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# THE FAITH COMPANION

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A Catholic Perspective

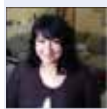
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*Saint Therese*

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## **Editor's Corner** 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 trained for 2 years as a spiritual director at the London Centre for Spiritual Direction. She works as a registered adult nurse.

**D**uring adjustment to a “new normal” and continued uncertainty it is reassuring to know we, as the People of God, have been gifted with our Faith. Whatever happens God’s Love is ever present. It is my sincere hope that your encounter with the pages of our September/October 2020 edition will attest to this fact to give you strength and guidance.

Martin Ryan reflects on what the Divine Will means to us and how we discern God’s intentions. Fr Kevin O’Donnell reflects on how the Church can’t be contained as Christ is “out there” and all around. We then look at the interplay between Two Rules of Faith; Scripture and Tradition and I discuss the art of Contemplative prayer. Our Devotions focus on Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and Our Lady of the Rosary and our Saint, this edition, is St Thérèse of Lisieux and her Little Way.

We complete part two of Anthony Evans’ inspirational faith story on how he turned away from a corporate career to work for Christ every day. He then shares the consequent blessing of his wife’s conversion to the Catholic Faith helped by Ashley and John Noronah who run the Truth and Beauty Project in Rome. They share their project with us in our Faith in Action section and Miranda Litchfield, Director of The Society of the Little Flower shares their work.

Fr Robin Sebastian tells of his work with orphan boys in India who he and his fellow Benedictine confrères have rescued. They are inspired by the work of St Mother Teresa of Calcutta and are currently in need of new premises to house the 37 boys in their care. We are championing this worthwhile cause so their work will feature regularly in order to follow their progress.

Lastly, The Faith Companion team very sadly had to say goodbye to Anneli Figura and Brian McDonough who have helped in editing The Faith Companion since its inception. Words cannot express how grateful I am to both of them for the love, support and expertise they brought to the magazine and to me personally. May God bless with them abundantly for their dedication and love.

I pray you encounter God through these pages and may He continue to bless your faith journey through The Faith Companion.

**Kathy Bishop**



The Forget-Me-Not flower is known as a symbol of undying love and eternal friendship. However, there is an ancient Christian legend regarding this little flower according to which the Child Jesus, sitting on Mary’s lap, told her He wished future generations could see her eyes. He then waved His hands over the ground and the blue forget-me-not flower appeared. Thus, according to legend, this flower represents Mary’s eyes and as such will be used by The Faith Companion as its main symbol. Mary is to be at the centre of our vision watching over her children, The Faith Companion’s readers.

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## Give Me Your Orders! by Martin 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/>

When I was asked if I would write a short article on the Divine Will, the very first thing that came to mind was the powerful prayer to the Holy Spirit recommended by Cardinal Mercier, and the title of this article is taken from that very prayer: "Give me Your orders".

The Cardinal's prayer, if you're not familiar with it, is as follows:

*"O Holy Spirit, beloved of my soul, I adore You.*

*Enlighten me, guide me, strengthen me, console me.*

*Tell me what I should do; give me Your orders.*

*I promise to submit myself to all that You desire of me and to accept all that You permit to happen to me.*

*Let me only know Your Will."*



Cardinal Mercier

quiet concentration every day, then: "This submission to the Holy Spirit is **the secret of sanctity.**"

The good Cardinal asserted that if we prayed this prayer with sincerity and in

In an age of mass media, where trite boasts and misinformation abound, his assertion is, I believe, divinely inspired, utterly true and efficacious. I would

heartedly recommend the daily practice of this prayer to every Catholic.

And yet – “Give me Your orders” – is perhaps not a phrase that strikes us as sitting easily in a prayer? Perhaps it has more the tone of a military statement: like something that might be spoken by a frantic officer in the heat of battle asking his general for instructions? (Notice by the way that I have added an exclamation mark to the title.)

*“This submission to the Holy Spirit is the secret of sanctity.”*

Cardinal Mercier is long dead now – maybe we think his prayer and his language is of another time and place, and therefore largely outdated for today’s Catholic. After all Cardinal Mercier lived through some very difficult times and had to support his beloved Belgian people during the German occupation of the First World War, and he bravely opposed the forces of oppression. He very much had to put his Catholic faith on the line. Maybe his prayer reflects that time of terror and a ‘life and death’ emergency, and has less value for us today? I think that would be to greatly misunderstand the Cardinal’s prayer. In fact, his prayer might be all the more relevant to us in the twenty first century as we face the subtle assaults of a godless materialism.

For a moment, let’s come at the Divine Will from another angle. When we pray the Our Father, the archetypal prayer given to us by Jesus Himself, and if we actually try to concentrate on the words, is it perhaps not more honest for many of us to admit that when we say:

*“Your will be done” we really mean:  
“My will be done”.*

Ouch – maybe that’s an uncomfortable thought, but, having prayed the Our Father, how many of us then go on to do exactly what we had intended doing and thinking all along? Surely the immediate and necessary consequence of praying



the Our Father is to then take time to try and discern what His Will might actually be for us? That, by the way, is a huge thing whenever we consider the Divine Will – **discernment!**

Another key term when we consider the Divine Will is our own human will. It has



been rightly said that free will is not the freedom to do just as we please without consequences or accountability – if that were the case then there would be no such thing as sin. We are in fact free in order to choose the good, to choose love. If we choose the bad, then we commit sin, and potentially risk rejecting our eternal home in the Kingdom of Heaven.

*Surely the... consequence of praying the Our Father is to then take time to try and discern what His Will might actually be for us?*

So, we can understand the Divine Will as God's proper intention for us in every situation. This Divine intention presents us with a choice (or series of choices), but a choice that isn't a "take it or leave it" option. Indeed, given that the intention is given by God, it has a mandatory quality and we should use our choices to fall into line with the divine will. But since to be human is to be fallible, knowing and doing God's Will isn't always clear-cut. Yet the difficulties of receiving God's righteous orders are all on our side, for God does speak, and speak eloquently, but we are so very heedless of His words and signs. God speaks to us through Holy Scripture and the Sacraments and liturgies of the Church. He speaks to us through nature. He speaks to us through human history. He very much speaks to us through the secular world and the signs of the times. He speaks to us through one another. He also speaks to us in the silence of our hearts, in our feelings, and even through our reactions to sin and suffering.

God's Will impacts our individual actions, both great and small, and absolutely everything matters to Him. But importantly, God's Will impacts on our

attitudes and life stances. For example, we may go faithfully to Mass every Sunday but hold a grudge against a neighbour, defraud our customers, or even harbour racist attitudes.

The ancient Greek aphorism holds true – know thyself. If we truly know ourselves, then we know that, no matter what a secular world says, God is not an option. The whole purpose of our existence is God. Our duty is therefore to respond to His love by saying yes to love. You might say: I'm a Catholic! I know that! But this knowledge of God's sovereignty over our lives isn't simply a 'head knowledge', and it really needs to permeate into every fibre of our being.

For Jesus, the Father's Will wasn't just some intellectual assent – it was His very food. In other words, it brought life, purpose and vigour to his entire being. Through his commitment to doing God's will, He could face and embrace hard situations, and embrace suffering and loss, to the point of sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, to the point of a horrendous death on the Cross. The Resurrection that followed was also the Divine Will.

We're not playing at games here. Consider an area of constant tension within our beloved Church – disputes between so called traditionalists and progressives, particularly in regard to the appropriate forms of the liturgy or how to apply Jesus' teaching in pastoral care. These two groups are often deeply entrenched even to the point where folk leave the Church because it is either too 'modern' or too 'fossilised'. Pope Francis knows this tension all too well and he knows the likely consequences if he pushes matters too far too quickly. To the diehard traditionalists and progressives, I



would like to quote a short verse by the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai:

*"From the place where we are right,  
flowers will never grow in the spring.*

*The place where we are right is hard  
and trampled like a yard.*

*But doubts and loves dig up the world  
like a mole, a plow."*

It may seem odd to emphasise "doubts and loves" when we are talking about responding to the Divine Will but there are certain qualities that are the touchstone of

whether or not we are truly attempting to discern God's Will. Key among these are humility, openness, and a preparedness to change. There is moreover a 'holy hesitancy' required of the true disciple – simply because ... we are not God! In contrast the qualities that indicate we are not following His Will include arrogance, inflexibility, and rashness. Such people will regard hesitancy as weakness of belief, and compromise will not be found in their vocabulary.

Coming back to Cardinal Mercier's wonderful prayer – it is underpinned by humility and submission. Part of the

power of this prayer to the Holy Spirit is that, if it is prayed frequently and prayed from the heart, it actually opens us up to receiving God's Will. We are explicitly asking Him to reveal His Will to us and promising to submit and obey. This is discernment! Cardinal Mercier's formula is simple logic: to know God's Will and to do it = sanctity.

If we truly know ourselves, then we know that, no matter what ... God is not an option

As a project manager by trade, I know that whenever you are faced with an important task or project, the best way to proceed is to break the overall task down into smaller logical chunks or stages. If I can be permitted to apply this to the Christian life, I would suggest the following:

- 1 *absorb His love*
- 2 *discern His Will*
- 3 *act on it*
- 4 *reflect and doubt!*
- 5 *repeat 1 - 4!*

Bear with me on this!

