was strong and from that she would have found courage and comfort. I believe my mother would have talked to God, telling him of her hopes and wishes for her soul. My faith and trust in God are also strong and I believe God heard and listened to her.

For a time after her death I wondered if I should have told her what she was wanting to hear; that her soul would go to heaven and live happily ever after (as I believe it did)! However, my mother showed remarkable courage in letting down her guard, permitting herself to be vulnerable in the presence of her youngest daughter and sharing these fears and anxieties. I believe my mother knew that I would respond to her honestly, not merely to pacify. I feel that if I had responded merely to appease, I would have devalued my mother's courage and her very life and existence. My mother's life had been difficult with many challenges and obstacles and she had faced and surmounted them all; always moving

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie
down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside
the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he
leadeth me in the paths
of righteousness for his
name's sake.

Psalms 23



forward as best as she could. I prayed that her death would not be a struggle.

When she was in the last stage of her life, my mother lay in a deep sleep, a breath away from death. I sat at her hospital bed, my husband by my side, and I reached for the Bible from a nearby table; the Book fell open with ease at a particular page, indicating to me how often that page had been read. The Book falling open at that page was, to me, a testament to the many others before me who had reached for that same Bible, held it as I held it and read that same page, as they too sat around the bedside of a loved one. I drew comfort from that thought because it reminded me that, as human beings, we share so many of the same life experiences. Each one of us experiences the inevitable stages of life and it is likely that even with many of those personal life experiences which we believe are unique to us, others may have also trodden a similar way before us.

"...perhaps what she could do was in her mind stretch out her hand and God would do the rest."

However, one of the hardest lessons of life to accept is...time is not endless! Time does run out for each of us and for everything. The number of todays

and tomorrows in anyone's life is not infinite. Whether it is to do with loved ones or with others who people our lives, goals, dreams, plans and hopes, time for fulfilment is not open-ended. There exists an unknown, defined ending for each of our lives and for everything on earth - and that ending travels according to its own timetable!

I also reflected on how the ending of the life of a body is as much a part of our journey of life, as birth is the beginning of our journey. Additionally, the separation of the soul from the body and its journey to the next life is important, even though it remains mystifying.

As I sat by the hospital bed where my mother appeared to be merely sleeping, my thoughts continued to attempt to respond to my mother's question about what would happen to her soul after she died. I needed to do something in support of, and in response to, the plea I had read in my mother's eyes during the last conversation we shared. She had let me know she was frightened and anxious about what she believed her soul might find beyond this life. On behalf of my mother, and for her soul, I silently read the page, which the book had opened at effortlessly - the 23rd Psalm:

"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want ... He restoreth my soul..."

Sitting by my mother's bedside I waited for the expected to come; then come it did, suddenly, without struggle.



Reflecting God's Glory by Anthony Evans



Anthony Evans is the founder and Managing Director of "Everyday Christian Marketing", a bespoke marketing agency assisting the Catholic Church. Anthony's mission is to raise awareness of God's kingdom through digital technology. Previously, Anthony worked for 20 years as a senior marketing professional – but then he heard God's call to use his skills to benefit the Church more directly. He now has an expanding portfolio with clients in more than 12 dioceses across the UK and many collaborations including ecumenical work in Rome and the USA. Anthony is well-versed in scripture and theology, leading prayers and meditations during this journey. God has mightily blessed Anthony's step of faith. He says: *"I believe that as we look through the eyes of faith, we are enlightened ... everything becomes more colourful and we find our real selves. There is a natural synergy between faith and creativity."*



these various souls and we realized that we had one thing in common: WE ARE ALL REFLECTING GOD'S GLORY in our various different ways. And so, this new initiative is the fruit of meeting so many different people who in their different ways are bearing fruit for the Lord, reflecting His light out into the world.

"Reflecting God's Glory" is a monthly focus on

On 27th February 2020 at St Teilo's Parish in Whichurch, Cardiff, my wife Erica and I hosted a new monthly programme for Christian unity – an ecumenical initiative. This has been inspired by meeting, on our spiritual journey, so many vibrant, talented characters who are on fire for their faith, spurring them on to embark on all sorts of missions for our Lord's purpose. We have discovered so many treasures within

different aspects of faith across the country and indeed the world, where there are little pockets of reflecting God's glory taking place in, sometimes, the most unlikely of places. In essence this initiative is about joining these streams of living water so that they can flow into one big Ocean – our "one Church" – our Faith – so that the light of God can be reflected out to the whole world.