The first task of the disciple is to give proper time to absorb the unconditional and overwhelming love of God for each one of us. As it were, to sunbathe in the radiance of His love (no fear of getting sunburn or cancer with this!). While we do this, we essentially relax. This is the core of prayer, meditation and silence. It naturally leads us on to praise, which is both our highest duty and privilege.

The second key task is then to take time to look inwards, into our soul, remembering the whole person, spirit, heart, mind and, very importantly, body.

In the light of His love, and only in the light of His love, we face our inner reality, acknowledging our sinfulness (neither exaggerating nor minimising it) but also our values, life stances and blessings (and we can never exhaust cataloguing our blessings). During this internal reflection we can attempt to discern our situation and our priorities, and importantly, allow the Holy Spirit to 'give us His orders'.

The third task is then simply to obey His orders as we understand them, without regard to cost because His way is always best, and He will never ever be outdone in generosity.

The fourth task is crucial – take time to prayerfully reflect on what we've done in His name, and always be open to correction, in humble submission, because none of us has a crystal ball (thank God!), and none of us knows all the aspects of any situation. Religious arrogance and intolerance are always a denial of His Will.

Soldiers sign away their consciences to their superior officers, even to the point of killing. We are truly soldiers for Christ and we need to completely sign over our wills to His Divine Will, but we may be entirely confident that in doing so we are fulfilling our very destiny helping to build His Kingdom of Love, and He will never lead us astray.

As ever Our Blessed Mother points the way in regard to the Divine Will. As she said at the wedding feast at Cana: "Do whatever He tells you".





## **The Church without Walls 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.

I met a 'servant of God' some years ago; he was a New Church pastor and not a Catholic Christian. He was of a different mould than some in that non-denominational tradition. He had a small number of committed members and helpers. He went out on the streets meeting, talking with and praying for people in need, often homeless or addicts and also the seemingly more respectable who were holding interior agonies of their own. He organised charitable food aid (this was before food banks) and clothing.

His gathering for worship, his 'church', was held outside, meeting, in fact, in the

piazza of Westminster Cathedral. It was a random assembly, some stopping as they passed by; some faithfully returning because of the love and care shown to them. He called this 'the Church without Walls'.

My dramatised dream, 'The Lenten Jesus' caused some confusion when I spoke of the Church buildings having no walls. They had a roof and a floor, but how would these stand without walls to support and build upon? The point about dreams is that they are rarely logical. Such an image as my 'church without walls' is non-discursive and symbolic. The Church as a whole has a 'roof' and a 'floor' as it



has form, presence, substance, gifts and oversight. It is more than the individual's interior faith or that of a selective group as met in the piazza. However, it cannot be contained like trying to hold water in the hands. As Gerard Manley-Hopkins puts it in 'God's Grandeur':

*"The world is charged with the glory of God.*

*It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;*

*It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil..."*

*If we erect walls, we have fortresses and not places of loving invitation.*

If we try to contain, we entomb. I don't know if anyone remembers the comedian Dave Allen who had part of finger missing and always hosted with a glass of whiskey in his hand? One of his jokes spoke of a soul being shown around Heaven by St Peter. There was a huge wall that circled round one area. When asked why that was there, St Peter replied; "Oh, that's for the Catholics. They think that they are the



only ones here!". If we erect walls, we have fortresses and not places of loving invitation.

We may say, rightly, that the Catholic Church has a solid foundation and universality, a rock to pray upon; we may rightly say that the Pope is a focus of unity and gift of caring oversight. Yet, don't disparage those of Christ who are worshipping and ministering without consciousness of those gifts. I believe that they would have such depth, strength and security if they came further in and under that roof, standing on that floor. Still, they may put many of us to shame with their dedication and charity. My friend's 'Church without Walls' is part of us and we of it and the separations are a wound in the Body.

*My friend's 'Church without Walls' is part of us and we of it and the separations are a wound in the Body.*

Likewise, some of my Anglican priest friends live sincere, caring and worshipful lives. They believe so much of the Catholic faith and spirituality. For example (though I know this is a little extreme) there is a priest of that Communion who until recently (he is now in advanced years) rose at 5am each morning to walk to the end of his garden and celebrate his mass in his garden-shed chapel. He wore his cassock when shopping (to the frustration of his dear, long-suffering wife!), said his rosary in the street and spoke gently to various needy individuals who passed by. I have talked with him about 'crossing the Tiber' as we call becoming Catholic, and he says with all his heart, "But I am a Catholic in the Church of England". This is sincere and devoted after a life of such faith and intent. I cannot criticise unkindly

or judge him, though some have urged me to do so. He is not befuddled, horribly deceived or sinful. He loves God and is loved. I found it chilling when someone suggested that he risked his salvation for not 'coming in'. That man shows more concerned piety than many a cradle or convert Catholic. (I am not arguing about *Apostolicae Curae* and the question of Anglican Orders here, merely speaking of him as who he is at heart.) He is an exemplar who I am honoured to have met. Do I wish he could stand on the solid ground under the roof? Of course, I do. Do I wish I could concelebrate with him at the altar? Of course, I do, but he is still part of us along with the 'pastor in the piazza' and so many others joined in our common baptism and in His name.

In truth, Christ is 'out there' in the entire world, especially with the broken and needy ones. They are also a part of us, and if they are to be brought under the healing wing of the One who died for all and seeks to gather his 'chicks' like a 'mother hen' (cf Matthew 23:37), then we need to dismantle some of our barriers and attitudes. They just get in the way. If we want them to look within, we have to also look without.



## The Two Key Rules of Faith **by Martin Ryan**

Many years ago, when I was studying for the priesthood, I lived with other seminarians in a fairly ordinary looking house in a fairly ordinary looking street. One day when most of us were out at college, one of our community who had a naughty sense of humour answered the door to two Mormons. He listened politely to their presentation and then suggested they come back that night when everyone was at home. They went off thinking they had a positive invite and potential converts. When they appeared that night they were led into the common room and were immediately suspicious to see a large group of young men. They began their speech, but it wasn't long before they were taken to task on some of their assertions, particularly when they started criticising the Catholic Church. As they struggled to cope, they, in desperation, asked who we were. It was explained to them that we were a Catholic seminary and in the room with them as well as students doing six years of intensive study there were three lecturers who specialised in Scripture, theology and Church history. They couldn't get out of our house fast enough!

If you've ever had the experience of Protestant missionaries knocking on your door and trying to convert you, you may have answered "No thanks, we're Catholic!" However, that can often spur them on to argue with you in the hopes that they might win over "lost souls".



They often rely on Catholics being fairly shaky in their knowledge of faith, and they sometimes sense, it seems, that they can browbeat you into submission. I have found one of their classic attacks on Catholicism is: "You Catholics believe things which are not in the Bible!"

*...the very first Christians didn't have the Bible as we know it - they only had the Jewish Scriptures...*

Well here's a thought: the very first Christians didn't have the Bible as we know it – they only had the Jewish Scriptures and many of these early Christians weren't even Jewish. The four Gospels and the other books of the New Testament weren't written for some time after Jesus ascended into heaven. How on earth did these early Christians manage to keep their faith on the right lines? Answer: the oral teaching of the apostles and those they formally appointed to teach the faith. Those early Christians didn't have the New Testament - with Divine inspiration and guidance, they wrote it!



Protestants, nonetheless, use certain texts from the New Testament to 'prove' their argument for 'sola scriptura', that is, scripture is the only authority for matters of faith. Without going into detail, all these texts do not state that scripture is the sole authority and indeed the texts are invariably taken out of context. The Protestant argument for sola scriptura is in fact a dead end.

Kenneth Hensley, a Protestant minister who converted to Catholicism states:

*"As I focused on this key issue - the issue of authority, the most important issue of all - I came to believe that sola scriptura had not been the faith of the earliest Christians; that it was completely unworkable, having led since the time of the Reformation to the fragmentation of Protestantism into countless denominations and sects and independent churches; that it didn't make sense logically; that it wasn't even the teaching of the New Testament. In other words, I came to see that sola scriptura refuted itself."*

of the Bible, and there were many early religious texts to choose from, had to be vetted before they were officially added to the formal compilation, called the 'Canon' of Scripture. Who did the vetting? The early bishops and theologians gathered in Councils of the Catholic Church, notably the Council of Rome in 382! This vetting was extremely important because what was included in the Canon of Scripture was therefore understood as the inerrant Word of God. Far from Scripture being the sole rule of faith, Scripture as we know it in the Bible was compiled and authorised by the teaching authority of the Catholic Church, which we call the 'Tradition'. Ironically, some Protestants went on to adjust their set of Bible books, applying their own 'tradition' and thereby compromising the very principle of sola scriptura!