“This initiative ... is about joining these streams of living water so that they can flow into one big Ocean - our “one Church” - our Faith ... “

At this particular event, the focus was on creativity in the arts and literature. Firstly Erica, who is an artist, talked about how she uses her God-given talents to run workshops to teach art techniques and keeping a spiritual art journal. There are some experiences which words just can't capture; and some for which words just don't resonate. Next, we introduced Ashley and John Noronah from Rome who are the founders of a programme called the “Truth and Beauty Project”. John is a Professor at the Pontifical University of Santa Croce and a former producer of the TV news show, “Voice of the Vatican”. Ashley is a media personality, the Rome Correspondent for “The Relevant Radio

Network” and the former host of the Voice of the Vatican news show. She was also the Vatican's English Language Official at the Pontifical Council of Social Communications and has been featured on various global TV news networks as an expert on Vatican issues.

Ashley and John talked about their Truth and Beauty Project which better helps Christians understand their roots through the living classroom that is Rome. They weave together art, Scripture and faith (amongst other things) taking participants on a lived experience of faith, truth and beauty. John demonstrated how they do this by helping us to understand the theology and symbolism embedded in Michelangelo's Pietà statue. The project involves a tour of Rome and the Vatican, exploring the artwork that can be found all around the Holy city. Information about the project can be found at their website www.truthandbeautyproject.com



Reflecting God's Glory isn't all about the extraordinary, but uncovering the ordinary, everyday... missions people are undertaking in our Church

Next Hugh O'Donnel shared the poetry of his wife Sue, and introduced her book "Listen Carefully to Me" which has been given the nihil obstat and imprimatur of the Church. It is an inspired daily devotional. Another author Teresa O'Driscoll introduced her book "9 Days to Heaven" in which she offers nine days' worth of guided meditations to give people of faith (and of no faith) the opportunity to connect with God through meditation. Lyn Peterson introduced her book "Royal Birds", all about trusting God by allowing Him to heal past hurts and free you from the false identities adopted in your youth; thus, helping people to emerge in freedom as the Royal Children of God. Finally, Kathy Bishop gave her testimony about the beginnings of "The Faith Companion" magazine and explained its aim of making our faith more accessible to all and uncovering the voice of God in peoples' lives.

As you can see, we had an extraordinary gift of talent at this event; however, Reflecting God's Glory isn't all about

the extraordinary but about uncovering the ordinary, everyday stories and missions' people are undertaking in our Church. For example, we have a friend, John, who with his wife Pamela goes out onto the streets of major UK cities evangelizing and giving out free booklets and Rosaries. They have incredible stories to tell and have set up an organization called "Catholic Street Evangelization". There are many who are trying, with God's grace, to work wonders as the fire of our faith intensifies within them. We wish Reflecting God's Glory to be a showcase of how we are glorifying God. This could be happening on a grand scale but it could also be your neighbour doing something equally wonderful. Faithful people reflecting God's glory are often closer than you think. We believe there are many hidden treasures in our Church waiting to be revealed.

This makes me think of Matthew 5:15:

"No one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house."

This verse is the anchor to our mission in these Reflecting God's Glory events. Many can hide their light, but we need to be reflecting God's glory out into the world and this mission is one way we can do that and is key to it. If you would like to find out when the next event is taking place or if you would like to showcase your mission, then do visit our website and get in touch: www.reflectinggodsglory.com



Spiritual Journaling Workshops by Erica Evans



Erica Evans has a BA (Hons) in Fine Art and has been running workshops in mixed media crafts for more than 20 years. In 2018 Erica went to Rome and was swept off her feet by the story of the saints through art; this spiritual revelation was so profound she immediately converted to Catholicism. Since then, Erica's love for painting has been reignited and inspired by sacred art. She is excited by what lies ahead and desires to see others grow spiritually through her art-spiritual journaling workshops. All artwork shown here created by Erica.

I am an artist who lives in South Wales with my husband and two boys, now young men. I have been running craft workshops showing others different artistic techniques using various methods for a long time. Since recently being received into the Catholic Faith I felt called to change my work to develop workshops which help to deepen faith through creativity. Hence, I have turned my workshops into teaching others how to develop spiritual journaling using creative artistic methods.

Now, this workshop of faith-art journaling is something anyone can do. Some people are not writers and see the world differently. I am one such person where colour, patterns and images mean more than the written word. To make a spiritual journal more artistic you don't necessarily have to be an artist, you just have to be taught certain techniques in order to enhance the expression of your spiritual journey.

Recently, I was inspired by Luke 2:19:

"But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart"

I am going to use this quotation as a starting point for one of my workshops. People won't necessarily draw pictures of



Mary as such but get creative and inspired by the meaning of the quotation. They will spend time thinking and pondering, looking at deeper meanings, particularly of their lives. They may, perhaps, try and picture what expressing love could look like. They could use a shape with words that have come to mind written inside, or they can even make pictures out of these words using anything that gives them inspiration. Words can become art.

They will spend time thinking and pondering, looking at deeper meanings particularly of their lives

The page itself can become a piece of art with background colour, cutting out patterns on edges or sides. Patterns can be imprinted across the page in



the background. You can use stenciling to enhance the effect. A whole host of techniques can be used to make your spiritual journal represent a beautiful expression of your faith.

You can, as we do, use quotations from poems, Scripture, hymns and worship music in art journaling, especially if you don't have any words of your own. You can also perhaps use well-known quotations from our great Saints, Popes or even your priest from his homily last Sunday. Use whatever gives you inspiration.

Spiritual journaling can be truly creative for expressing your faith and you can be as creative as you wish as it is for you alone. Nobody has to see it if you don't want them to. If things don't go as well as hoped, it doesn't matter. What is important is the process, the journey that it takes you on, the time for reflection and most importantly your connection with God.

We create as co-creators with God to express our faith journey

As I am an artist and think in images, God often gives me images which just pop into my subconscious. This is how He communicates with me. For someone who is a journalist, writer or author

perhaps God reaches them through words or poetry. For a musician perhaps God will speak to them through music. Whichever of the arts most inspire people – words, art, music – it is all creativity. We create as co-creators with God to express our faith journey.

If people are writers like Lyn Alderson, then words are the tools with which to express their faith. Lyn has written an e-book showing people how to journal in a therapeutic context, but which can also be used for the spiritual journey, which may prove useful. It can be found at:

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Write-Therapy-Keeping-Healthier-Productive-ebook/dp/B00N1433JC>

Finally, spiritual journaling is a personal thing and people do like to keep it personal. It is an expression of faith, and faith is a journey that is very personal between you and God, but I believe this is a way of developing faith through creativity.



Royal Birds: God's Overcoming Daughters **by Lyn Peterson** *Review by Kathy Bishop*



ISBN: 978-1-78815-716-2

Lyn Peterson is a free-lance writer and former news reporter, features editor and psychology lecturer. She lives in the Midlands with her husband and attends a non-denominational church where she worships alongside people from diverse traditions, although broadly Evangelical. Readers may feel it strange for us to endorse a book written by a non-Catholic, but this has been thoroughly vetted and nothing in it goes against Catholic teaching. In fact, it fully informs and builds upon everything the Catholic Church teaches. The only thing Catholic readers may notice is a difference of perspective when, for example, she discusses finding a good church or church leader whilst we would refer to "our church", that is the local church and "priest" belonging to the universal Catholic Church. There is also perhaps a greater reference to Scripture than in a Catholic book (which might also refer to Church teachings or writings of the Saints).

We recommend *Royal Birds* because *The Faith Companion* is all about nourishing faith in daily life and this book does just

that. It will help all those who have had difficult, or even abusive, beginnings and life experiences to move forward from enslavement to their past into freedom and life in God's Spirit, knowing that they are a Royal Bird, a child of God. Past experiences can block faith development and thwart a growing relationship with Christ; the very practical help in this book is too good to deny our readers simply because it hasn't been written by a Catholic author.

Lyn's starting point is Hans Christian Andersen's 1844 fairy tale "The Ugly Duckling", which she uses as a metaphor for Christian identity. Lyn says:

"In this story, a poor little duckling was bullied and abused. Everyone saw it as ugly and condemned it as a social misfit. But beauty is more than skin deep and appearances can be deceptive. The Ugly Duckling turned out to be a swan growing up in a duck family! It was in fact a Royal Bird."

The crux of this metaphor is that like the Ugly Duckling, we too can suffer a devastating identity crisis in our Christian journeys. The truth was revealed to this poor bird when it caught sight of itself in a reflection in the water. It saw itself as



it truly was, and its poor self-worth was healed. In the same way, when we learn to see ourselves through God's eyes we are then able to see ourselves as we truly are, as God sees us – His beloved children, His Royal Birds, loved and protected.

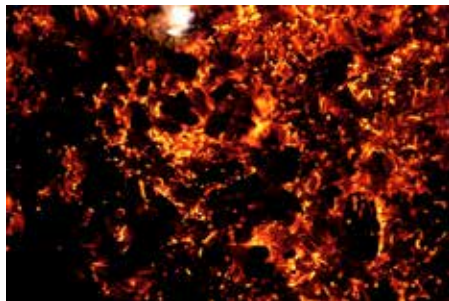
Past experiences can block faith development and thwart a growing relationship with Christ

At the beginning of the book Lyn looks at her own spiritual journey in parallel to this metaphor, reflecting upon some of her difficult experiences when she accepted a counterfeit identity. Her true identity had been stolen through accepting an identity portrayed by bullies and abusers. Lyn uses the Ugly Duckling metaphor not only for her struggles, but for those of many of God's children who don't see themselves as they truly are. She says:

"[God] doesn't want us destroyed by life's hardships and hurts. He wants us to rise up in the power of His Spirit as overcomers. He will restore what's been lost if we trust Him."