*"...I came to believe that sola scriptura had not been the faith of the earliest Christians..."*

Protestants have a problem here – having rejected the authority of the Catholic Church mediated by the Pope and the bishops through the apostolic succession, that is, the clear and direct line of inherited authority and teaching from Peter and the apostles. They have to maintain one single rule of faith, which is of course the Bible. But the Bible didn't fall gift wrapped from heaven. All the books







As Catholics we have always held that there are two principle rules of faith:

- ~ *Sacred Scripture, which we acknowledge as the inerrant Word of God;*
- ~ *and Tradition, the accumulated wisdom and teaching passed down through the centuries in the apostolic succession stemming from Jesus' commission to Peter and the apostles.*

## The Second Vatican Council

This tradition is equally sacred and is not a mere collection of stories and human customs. It has to be understood as the formal ability of God's Church to 'loose and bind' (Matthew 16: 19), and in its infallible aspects has to be carefully promulgated by papal authority. As such, Tradition mediates Scripture and Scripture mediates Tradition, both working in a divine symbiosis to provide the people of

God with clear doctrine and protection against all forms of dubious teachings and heresies.

It isn't any surprise, therefore, that since the Reformation, Protestantism has tended to fragment and continually split into myriad different churches – because it denied and separated itself from the central authority that Jesus had instituted in His Church precisely to preserve it from fracturing which is what usually happens when large groups of people hold different views, even on key aspects of the faith.

If all this sounds like an attack on Protestant and other Christian churches, we should remember that there is a huge deal of goodness and wisdom in these other denominations, and in these more enlightened times we should readily acknowledge that we can learn from other churches and ecclesial communities. It isn't a case that other Christian groups are wrong, and we are right, perhaps it's

more a case of good, better, and best. The Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church, which met in the early 1960s, constituted one of the great magisterial teaching events of our faith. It declared that the true Church of Jesus subsists in the Catholic Church. The key word here is 'subsists'. What the Council taught was that there are certain fundamental elements that constitute the true Church of Jesus, and while some Protestant and other denominations may have some key elements, it is only the Holy Catholic Church that truly contains all the essential elements of Jesus' Church. This allows us to recognise that the Catholic Church can, at times, be at fault, and that it may not always completely respond to the Holy Spirit's promptings, but it is always the Church that God ordained as His Church, and that the gates of hell will never prevail against it.

## *Tradition mediates Scripture and Scripture mediates Tradition*

How blest we are as Catholics to have two such tremendous sources of God's revelation! While Scripture does indeed contain a vast treasury of spiritual truth and wisdom, and guidance for our daily lives, there is much that it doesn't contain. The Holy Bible is many things, but it is also clearly not many other things: it isn't a science textbook; it isn't either a formal history book, though it does contain many historical facts and personages. What it is pre-eminently is a **love letter** – God's love letter to His people. And the love-truth within its pages is often couched in stories and parables, because as any child will tell you, stories are brilliant ways of getting a message across, and can have many depths of meaning.

Indeed, one of the problems with taking the view that Scripture alone has authority in matters of faith is that there is a tendency to take it literally, and that is something we should be very wary about doing. Verses such as Jesus saying, "if your right-hand sins, cut it off!" (Matthew 5: 30), have to be understood for what they really are. This particular verse is an example of a form of speaking that Jews in Jesus' time understood as 'strong words' – in other words, Jesus as a Jew, speaking to Jews, is emphasising the seriousness of sin and its consequences. Jesus is not of course advising us to mutilate ourselves! Taking the Bible literally is a bit like solving Rubik's cube by dismantling it – missing the point entirely!

We as Catholics reverence Sacred Scripture, but we acknowledge it is the *Word of God written in the words of men*, men of a certain time and culture, and that, on a word by word basis, it can be confusing and even upsetting. We need the teaching authority of the Church which is built on centuries of dedicated prayer and study to guide us in understanding its message. However, that doesn't preclude its wonderful ability to allow God to speak to us through Holy Scripture in personal devotion.

And having the glorious Tradition accumulated over long centuries also enables us to enrich our faith with wonderful treasures such as the Marian doctrines, and also allows us to respond to important human concerns which were never conceivable in Jesus' time and therefore never mentioned in Scripture – such as genetic engineering and climate change.

Do we as Catholics really appreciate the enormity of what God has provided for His beloved people in His Holy Church? Praise Him!

## **Two Boats Full (Luke 5:1-11) 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.



**I**f Jesus was standing one day by the lake of Gennesaret, with the crowd pressing around to hear the word of God – pressing so closely he could hardly stand, and they could hardly tell what was going on. He caught sight of two boats close to the shore; the fishermen were sitting nearby washing their nets. Despite their tiredness, they were looking with interest at the crowd around the wandering rabbi.

Jesus went to one of the boats – Simon’s – and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Simon and his companions

complied willingly, so Jesus sat down in the boat, where all could now see him, and taught the crowds from there.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, who had been listening, enthralled, “Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch.”

“Master,” Simon replied, “we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.”

His companions heard this and sighed – they’d have to wash the nets all over again before they could go to their beds.

But they did as Peter told them.

*As soon as the nets splashed into the water, the lake seemed to boil...*

As soon as the nets splashed into the water, the lake seemed to boil... At once, the nets were bursting with fish, so many that they began to tear. They signalled frantically to their companions in the other boat to come and help them and for long minutes all was hauling, grunting, urgent commands ... water splashed everywhere, fish flopped, until the boats were beginning to founder, the last fish were released, and the nets hauled in.

*His companions stood, calf-deep in fish, staring at Jesus; they were all overcome.*

Simon Peter struggled to where Jesus stood on the step in the bow, above the water and fish, holding a hawser lightly for balance and smiling slightly. He threw himself down at Jesus's feet, amid the water and slimy fish. "Leave me, Lord! For I am a sinful man!"

His companions stood, calf-deep in fish, staring at Jesus; they were all overcome. They had never known a catch like this.

In the other boat, James and John, sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners, also gaped in disbelief.

Jesus took Simon's hands and helped him up out of all the fish. "Do not be afraid," he told him, "from now on it is men you will catch."

Then he tilted his head meaningfully towards the waves breaking over the side of the boat. Breaking free of his paralysis, Peter hurried to bring the wallowing boat

back to land. His companions laughed with joy as the fish flopped all around them. They were rich! At any rate, they would be comfortable for some months, after selling this catch!

Once the keel touched the shore, Jesus stepped lightly out and with a smile and murmured thank you, began to walk away.

"Lord?" called Simon. **"Lord!"**

Jesus looked back and smiled but didn't stop. Simon leapt from the boat and raced up the slope after him.

"Simon!" called his boat hands, "What about the fish!"

"You have them!" called Simon, without pausing. He reached Jesus's side, shot an anxious look and was reassured with a smile.

"Hey! Wait for us!" called James and John, scrambling from the boat.

Racing up the slope, they fell in behind, panting, eyes wide with joy and fear at what they were doing.

They were walking away from more worldly wealth than they'd ever had.

But they didn't look back.



## The Prayer of Contemplation 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 trained for 2 years as a spiritual director at the London Centre for Spiritual Direction. She works as a registered adult nurse.

“Normally it does not feel like prayer” says Ronald Rolheiser of contemplative prayer.<sup>1</sup> I, too, would say it is not like any other method of prayer simply because it isn’t a “method” in that you do something and prayer or the feeling of prayer is achieved by your own actions. Contemplative prayer is a truly undeserved gift from God as, essentially, it is to sit in the presence of God. It is God who allows this prayer, but one has to also be in the correct disposition of heart to receive, remembering to take off your metaphorical shoes as you will be standing on holy ground, like Moses before the burning bush.

Start by finding a quiet place alone where you know you won’t be disturbed; then begin by using a centering prayer or simple meditation to encourage stillness. Then, you turn your soul to God in an open contemplative, listening stance (it is worth noting here that if you are talking to God you can’t listen to Him!). Whereas meditative prayer is active in that you concentrate or focus on a piece of Scripture or Icon to read over and over allowing it to speak to you, you notice, sense, feel and wander at what is revealed, which might lead you to more activity like a prayer of petition or thanksgiving. Contemplation, on the other hand is the opposite, a lack of activity and concentration, you clear your mind, empty your soul and just wait with an open heart – you wait humbly in a contemplative stance.

1 Rolheiser, R. The Shattered Lantern: rediscovering a felt presence of God: Pg 199

*...you clear your mind, empty your soul and just wait with an open heart – you wait humbly in a contemplative stance.*



Rolheiser who is an American Catholic priest of the Order of Oblates of Mary Immaculate, uses a parable of a little fish to describe our search for God. One day this little fish swam up to his mother and asked, “Mummy, where is this water that I hear so much about?” The Mother replied, “You stupid little fish! It’s all about you and in you. Just swim up on the beach and lie there for a while and you’ll find out.” The little fish in this parable are those people who say, “Where is this God I hear so much about?” Rolheiser suggests here that God, to us, is like the ocean to this little fish; God is all around us and in us. Rolheiser poses the question if we can never get outside of God how can we keep ourselves aware of God’s reality particularly when the trials of life seem more real than the presence of God? The answer, Rolheiser says, comes from Classical spiritual authors, not just from



Christianity, but within all other major religious of the world - is the practice of contemplative prayer<sup>2</sup>.