So, the common theme in this book is trusting God, allowing God in to mend and heal a broken identity.

The first chapters of this book are about the struggles Lyn encountered in childhood and early adulthood, in her own words "feeling like a square peg in a round hole". This identity crisis started early on when she discovered her father had actually always wanted a boy. Her false identity was sealed with the constant bullying she experienced at school. Eventually depression hit, along with a mysterious illness no doctor could diagnose. Her early life was plagued. She was, however, able to live a moderately



normal life, although that life was tough.

The embers of some early spiritual stirrings, resulting from a miraculous escape from a potentially dangerous situation, smoldered on the back burner for some years until connection to a Baptist family lead Lyn to be baptized in the Baptist Church. The smoldering embers on the back burner were sparked into a deep spiritual life which grew into the roaring fire it is now, with a calling to help others see their true identity as God's Royal Birds.

The smoldering embers on the back burner were soon sparked into a deep spiritual life which grew into the roaring fire it is now

After a disastrous childhood, a yearning for love, acceptance and connection led Lyn into a relationship she felt, looking back, was not anointed by God. She married in haste. After a long struggle to stay married, as her vows and faith were important to her, an inevitable collapse ensued as did disintegration of the marriage. Disconnection from her church followed, as she had received condemnation for her divorce from certain church leaders. She was out in the cold again, except for some very dear Christian friends who continued to love her unconditionally.

After hitting rock bottom Lyn had a deeply spiritual experience on retreat at Ffald y Brenin in South Wales when life turned around for her. She felt spiritually renewed, now knowing that she was precious to God and that He would never leave her alone. Bolstered by this loving assurance Lyn began to look to the future. She met a widower, Richard, whom she eventually married. When doctors finally diagnosed and treated her mysterious illness, she was freed to live life anew.

A period of spiritually reflecting upon her life followed:

"Through the process of opening up my life to God, I have been rewriting the text of my life and reframing the story of who I am and where I am going. God has spoken words of life into places where I had felt dead."

Through God's grace Lyn has been gifted with a brand-new identity; the process of achieving this are the nuts and bolts of this book.

The first stage is exposing the Ugly Duckling mindset and revealing its symptoms: for example, not liking yourself, finding it hard to accept compliments, being oversensitive to others' comments, lacking self-confidence – the list goes on. Lyn then looks at the root of the problem, for example parents, authority figures or peer group treatment and abuse, to name but a few potential root causes. After this she moves onto dismantling the Ugly Duckling mindset by examining negative labels; the acquired lies Lyn had believed about herself until she began the process of handing over the pain to God, receiving and believing God's perspective on who she was. She says:

"I have replaced each soul-destroying label with the truth of who I am in Christ ..."

Lyn gives some beautiful Scripture passages that clearly show our true identity in Christ – your God-given identity.



Lyn rounds up her work by giving us 10 tips to help with the process of realizing your identity in Christ which isn't an Ugly Duckling, but a swan, a Royal Bird.

From this automatically flows knowing the depth of Our Father's love for us, explored in chapter nine. Chapter ten explores healing past hurts by allowing Jesus to show us a new perspective on past events. Lyn says:

"... it's possible for Jesus to show us a moment in time which has already passed and heal the emotions connected with it."

This shows how essential it is to own our own pain, in order for memories and hurt to heal. As Royal Birds, God's children, we need to look at the past in order to move forward. Lyn suggests useful ways of hearing God's voice on this healing journey.

In chapter eleven Lyn discusses the role of Satan in thwarting all these efforts. She explains that God's Royal Birds know God and understand their enemy. Satan will try, at every turn, to entrap God's Royal Birds, but as with all swans they are protected by royal assent. In chapter twelve Lyn discusses guilt and shame, explaining how Royal Birds are pure, protected by walking with God. God has made us all worthy in Christ – this is the antidote to shame. Chapter thirteen discusses accepting change and forgiveness; forgiving yourself and others

– even forgiving God. Lyn rounds up her work by giving us ten tips to help with the process of realising your identity in Christ; an identity which isn't that of an Ugly Duckling, but of a swan, a Royal Bird.

Lyn finishes by sharing a vision received:

"In my eyes swans are the most beautiful of birds... (they) possess pure grace and beauty from another world, from my Kingdom ... Royal Birds are supernaturally anointed ... they have everything they need within them."

I highly recommend this book as for some, it will be an important book on their faith journey. It is easy to read, relevant to everyone and a good resource for those who find their faith blocked by a negative self-concept founded in a false identity. This book does come with a warning: be prepared for some real soul searching which may be hard. Some may not be ready, but it may be necessary in order to transform your Christian identity from an Ugly Duckling into a Royal Bird - God's beloved daughter or son.