Rolheiser describes an example of prayer of contemplation like this:

*"... you decide to spend half an hour in prayer. You sit down in a quiet place. However, for contemplation you do not bring the Bible, nor do you bring anything to pray about. You begin... by making a brief act of meditation. You actively focus yourself on what you are about to do; pray. Then you calm and center yourself, perhaps by using a breathing technique and a prayer word... Then begin... What do you do? Nothing. You let your heart and mind go and you interfere with the stream of feelings and consciousness only when you catch yourself concentrating very long on anything... The whole time of prayer, save for a brief explicit act of meditation at the beginning and again at the end, consists in this stream of consciousness and feeling. This discipline is more of not concentrating than concentrating."*<sup>3</sup>

So, if this contemplation is just sitting in this stream of consciousness, Rolheiser poses the question, how do you know you are praying? He explains this by expanding on the little fish parable. Instead of the Mother of the little fish saying to him to swim up to the beach, what if she was

able to set up a slide projector and screen at the bottom of the ocean to show him pictures, slides and videos of water? Rolheiser says then suppose she switched the projection equipment off and told her little son, "Now you have some idea of what water is, you've seen the pictures of it. Now I want you to simply sit in it and let it flow through you." Rolheiser says, in essence, that is what meditation and contemplation are. He likens the slide show to what we do when we meditate, but all thoughts and feelings about God, good though they are, are no substitute for the reality of God's presence. Rolheiser says at some point meditation must give way to reality – to contemplation – we must sit in God's reality<sup>4</sup>.

*...at some point meditation must give way to reality – to contemplation – we must sit in God's reality.*

I have used Rolheiser and his analogy of the little fish as it is the best description of the prayer of contemplation that I have come across, but unbeknown to me it has also been used a fair bit by St Catherine of Sienna. In my own practice I also find using another analogy useful as I experience sitting in God's presence like experiencing a current – one of consciousness and feelings. This is not something that comes from me, it doesn't happen every time and I have to empty myself and wait on God patiently and persistently. However, sometimes I do feel I am drifting on a current when I sit in the presence of God which I liken to the Trans- Atlantic Drift, a fast flowing current deep below the ocean. On the surface nothing of the power of this current is visible, but it is always present, and this never-ending powerful force never stops.

2 Rolheiser, R. The Shattered Lantern: rediscovering a felt presence of God: Pg 196

3 Rolheiser, R. The Shattered Lantern: rediscovering a felt presence of God: Pg 198

4 Rolheiser, R. The Shattered Lantern: rediscovering a felt presence of God: Pg 198-199



Having a strong faith is a pivotal component of this style of prayer.

In Finding Nemo<sup>6</sup>, a child's cartoon film, Nemo, the boy fish, goes missing and the whole story is about his father Marlon who never gives up hope searching for him (sounds familiar?). On his journey Marlon joins with the lovely Dory (a pretty lady fish) whose disability is a 30 second memory (like me, some may relate!). They discover the diver, who took Nemo for his fish tank, lives in Sydney and on the grapevine, they discover the quickest way to get there is to join the Trans-Atlantic Drift. They learn from others that the easiest way to join the current is to stop still and then take a huge leap into the current. They take that leap and join it along with many others (including friendly turtles) who enjoy the ride. Now this may not be a good analogy, but where it comes into its own is Marlon and Dory had to prepare by stopping and staying still before taking that leap which for us represents taking a leap of faith. Having a strong faith is a pivotal component of this style of prayer.

## Marlon and Dorey joining the transatlantic drift

Rolheiser says do not assess or analyze during or after this prayer of contemplation as you may do with other forms of prayer. You practise this over a lengthy period of time perhaps several

months and then check yourself; how have you changed, are you calmer, more peaceful, more restful? He says if there is progress, if there is change in you then you, indeed, have been praying and God is working in you<sup>7</sup>. It is important to note here that everyone's experience of this style of prayer will be different. I feel lightness, movement of soul and a feeling of floating and often my hands and arms tingle. Others may not feel or experience anything at all. If it is God's will, He will reveal something in an individual way, but if nothing is experienced then that can still be classed as contemplative prayer but only time will tell. The art of practicing contemplative prayer can be transforming as the closer to the reality of God you allow yourself to be, the more like Christ you become and the more you become aware of the reality of God's presence in your life. This is why the prayer of contemplation is commonly called the highest form of prayer. It will transform you. Ready to take a leap of faith?

## REFERENCES

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FINDING NEMO (2003) - A Disney Film - Hollywood, Pixar

6 FINDING NEMO (2003) - A Disney Film - Hollywood, Pixar

7 Rolheiser, R. The Shattered Lantern: rediscovering a felt presence of God: Pg 200

## The Miraculous Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Succour by Martin Ryan



Many Catholics, particularly older Catholics, will be familiar with the novena devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of 'Mother of Perpetual Succour'. While 'succour' may be a slightly unusual word in everyday usage, Catholics will nonetheless know that it means 'help' and that the theme of devotion to Our Lady under this title therefore means: her unending help and assistance for all of us. And while the title is sometimes styled as 'Mother of Perpetual Help', the word succour perhaps has an even stronger emphasis since it is derived from the Latin

meaning 'to run beneath', as in "to be very quick to come to someone's aid". The novena devotion itself stems from a venerable picture, or more properly icon, that is many hundreds of years old and has a fascinating history.

A novena is commonly a devotion held for a period of nine days or weeks, yet when it comes to this particular devotion the practice can itself be 'perpetual' – ongoing throughout the course of the year, year after year, and is actually referred to as the 'perpetual novena'. Note that the word 'novena' derives from Latin for the

number nine and is thought to be based on the nine days that the apostles and Our Lady spent in constant prayer after the Ascension of Jesus and until the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

*...the word succour... is derived from the Latin meaning 'to run beneath', as in "to be very quick to come to someone's aid".*

Perhaps it's harder to find a local church in Britain that still holds the weekly novena to Our Lady under this title nowadays, partly due to the amalgamation of some parishes as the number of priests continues to decline, but pretty well most Catholic churches will have a copy of the famous picture somewhere in the church building. This hugely popular devotion was spread to many countries by the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, or Redemptorists as the priests and brothers of this missionary order are perhaps better known. The Redemptorists became part of the long and intriguing history of the picture, whose origins can be traced back to the late Middle Ages, though only God knows how old the image actually is.

The earliest record of the icon is in Crete towards the end of the fifteenth century. Even at this early date the icon had clearly existed for some considerable time and was recognised as being of a great age. However due to conflict, and possibly theft, the icon eventually found its way to Rome where it was, not without some drama, finally installed for public veneration in a small church dedicated to St Matthew. There is record that this specific location was actually asked for by Our Lady herself! The icon then resided in St Matthew's for almost three hundred years and many miracles were attested to

it, making the small church a very popular pilgrimage site.

Military conflict again caused the icon to be removed for safety when St Matthew's was destroyed, and then in the confusion and turmoil it was stored elsewhere in Rome for a period of over sixty years and its significance largely forgotten. Luckily an old monk had remembered the miraculous icon and had the presence of mind to tell a young altar boy about it. This altar boy not only went on to become a Redemptorist priest but was based at the new Redemptorist general house and church in Rome which was built - on the site of old St Matthew's...



*This hugely popular devotion was spread to many countries by the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, or Redemptorists....*

The icon was now located but it took a sermon by a priest scholar to remind people that Our Lady herself had asked for the icon to be installed at a very specific site in Rome. In 1865 therefore the Redemptorist general superior, Fr Nicolas Mauron petitioned Pope Pius IX that Our Lady's wish be granted, and the icon returned to her chosen location, over which the church dedicated to St Alphonsus Liguori, the founder of the



Redemptorists, now stood. The Pope was not surprisingly keen to ensure that Our Lady's wish was fulfilled and ordered the icon to be moved to its current place of honour. He had two conditions though: the Redemptorists were to provide the previous holders with a suitable replacement, and the Redemptorists were to foster devotion to Our Lady under the title of Perpetual Succour. Pope Pius also asked for an exact replica to be provided for his own personal devotion.

Miracles were again attested from devotion to Our Lady under this title and not surprisingly St Alphonsus church in Rome became a focus for pilgrimage. Among the many miraculous events recorded, English Bishop Richard Lacy, who was the first Bishop of Middlesbrough, gave personal testimony of his own amazing cure. He had been a student in Rome when the icon was solemnly installed in St Alphonsus and he recalled being hugely moved by the occasion. He had suffered from a debilitating illness for nine years

and prayed to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and was instantly and completely cured!

The Redemptorists took the papal command to spread this devotion very seriously and, as their apostolate took them all over the world, the novena was quickly established in Catholic communities across the globe. As part of this devotional outreach, numerous copies of the icon were created and after being touched to the miraculous original were then sent around the world. And with this global spread so too did the miracles continue to be experienced across the world, greatly helping to intensify the devotion. In some American parishes eight to ten separate novenas had to be scheduled on the same day to cater for the crowds!

As a Redemptorist myself, visiting Rome in the 1980s, I was privileged to be able to climb the steps behind the high altar at St Alphonsus and touch the venerable picture in the quiet of the empty church.



As well as the intriguing story of the icon's history, the image itself tells a very special story. It has to be said that the overall imagery perhaps doesn't suit what we in the western tradition would be comfortable with: the proportions of Mother Mary and child Jesus are somewhat unnatural, and the portrayal of their garments are very stylised. The image is very much in the Eastern Orthodox style which emphasises message over realism. For the Orthodox Christian, icons are much more than mere pictures: they are conceived and created through prayer and devotion, and the artist seeks to allow the Holy Spirit to speak through the image. Icons are therefore regarded as holy and worthy of veneration. The icon of Perpetual Succour is considered to be from a tradition arising from St Luke who knew Mary so that he painted her image. This style presents Mary as the very channel to Jesus as she holds Him out to us. In the picture we see that the child Jesus is being held tenderly in His mother's arms, and therefore the key message is one of motherly love, a love which we know is also for us too as Mary herself was given to all humanity as our mother by Jesus from the cross.

*Mary is a mother who is quick to comfort and assist us in any suffering or anxiety.*

Her comforting of Jesus is all the more profound because Jesus appears to be unsettled if not frightened – signified by his sandal falling from His foot in alarm. His fright is caused because two angels, identified as the great archangels Michael and Gabriel from the Greek initials written above them, are showing Him the instruments of the Passion: the cross, the nails, the lance, sponge and reed. The angels are therefore showing Him a

vision of His cruel suffering and death in the future. The inference of this for each one of us is clear: Mary is a mother who is quick to comfort and assist us in any suffering or anxiety.

There is much more symbolism in the image. Mary's mouth is tiny in proportion to her face, and this is to emphasise that she listens and ponders matters deeply in her heart, and she thereby promotes the importance of silence if we are to truly hear the voice of God in our own hearts. Her countenance appears solemn and even sad, and this suggests her empathy with her child's fear, and thereby her empathy with us in all our human frailties. Both her hands, while supporting her frightened child, are not grasping Him tight, and this reflects the fact that she has ample room for our fears and troubles as well. The background is vivid gold and again this symbolises the glory of eternal life in heaven, which is ever Mary's priority for her spiritual children.

And so, the icon truly portrays a mother who is always ready and prompt to comfort her beloved children, and most especially when they are troubled in any way. Thousands of devout Catholics have grasped this core message of our faith and surely countless sincere souls have been supported and encouraged in their faith despite trials and tribulations. No wonder then that this icon is one of the most well known and loved images of Mother Mary, and long may our devotion to her under this special title continue, both for her honour and for our pilgrimage to heaven. And as with all devotion to Mary: honour the mother and the good son is honoured too. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

## **Our Lady of the Rosary and the Battle of Lepanto**

**by Roderick Campbell Guion OCDS**



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*Paolo Veronese. The Allegory of the Battle of Lepanto (1573)*

The Angel of Mons is one of those stories which many believe they have heard about and yet when questioned admit they know little about the detail. As I would include myself amongst this number, I decided to do a bit of research. I was broadly aware that the story concerned an angel alleged to have appeared to British troops facing a German attack in August 1914. Having no doubt myself about the importance

and reality of angels, I have had to sadly conclude that the facts suggest something more akin to what we would now call an 'urban myth'. It started with a patriotic short story written soon after the Battle of Mons by a Welshman called Arthur Machen. The story related how phantom bowmen from the Battle of Agincourt were summoned to help British troops facing the numerically superior German attack. Machen was concerned

to hear a few weeks later that the London Evening News intended to publish his story as a news item rather than as a piece of fiction. Nowadays we would say this was probably the earliest example on record of 'fake news' but at the time this was justified as being essential for strengthening the morale of the nation. The story rapidly developed legs of its own and by 1915 the bowmen had evolved to become angels who were now cited as evidence of Divine Providence helping the Allies against an obviously evil enemy. I have to say the idea that God might intervene to back one side at the outset of such a catastrophic war is a troubling question and one best left for those more doctrinally qualified than I. There is however a strange echo to this story in a memorial that we celebrate each year on the 7th October.

*Memorial to Our Lady of the Rosary originally commemorated a crucial defeat of Muslim naval forces at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571.*

On this day there is the Memorial to Our Lady of the Rosary, which originally commemorated a crucial defeat of Muslim naval forces at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. To understand the importance of this event it is necessary to explain that it happened at a time when Providence did not appear to be smiling on Catholic Christianity. Luther's Reformation was tearing apart the north of Europe, whilst in the south internal jealousies were presenting the Ottoman Empire with tempting opportunities for territorial expansion. Constantinople had fallen in 1453 and most of modern-day Spain had been under Muslim control until the re-capture of Granada in 1492

finally expelled the Moors from the Peninsular. Pope Alexander VI was quick to underline the Christian significance of this event by bestowing the title *Los Reyes Catolicos* upon the newly unified Spanish crown, but it was not long before Muslim ambitions resurfaced. In 1571 Famagusta in Cyprus surrendered to the Ottomans after a lengthy siege and appalling atrocities committed against military and civilians alike starkly underlined the clash in cultural values. Pope Pius V was shocked and took urgent action by begging Spain and Venice as maritime nations to bury their mutual distrust and form a combined fleet to prevent Ottoman expansion by sea.

What, we might ask, does all this have to do with our Lady? When it became apparent that the Holy League were going to be heavily outnumbered, Pius's immediate response was to turn to Our Lady for help. Pius was a Dominican and recall here that St Dominic had received a visit from the Virgin Mother whilst he was struggling against the Albigensian heresy. According to tradition, in 1208 Dominic received a vision of Our Lady whilst at Prouille in the south of France and it was said that he was there given the devotion that we now know as the Holy Rosary. He immediately understood this was to be a spiritual weapon for the winning of souls, far more appropriate than the retributory violence being unleashed by Crusader troops. Dominic's message was not lost on Pius and he took immediate action. He ordered that churches in Rome were to remain open for the faithful to pray the Rosary. To maximise public awareness, he also arranged for rosary processions, in which he himself took part despite his severe physical incapacities. When the ships finally set out for sea, instructions were given that the Rosary should continue to be prayed and Mass was to

be celebrated daily on each of the vessels

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*Our Lady of the Rosary sculpture by Franz Mersa*

It turned out that Our Lady would accompany the fleet in another important way. The destiny of Spain at this time was heavily enmeshed with the New World where in 1531 the Virgin had appeared on several occasions to an Aztec convert by the name of Juan Diego. Our Lady asked him to inform the Archbishop of

Mexico of her wish for a commemorative shrine to be built. Understandably the Archbishop felt in need of confirmation of the reliability of this request and all present were shocked when the miraculous image that is now known as Our Lady of Guadalupe was found imprinted upon the folded cloak that Juan Diego had brought with him. At the time

various attempts were made to make authentic copies of the image but without lasting success. The principal problem was that over time the colours and fabric of the copies declined, whilst the original to this day has remained inexplicably pristine, defying all scientific attempts to explain its origin. At that time the Archbishop of Mexico ordered five exact copies to be made, each of which was to be touched to the original miraculous cloak. One of these copies was sent for presentation to Philip II who was the King of Spain and a man of deep faith. In the face of the Ottoman crisis he had no doubt about what he had to do: he sent the

image to Giovanni Andrea Doria, one of the three admirals in charge of the Christian fleet. Doria kept the image in his ship's state room throughout the battle, whilst also flying a blue standard dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe from his mast head. The military details of the battle are not here important other than to say that a larger and more experienced Turkish force was soundly defeated by the ships of the Holy League. Some

military historians have argued that the technically superior Spanish cannon were a significant factor in this but Pius himself had no doubt as to the provenance of the victory. It is reported that on the day of the battle he was going over accounts with his treasurer Bartolo Busotti, when suddenly he stood up and confidently proclaimed: "Let us go and thank God, for this moment our fleet has defeated the Turks." At that time, long before the invention of telecommunications, it would have required two weeks for news of the victory to reach Rome, but Pius seemed to know at the very moment that the event had happened. So, was Our Lady perhaps wanting him to immediately know that his Faith had been rewarded?

*...the Queen of Heaven is the intercessor who begs us to change our personal orientation. She calls for our repentance and for us to follow her decision by aligning our human will to the will of God.*



*Our Lady of Guadalupe*

Ironically the instability caused by the final decline of the Ottoman empire has been cited as one of the precipitating causes of the First World War, which brings us back to the Battle of Mons where this article began. Whilst writing this I have been trying to clarify in my own mind the essential difference between Our Lady's presence at Lepanto and the intervention Arthur Machen imagined for his fictitious bowmen at Mons. What has struck me is that for Christians Mary's *Fiat* was the moment that defined the cosmic turning point of our whole human history – the moment when she freely chose to say in the presence of the Angel Gabriel: 'Let it be with me according to your word' (Lk 1: 38). Looking back over the long history of the reported apparitions of Our Lady it is clear that she has never appeared as a warrior queen, nor wanted to take specific sides to interfere in the course of our secular history. Historical events are after all the logical outcome of the human decisions for which we must learn to be responsible if we are to grow. Instead the Queen of Heaven is the intercessor who begs us to change our personal orientation. She calls for our repentance and for us to follow her decision by aligning our human will to the will of God. There can be no coercion here, as this is a decision that each one of us must freely make. So, as we approach the end of a year where all have faced great times of trial, it is once again October, the month of the Rosary. Might we not take this as a timely reminder to heed Our Lady's repeated calls and return to the devotion that she assures us will aid us in starting our journey anew?