Q "I notice that during the Mass, after the Sign of Peace and before we sing the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God), the priest breaks the Host into pieces. He also places a small piece into the chalice. Please could you explain why he does this?"

Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in the one bread. 1 Corinthians 10:17

A Answered by a priest of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

St Paul, in this quotation from his First Letter to the Church at Corinth (and written, probably, about the year 54AD) is, of course, talking about our unity in Christ. Through baptism, we are joined intimately to Jesus and to one another. With Christ we are one. In Christ we are one. We are all different individuals ... but, essentially, through Baptism and our faith in Jesus, we are one.

The loaf/bread imagery that St Paul uses is particularly pertinent (for obvious reasons) for our celebration of Holy

Mass. The Host is broken and shared, thus expressing our unity (one loaf) and our individuality/difference (the broken pieces) all at the same time. Even though we are individuals, we are from the same loaf: Jesus Christ! The priest breaks a large Host so that **at least some of the people present** are able to share, with him, from that 'loaf'. Because of the way we now have individual and separate Hosts, this symbolism is easily lost ... but it is there – and is most noticeable in the breaking **and sharing** of the parts of the priest's Host (which is why he has a larger Host). In eating from the same loaf (which is Jesus) we are united both with Jesus and with one another. It is, therefore, an expression of what exists between us already (unity in Christ) and a deepening of that reality in us. Scholars call this 'expression' and 'impression'. We express, symbolically and liturgically, a truth, and the very expression of it means it deepens its impression in our hearts. A husband may know, for example, that he loves his wife very much – but to actually tell her so, both expresses an existing reality and immediately deepens and strengthens that reality.

We express, symbolically and liturgically, a truth, and the very expression of it means it deepens its impression in our hearts

From some very early Church Fathers, we learn of the Pope sending a particle of the Host from his Mass to the Masses being celebrated in the local churches of Rome. By so doing, the Pope was expressing his unity with those churches at a time when belief in Christ could be very dangerous and many volatile heresies and false teachings existed. This expressed and also fostered orthodoxy (right teaching) and communion with the Pope (the litmus test of Catholicism). To be one with the Pope was to be one with the authentic Church which Jesus had founded. This custom, at least in some form, lasted until about the ninth century

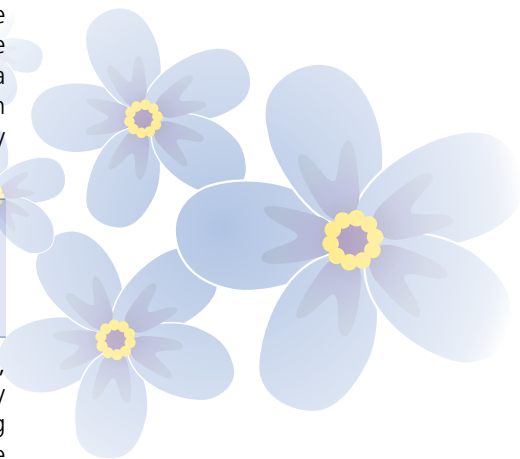
when it seems to have faded away. Many scholars will tell us, then, that this practice of breaking off a small fragment from the host is a hangover from that time and a reminder of our own faith and belief in communion and continuity with the Holy Father.

*Even though we are individuals,
we are from the same loaf:
Jesus Christ!*

As the priest places the Host in the chalice, he says, "May the mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it". There

are two consecrations in the Eucharistic Prayer (first using the formula "This is my Body ..." and the second "This is my Blood ..."). This reminds us of the separation of the body and blood of Christ in his Passion and death. The broken bread reminds us of his body broken for us on the cross, and the poured wine reminds us of his blood given and poured out for us. In these ways the double consecration reminds us of his saving death. It has been argued that the combining of the consecrated elements is a reminder or symbol of the resurrection, in which his body and blood are again united.

In closing, let us remember that it is important to remember that to receive either the Host or the Precious Blood alone, is to receive the entire Christ, and that we are one, in Christ, through our local bishop, with the Holy Father in Rome.





The mission of the Society of the Little Flower is to promote devotion to St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Carmelite Nun and Doctor of the Church. Through prayers and donations, friends of St. Thérèse enable Carmelites to continue her “Shower of Roses” in their ministries throughout the world and in their education of young Carmelites.

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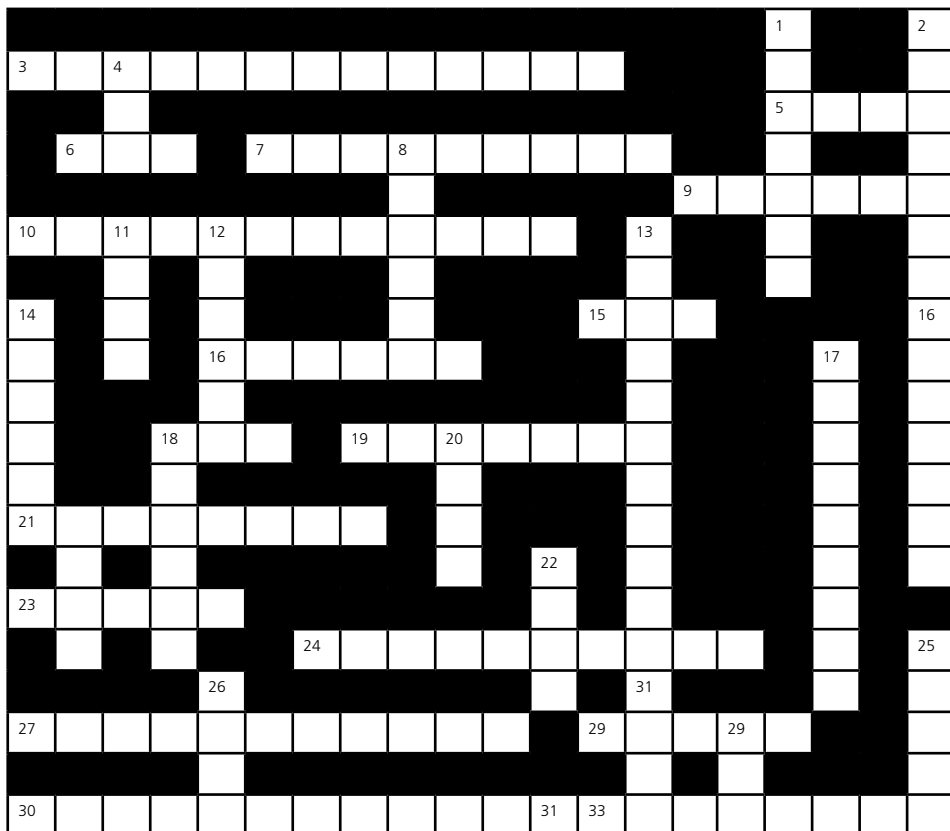
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Crossword



CLUES ACROSS

- 3 In His first miracle Jesus changed this into something else (5,4,4)
- 5 People showed a lot of this when they took pains to lower a sick man in his bed from the roof
- 6 Number of healed 'unclean outcasts' who came back to thank Jesus
- 7 Jesus worked His first miracle at the request of(3,6)
- 9 Jesus ascended to Heaven and sat at the right hand of His Father's
- 10 Jesus once fed this many people
- 15 Jesus sometimes referred to Himself as the Son of

- 16 The ten men healed by Jesus were sufferers of this disease and therefore treated as outcasts
- 18 A woman touched this part of the garment worn by Jesus while He was walking
- 19 In the parable about being prepared for the coming of the Lord, who were the wise and the foolish women
- 21 What was the tree that the man in 17 down climbed to see Jesus
- 23 Jesus likened Himself to the Shepherd and to us as His
- 24 In the parable comparing the genuine value of each person's offering, Jesus ranked this contribution as the highest (6, 4)