## **Rejoicing in our imperfections: St Thérèse of Lisieux's Little Way of self-knowledge by Anneli** **Figura**



Anneli has studied theology and spirituality at a variety of levels from CCRS to postgraduate and was involved with parish adult formation for over 20 years. She is now a full time PA to her disabled adult daughter. Her particular interests are Carmelite spirituality, ongoing faith formation and the dignity of the human person from conception to natural death.

**S**t Thérèse of Lisieux was one of the first saints I got to know after my conversion to the Catholic faith and also one of the most pivotal; her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, was a major influence in my choosing the spiritual path that would lead me, years later, to become a lay Carmelite. I am, however, just one of many Catholics who number 'little Thérèse' as one of their favourite saints. It is easy to understand why. Quite apart from her personal charm, her path to sanctification, the 'Little Way', is accessible to all, focusing as it does on doing the small tasks of every day with great love and relying on Jesus for the rest. We should not be misled by this 'ordinariness', however; the simplicity of Thérèse, both in her person and her path, is one of great profundity.

*...the 'Little Way', is accessible to all, focusing as it does on doing the small tasks of every day with great love...*

### **The story of a soul**

Most Catholics are familiar with at least the bare bones of Thérèse's story. Born in 1873, she lost her mother (St Zélie Martin) at a very young age and although she was an affectionate child who showed



an early inclination to great piety and a definite aptitude for contemplation, she was also over-sensitive and easily upset. In 1888 she followed two of her elder sisters into the local Carmelite convent at the tender age of 15 (her sister Céline would subsequently also enter). She died of tuberculosis at the age of 24, having passed through great physical suffering married to a 'dark night of the soul'.

Her death, like her life, was marked by an outpouring of passionate love for her Lord – she passed away crying, ‘Oh! I love Him! ... My God, I love you!’

There is a great turning-point within her story. Thérèse was not quite 14 years old when she experienced a ‘conversion’ whose spiritual fruits helped her to understand herself and to use this self-understanding to grow closer to Christ. Thérèse did not keep these fruits for herself; through her life and writings she shared them generously and we too can ‘taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him’<sup>1</sup>.

## The first fruit: self-awareness

Her great conversion happened as the family returned from Midnight Mass in the early hours of Christmas Day. There was a family tradition that Thérèse, the youngest, would find her shoes full of sweets upon their return which she would unpack with glee. Her beloved Papa, feeling tired, remarked how glad he was that this would be the last year in which Thérèse was young enough for the performance of this ritual. Thérèse, unfortunately, overheard and as usual began to react with hurt tears... but suddenly and miraculously, she found enough self-control to swallow them down. Rather than cry, thus obliging her father to comfort her, she recognised and responded compassionately to the fatigue that had provoked his remark and managed to unpack her shoes with delighted exclamations that charmed and restored him. It was a response made, at last, on her father’s terms rather than her

own.

Thérèse had been granted the gift of self-awareness. In one instant, she realised that all the well-meaning efforts she had been making to grow in virtue had been hampered by egocentricity and a need for affirmation. ‘Thérèse was no longer the same; Jesus had changed her heart!’ she wrote.

## Growing in authentic love

Having realised that she could entrust her growth in holiness to God, Thérèse no longer needed to be self-preoccupied. This fed into a new understanding of what authentic love really was: ‘I felt charity enter into my soul, and the need to forget myself and to please others; since then I’ve been happy!’



*The Martin Family*

During Thérèse’s years in Carmel the inevitable frictions inherent in community life took her deeper into this authentic understanding of the nature of love. As Brother Joseph Schmidt points out, she learned that love, with its requirement to accommodate the limitations both of others and of herself, ‘would be filled with self-surrender, self-sacrifice, and emotional suffering’; the peace it brought would be quite different from

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 34:8

'self-centred feelings of comfort and contentment'<sup>2</sup>. In other words, loving others was essentially a question of willingly and cheerfully accepting the Cross.

*...she learned that love... would be filled with self-surrender, self-sacrifice, and emotional suffering;*

## God's work, not ours

Another of the spiritual fruits of Thérèse's Christmas conversion was the understanding that her spiritual growth, rather than depending primarily upon her own efforts, was a free gift of God and that she needed only a willing spirit of co-operation to receive it. In other words, it was God's work, not hers. After all, Thérèse had tried hard for years to achieve self-control over her touchy nature but failed; 'The work I had been unable to do in ten years was done by Jesus in one instant,' she wrote. He did it 'contenting himself with my good will which was never lacking'.

This was a radical insight into the nature of holiness, which in Thérèse's day was widely misconceived as a fearful striving to rid oneself of all vice and become perfect in virtue. St Pope John Paul II highlights one of Thérèse's great spiritual contributions as being 'to heal souls of the rigours and fears of Jansenism, which tended to stress God's justice rather than his divine mercy'<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Schmidt, *Walking the Little Way of Thérèse of Lisieux*, 77

<sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Divini Amoris Scientia* 8.

## 'Don't be too hard on yourself'

Throwing herself upon the mercy and assistance of Jesus was another help in loving her neighbour; understanding that 'when I am charitable, it is Jesus alone who is acting in me, and the more united I am to Him, the more also do I love my Sisters', enabled Thérèse to deal with difficult fellow Sisters both lovingly but also prudently, without expecting more of herself than she had the capacity to give. She would first pray 'very much for this Sister who gave me so many struggles' but retain, without guilt, the option to 'run away like a deserter whenever my struggles became too violent'.

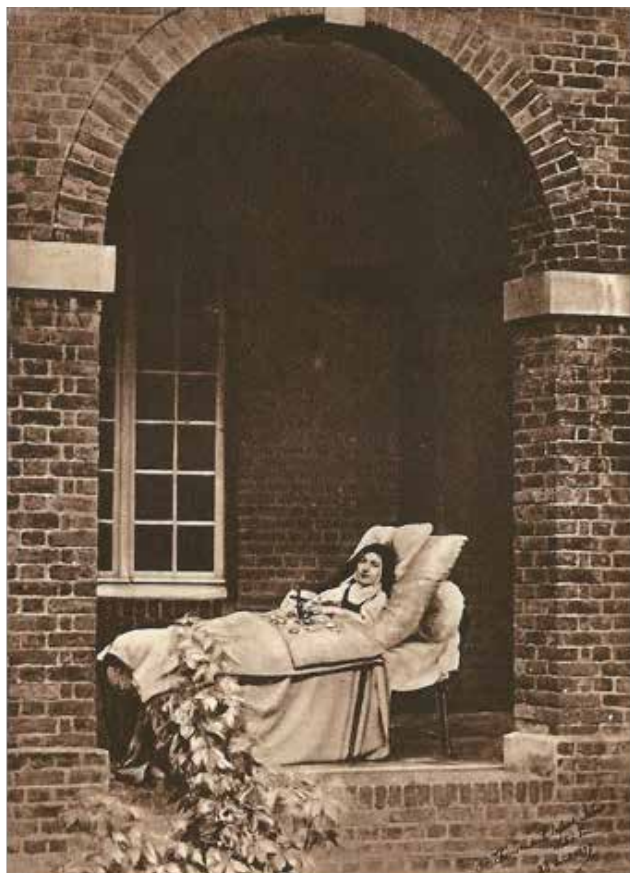
## The freedom to be who one is

Flowing from this self-awareness and dependency on God was a growth in self-integrity. Before her conversion Thérèse had been compromising her personal integrity for years in an attempt to please others 'at any cost'. This emotional insecurity doubtless had its roots in her mother's death and her subsequent feelings of abandonment, feelings which were exacerbated by her beloved elder Sisters' departure for Carmel, but it had led her to do violence to her true self.

*'I am simply resigned to see myself always imperfect and in this I find my joy'.*

## True humility

Her realisation of her own limitations, coupled with an acceptance that she was quite unable **to** conquer them in her own strength, was the catalyst for the birth of Thérèse's 'Little Way' to sanctity. She was once told by a priest to whom she confided her ambition to be a saint, 'What pride and what presumption! Confine yourself



to correcting your faults, to offending God no longer, to making a little progress in virtue each day, and temper your rash desires'. Thérèse, however, had enough courage and trust in God to believe that 'God cannot inspire unrealisable desires. I can, then, in spite of my littleness, aspire to holiness'. But how was she to achieve it?

'I want to seek out a means of going to heaven by a little way, a way that is very straight, very short, and totally new,' she wrote. Meditating on the fact that her conversion had been a gratuitous gift from God, she remembered an elevator that she had seen when in Paris with Papa

and Céline and a great realisation illuminated her soul. She wrote excitedly, 'I wanted to find an elevator which would raise me to Jesus ... The elevator which must raise me to heaven is Your arms, O Jesus! And for this I had no need to grow up, but rather I had to remain little...'