27 Jesus gave His parable of the Good Samaritan in answer to a question about (2, 9)

28 At the transfiguration, how many tents did Peter suggest should be built

30 Who did Jesus heal when He was told this: 'Lord I am not worthy that you should come under my roof' (3,10,7))

CLUES DOWN

1 Jesus raised this man from the dead

2 The miracle Jesus performed which proved His power over nature (6, 3, 5)

4 Number of 'unclean outcasts' who came up to Jesus to be healed

8 The term 'Rabbi' also means this

11 Jesus likened Himself to this, with us as the branches

12 Number of baskets left over once the crowd of 5,000 had finished eating

13 The food which was distributed to the five thousand (6,3,6)

14 Jesus raised the daughter of this man from the dead

17 The man who had to climb a tree to see Jesus

18 The woman who touched the garment of Jesus wasof her illness

20 Jesus entered Jerusalem travelling this way: He

22 Jesus said that a shepherd would rejoice over finding even one sheep

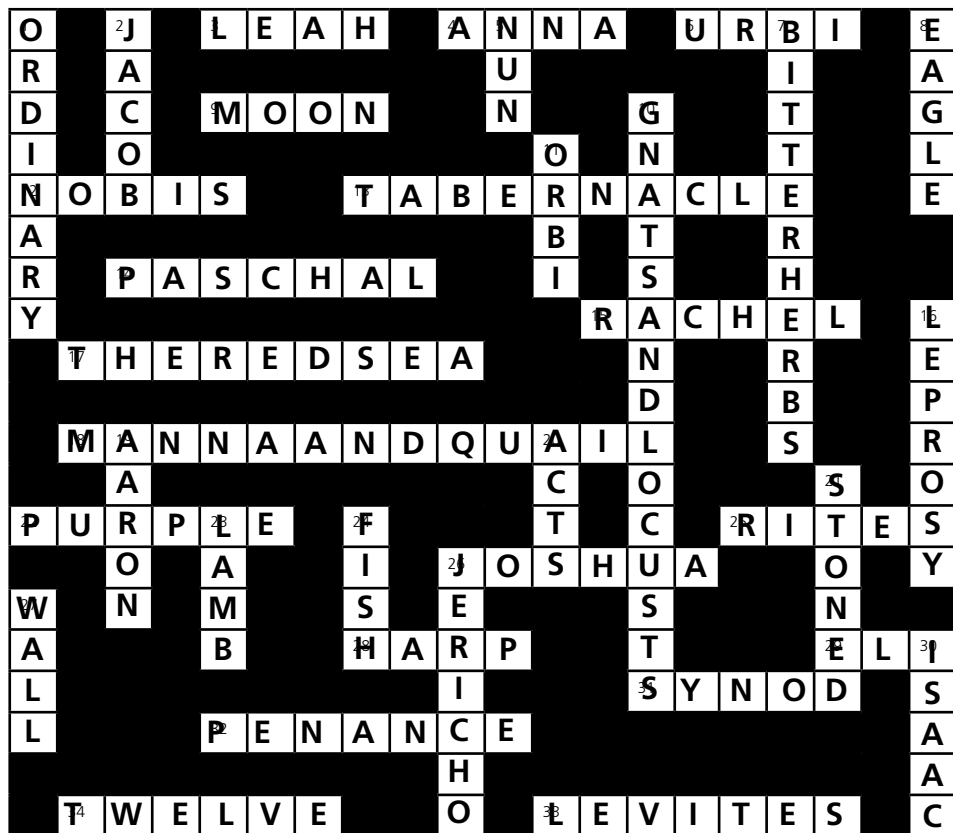
25 Jesus was asleep in this when the sea turned rough terrifying His disciples (1, 4)

26 Jesus said, 'I am the Resurrection and the

29 Which part of Malchus' head was cut off by a sword when Jesus was taken to trial, which Jesus restored



Last Issue's Crossword with Answers



CLUES ACROSS

- 3 Jacob's first wife **LEAH**
- 4 Joshua's first wife who was part Egyptian **ANNA**
- 6 Latin word in the Papal Easter Blessing meaning 'To the City' **URBI**
- 9 The date of the feast of Passover depends on the movement of this planet **MOON**
- 12 Latin word meaning 'us' **NOIBIS**
- 13 Sacred Structure built by the Hebrews at God's command and instructions while in the dessert **TABERNACLE**

- 14 Candle lit on Holy Saturday in Church signifying Christ as the Light of the World **PASCHAL**
- 15 Mother of Joseph and Benjamin, sons of Jacob **RACHEL**
- 17 God parted this body of water to enable the Hebrews to pass through (1,3,3) **THE RED SEA**
- 18 The food that God provided for the Hebrews in the dessert (5,3,5) **MANNA AND QUAIL**
- 22 Liturgical colour used to reflect repentance during the Lent season **PURPLE**