Two parables helped Thérèse develop her understanding of exactly what it meant to 'remain little'. The first was that of the Pharisee and the publican. She noticed that it was the interior disposition of each character that determined their standing with God, not their virtuous acts, of which the Pharisee (who was not justified) had many and the publican

(who was) had none. The Pharisee considered himself self-sufficient, in contrast to the publican who threw himself upon God's mercy with complete abandon, acknowledging his need of God. Thérèse sought to do the same, writing, 'rather than advance like the Pharisee, I repeat, filled with confidence, the publican's humble prayer'.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son Thérèse again observed that the son's moral littleness was a catalyst to his realising his need of his father, which led her to say, 'I am simply resigned to see myself always imperfect and in this I find my joy'.

## 'All you need is love'

As for the holiness she sought, for Thérèse its ultimate definition was to be found in Jesus' final commandment in the Sermon on the Mount: 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect'.<sup>4</sup> This then was the perfection that God desired: an attitude of merciful, compassionate and inclusive loving as exhibited by God Himself.

## Trusting to the end

Thérèse died young and in great pain, but – thanks to her Little Way – also in final happiness. To the end she rested secure in her loving dependency upon God's goodness rather than her own, writing at the end of her autobiography, 'In the evening of this life, I shall appear before You with empty hands, for I do not ask You, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is stained in Your eyes. I wish, then to be clothed in Your own Justice and to receive from Your Love the eternal possession of Yourself.'

God grant that we all remain as little as Little Thérèse.

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4 Matthew 5:43-45,48

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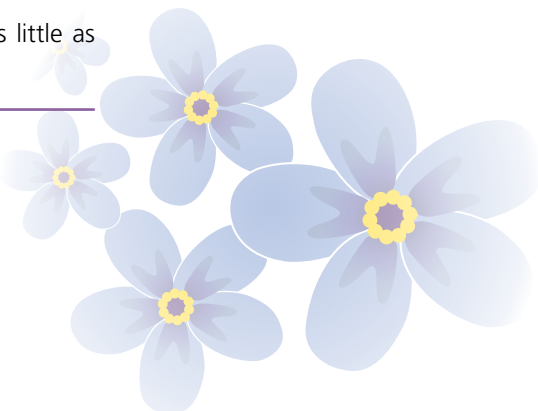
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# **The Role of the Saints in our Christian heritage**

**by Paul Cassidy**

Paul Cassidy has lived in Northern Ireland with his family most of his life and works in the retail sector. He has a keen interest in Religion especially writing about the Catholic faith.

**T**he saints have long been part of our Christian heritage. Some lived long ago and to this day we still pray for their help and they are still part of our lives. We pray to them for help, for assistance, for encouragement. Since they are near God, we know that they can help us. All prayers are heard by God. And God listens to the prayers of the saints as they intercede for us.

Something of a revolution, as it were, has happened in the Church in the past 40-50 years. Since the reign of Pope John Paul II many, many people have been canonised or their cause for canonisation has been opened. This is extraordinary. This may not be due solely to John Paul II himself but to the great outpouring of

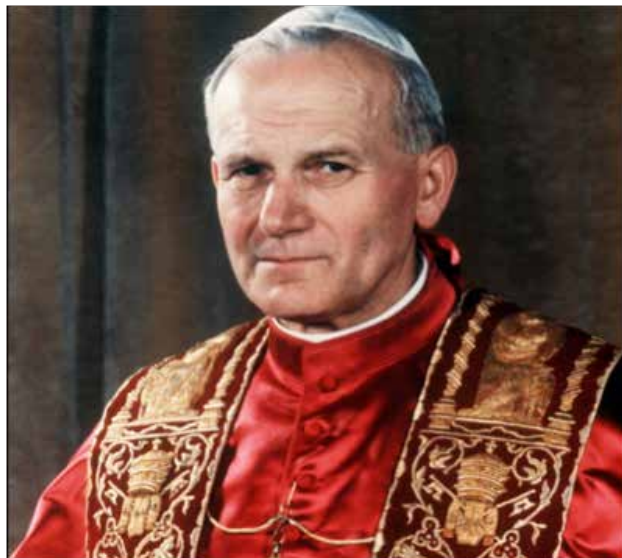
grace by God upon the world. God has always raised up saints but never more so than in our current times. So, let's take advantage of this opportunity and learn about some of these saints and blessed.

Who are the saints? Most of us are very familiar with the following well-known saints: St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Padre Pio, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Rita, St. Anne, St. Philomena, St. Patrick, St. Bridget, St. Christopher, St. Paul, St. Peter, St. George, St. Andrew, St. David, St. Bernard, St. Agnes, St. Martin De Porres, St. Rose, St. Augustine, St. Ursula, St. Barbara, St. Cuthbert, St. Edmund, St. Neot, St. Anthony, St. Therese, the little flower, St. Alphonsus Liguori, and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Many have devotion

to these saints which is not an exhaustive list.

**God has always raised up saints but never more so than in our current times.**

The saints can help us in several ways. Firstly, they can be a model to us, an example that we can imitate by the lives they lead and their relationship with God. When a person learns a trade, he or she learns from the master craftsman. So, too, do



*Pope St John Paul II*

we learn from the master craftsmen who are the saints, because they are well-practiced in being close to God and have a good relationship with Him.

Secondly, since we are on pilgrimage on this earth as we strive to walk along a path that will lead us to God, who better than the saints to help us on our way; they are only too happy to help us. Their prayers of intercession before God are powerful and, in this way, we can receive help when we are discouraged, overwhelmed by life's burdens, or have doubts and struggles with our faith.

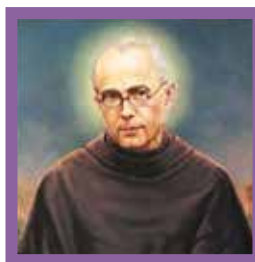
Thirdly, the saints remind us that we too are called to be saints. That is our vocation in life, the call to be holy. The saints by their prayers and example can help to fulfil our vocation from God to be saints. The call to holiness is the goal of our existence in this world. We strive to become saints just like them. Even if we do not succeed or only do so partially, then our good efforts are rewarded. They are an eternal sign to us to improve our lives, to strive to become like them in so far as we can, and if possible, to become like them as saints.

*... it is God who calls a saint. It is His standards by which we must look at the saints...*

It is not easy to define the attributes of saints. We may have a preconception that they must have done great apostolic or missionary work for God, founded movements, or brought whole peoples to God. Or, they must have said a lot of prayers and practiced daily penance and sacrifice. Yes, but I don't think these definitions present the full picture. First, it is God who calls a saint. It is His standards by which we must look at the saints. Sometimes, it is the little things

that people do for God or the intentions in their hearts that God is pleased with and who then sets them on the road to sainthood. St. Therese of Lisieux realised she could never do anything great for God in her convent, as a contemplative nun, but the little things she did for God she did well, and God was so pleased He called her to sainthood.

Some of my favourite saints are the following, of which I will say more: St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Clement Hofbauer, St. Josemaria Escriva, St. Don Bosco, Blessed Titus Brandsma, St. Elizabeth Seton, Blessed Eurosia Fabris, St. Francesca Cabrini, St. Josephine Bakhita, Venerable Edvige Carboni, and Blessed Dina Belanger.



**St. Maximilian Kolbe 1894-1941:** a Polish Franciscan priest, his name is Raymond Kolbe, Maximilian being his

religious name. He showed great love for Our Lady, founding the Militia Immaculate. He travelled to China and Japan to give missions. He was driven by zeal in his love for God. He was imprisoned at Dachau where he sacrificed his life so that a father, who was condemned to death, could live.



**St. Clement Hofbauer 1751-1820:** a Redemptorist priest born in present day Czech Republic, worked tirelessly for the poor and needy in Poland, and expanded the Congregation outside its native

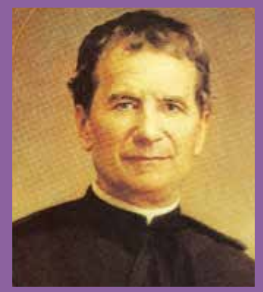
Italy for the first time, having set up a Redemptorist foundation in Vienna. He had great energy and worked mostly among the poor. He is the patron saint of Warsaw and Vienna.



**St. Josemaria Escriva**

**1902-1975:** A Spanish priest, he founded a Catholic organisation, 'The Work of God', to develop and

promote the sanctity and holiness of lay people. His belief was that all are called to holiness. He was an excellent pastor and worked tirelessly with the sick and the poor.



**St. Don Bosco 1815-1888:**

an Italian priest. He worked almost exclusively among the young boys and orphans of his time,

rescuing them from delinquency and shaping them to become responsible Christian people. He was an outstanding pastor. He displayed great compassion towards his flock.



**Blessed Titus Brandsma 1881-1942:**

a Dutch Carmelite priest. His birth name is Anno, his religious

name being Titus, after St. Titus. He taught and lectured at university in Holland and was a popular professor. He became a journalist and stood up for freedom of the press during Nazi occupation. He was imprisoned at Dachau where he was able to give comfort and spiritual support to many people at the camp who were to die there. He himself was sentenced to death at the camp.