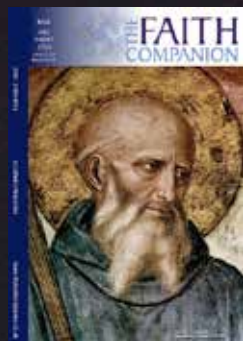
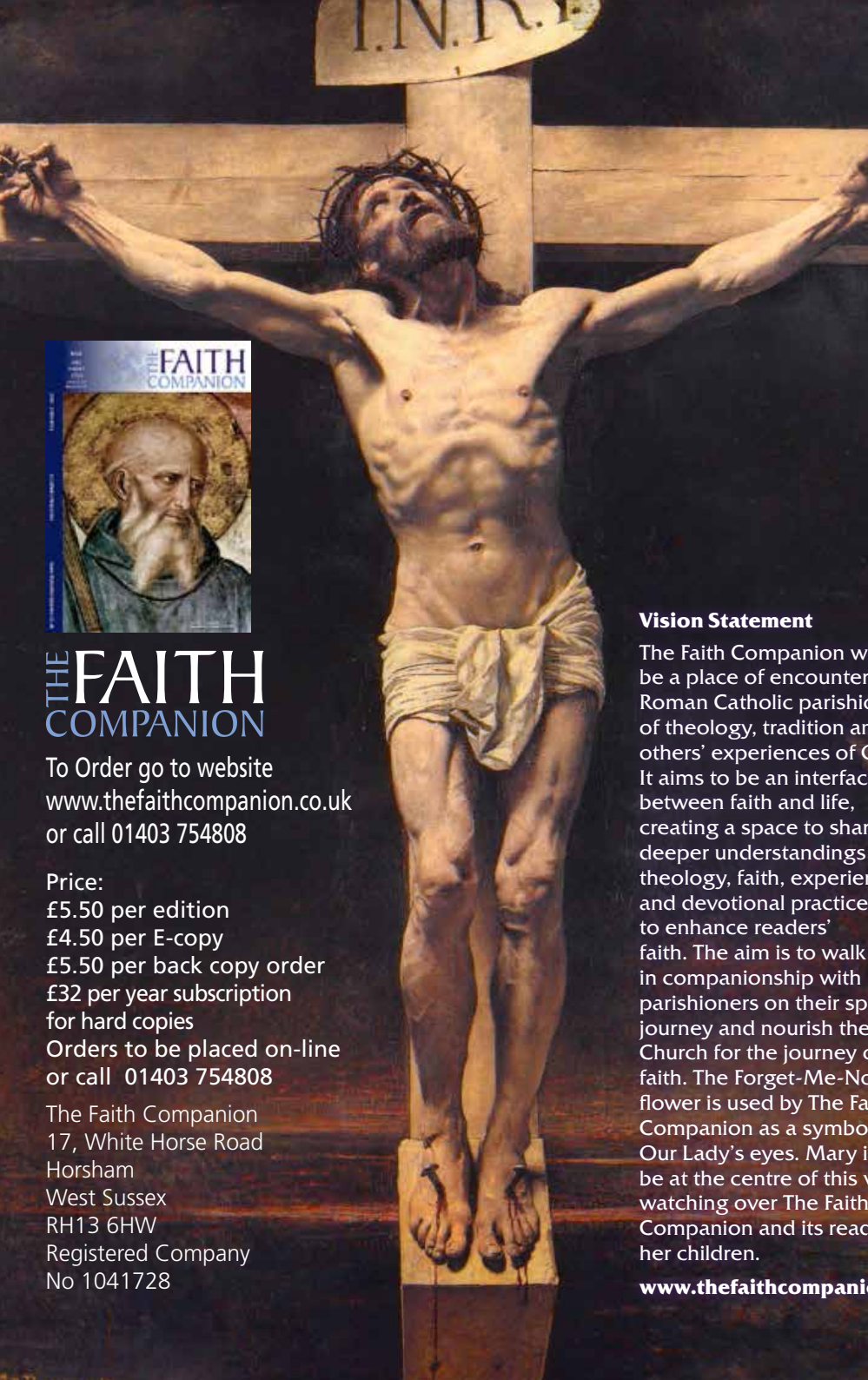
- 25 he unique customs and rules practiced by the Church **RITES**
- 26 He was chosen by God and appointed by Moses to lead the Hebrews to the Promised Land **JOSHUA**
- 28 Instrument played in Heaven by Angels **HARP**
- 29 Prophet of the Old Testament **ELI**

- 31 Conference of Cardinals and Bishops **SYNOD**
- 32 The season of Lent is focused on this **PENANCE**
- 33 Men serving in the sanctuary subordinate to the Priests **LEVITES**
- 34 The Hebrews were divided into this number of tribes **TWELVE**

CLUES DOWN

- 1 Season of the Liturgy before Advent **ORDINARY**
- 2 He migrated to Egypt with his whole family during the famine **JACOB**
- 5 Joshua's father **NUN**
- 7 The Hebrews were instructed by God to eat this with their bread before leaving Egypt **BITTER HERBS**
- 8 The symbol of St. John's Gospel **EAGLE**
- 10 The winged insects that plagued Egypt (5,3,7) **GNATS AND LOCUSTS**
- 11 Latin word in the Papal Easter Blessing meaning 'To the world' **ORBI**
- 16 Miriam, sister of Moses was struck down by this disease and healed **LEPROSY**
- 19 The first High Priest appointed by God to serve in the Tabernacle **AARON**
- 20 One of the books of the New Testament about the life and work of the Apostles after the Resurrection **ACTS**
- 21 In the old testament, women were punished this way for committing adultery **STONED**
- 23 Symbol depicting the Son of God who was sacrificed for our sins **LAMB**
(*Symbols for Jesus – Loyola Press Jesuit Ministry*)
- 24 Symbol which was a secret identity during the time of persecution – Greek word formed from the first letters of the expression "Jesus, Christ, Son of God, Saviour" **FISH** (*Symbols for Jesus – Loyola Press Jesuit Ministry*)
- 26 Land which was the hardest to conquer before reaching the Promised Land **JERICO**
- 27 The most indestructible barrier that was broken to enter 26 above **WALL**
- 30 Abraham's Son through whom God tested his faith **ISAAC**





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