**St. Elizabeth Seton 1774-1821:**

an American mother of 3 children. She was of the Church of England's faith and

displayed strong commitment to visiting the poor and helping them with their material needs. Her husband had TB and on a visit to Italy to find relief from his condition he died there. While there Elizabeth converted to the Catholic faith. In America, Elizabeth set up the first Catholic school for girls and established the first American Congregation of Religious Sisters, the Sisters of Charity, who looked after orphans and set up schools for poor children.



**Blessed Eurosia Fabris 1866-1932:**

an Italian mother of 11 children and Secular Franciscan. She took into her home 2 orphaned children and looked after

them eventually marrying the father of the children which she felt was God's will for her. She is renowned for her prayer life and her engagement with people, visiting the sick, catechising the children, leaving a lasting memory on the local people of her sanctity. Her children received her holiness in a high degree, with 3 of her sons becoming priests.

## **St Francesca Cabrini 1880-1952:** an



Italian nun. She was religious from her early years. She set up her own religious Congregation of women. She wanted to work

on the missions in China. Instead of China she was advised to go to America and help the many Italian immigrants who were extremely poor and in great need. She worked tirelessly with the immigrants especially the orphans. She set up schools and hospitals and her Congregation of Religious continued her apostolate.



## **St. Josephine Bakhita 1869-1947:**

born in Sudan she was taken into slavery by Arab traders and was treated brutally by

her enslavers. Eventually passing to an Italian Vice Consul she moved to Italy when that family decided to return

there for safety. Her family gave her to the Canossians Sisters to care for her and educate her. Later, the Italian family wanted to go back to Sudan and take Bakhita with them, but she was so impressed with the Canossian Sisters that she stayed with them and took vows. She is remembered in her local area for her great sanctity and for the spiritual peacefulness and reassurance that she displayed.



## **Venerable Edvige Carboni 1880-1952:** an Italian single woman.

She is known for her great prayerfulness and the visions she had from Jesus. She kept a spiritual journal describing her meetings with Jesus.



## **Blessed Dina Belanger 1897-1929:**

a Canadian nun born in Quebec. She was religious from a young age.

She had conversations with Jesus and wrote an autobiography which revealed her spiritual journey and meetings with Christ.



## Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald by Michael Doyle

On 5 October 2019 Pope Francis made Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald a Cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church.

Archbishop Fitzgerald was born in Walsall, Staffordshire and educated at St Patrick's Roman Catholic School and Queen Mary's Grammar School.

He joined the White Fathers, the Society of Missionaries of Africa, and was ordained as a priest in 1961. For some years he worked in Africa and other countries as a missionary.



In 1987 he was appointed Secretary of the Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christians, which later became the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. He was ordained a Bishop in 1992 and became Archbishop in 2002 when he was appointed President of the Pontifical Council.

In February 2006, he became Nuncio to Egypt and served as the Holy See's representative to the Arab League.

*Cardinal Fitzgerald is fluent in Arabic and he is one of the Catholic Church's foremost experts on Islam and the Quran.*

Archbishop Michael retired at the age of 75 in 2012 but continued to serve the Missionaries of Africa community in Jerusalem. In late 2018 he moved back to England to work in the inner-city parish of St Vincent de Paul in Liverpool.

Cardinal Fitzgerald is fluent in Arabic and he is one of the Catholic Church's foremost experts on Islam and the Quran.

His parents were Irish doctors who were general practitioners in Walsall and were the Doyle family doctors. I remember the Cardinal's father, Dr Tom Fitzgerald, very well; he visited my brother every day when he had pneumonia in the late 1950s.

In 1961, just after his priestly ordination, the Cardinal came to The Mount Church, Globe Street to celebrate Mass. I had the honour to serve on the altar at that time; how little did I know that Fr Michael, as he was then, would be made a Cardinal in Holy Mother Church. It is indeed a great honour for the town of Walsall to have produced a Prince of the Church.

*His example enabled me to understand the shared values which people of different faiths have in this secular world.*

The Cardinal's parents were very devout Irish Catholics who, during retirement, were daily communicants at Mass at St Mary's The Mount, Walsall. This is



the same church where Servant of God Fr Ignatius Spencer began his Catholic ministry. As a young altar server in the 1960s I observed the Cardinal's parents at Mass every day. At that time, I perceived their pious devotion, which was part of the Cardinal's own Catholic faith.

The Cardinal's work with Islam was indeed a marvellous inspiration to me. He was appointed by St John Paul as Head of Interfaith Matters for his work in reaching out to the non-Christian community. This gave me great courage when I taught for some years in schools which had a

majority of Islamic children. His example enabled me to understand the shared values which people of different faiths have in this secular world.

Cardinal Michael now works in Liverpool with young White Fathers, which enables him to share his experience of the Islamic world with young men who are going on missions overseas and at home.

Indeed, instead of a tranquil retirement Cardinal Michael is giving us all a great example that the road in the service of the Word is one of a continuous labour of love for the Lord.

## Meet the Team



**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 now works as a registered adult nurse.



**Rev Andrew Brookes OP** who is a Dominican of the English Province based in London at the Rosary Shrine North London and is The Faith Companion's theological advisor



**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/>



**Dr Roderick Campbell Guion's** doctorate was on the mystical transformation in the life of St Elizabeth of the Trinity. He is a Secular Carmelite who teaches Ecclesiastical History with the Carmelite Institute of Britain and Ireland.

## The Welsh Wizard Part 2 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.

**Note from Editor-in-chief:** This is part two of a story published in our July/Aug 2020 edition. Anthony had a successful corporate career in sales and after finding himself sailing ahead in his field he decided to branch out on his own – he felt that everything he touched turned to gold. We followed his journeying deeper into God during this time so when the 2008 financial crisis hit and Anthony saw everything he had worked for disintegrate, we saw him turn to prayer and the Bible. This second part shows how God, not only redeemed Anthony’s situation, but created a gift for the Church in his mission. The story picks up where Anthony was praying fervently when his wife implored, “But you need to find work!”

Eventually, the bank called to arrange a meeting to check if we could continue mortgage payments. If we couldn’t make further payments, they would have to look at repossessing the house. I made an appointment with them for about 2 weeks later, and I told my

wife it would be fine, having faith in God to look after us.

By that time, I had either read the whole Bible or many parts of it, and I remember thinking to myself, “I am ready, it will be alright.” I felt spiritually full, as I had now come to realise that the situation didn’t label or define who I was or my abilities – our identity is a beautiful gift from God – it was the circumstances, not me as a person.

I immediately called my previous employer (where I thought I was Alexander the Great), and they offered me the job I asked for just like that! The bank was satisfied, and we kept our home.

*I had now come to realise that the situation didn't label or define who I was or my abilities... it was the circumstances, not me as a person.*

Within about six months, I wasn’t just working in Cardiff, I became a Divisional Marketing Manager running the Public Limited Company’s (PLC) divisional business. That was the beginning of my next chapter. I worked for them for the next 5 years –

empowered by God the Great this time, not me as Alexander the Great!

I was on top of my game again, but this time everything I touched, I tried to remember to give to God. They called me the Welsh Wizard again. Some of the businesses within the division began to complain that I was bringing in so many opportunities that they couldn't cope. It was phenomenal. I traversed the country, praying as I went. It wasn't long before I began to be reprimanded for introducing faith-based techniques into my management style. Occasionally, before a team meeting, I would say "Let's say a prayer." I was called into HR, who told me to stop. The area Director under the wire told me to keep going as long as I kept getting results, but suggested I keep the "Religion Stuff" low key, so to speak. He suggested that I not talk about God due to the multi-faith-based nature of the PLC.

I got on very well with this Director, and he decided shortly afterwards to go on a cruise. When he got on the boat, he suffered a major heart attack – they had

to bring him back three or four times. As a manager, I got a text from his secretary saying it looked like he wasn't going to make it. Immediately, I sent a prayer by text to him saying: "Heavenly Father, I cover Paul in your Divine Mercy and Blood of Jesus"(or words to that effect). Now, this was the same Director who told me not to talk about God. It turned out his wife had picked up the text.

Eventually, he recovered and came back to work, but not too long afterwards announced he was going on another holiday. I said to him before he left "Paul before you go on holiday, I'd like to give you a gift." He said, "Of course!" So, I said: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" and continued to pray the Our Father prayer over him. I was shaking in my boots! I was standing in front of the Director who told me point blank not to mention God at work. Then HE BOWED HIS HEAD, and I prayed with him. He went on holiday, came back and years later decided to retire from the fast lane.

When he retired, I decided that I didn't want to begin again with another boss, so I decided it was time for me to go too. I wanted to work for God. I used Paul's leaving, and the PLC's subsequent changes as an opportunity to exit the corporate world. This was just over four years ago. Now he and his wife are



*Merlin the Welsh Wizard*

beautiful friends. The last time we visited them they took us to Church – this same Director who told me not to mention God at work, who bowed his head allowing me to pray over him – was now taking us to Church!

I knew I wanted to do work for Christ every day, as before leaving the corporate world, I felt an undercurrent of frustration developing. I kept saying to God, “Let me do it for you, Lord.” I felt excited, but also knew I wasn’t Alexander the Great as before. I knew I wanted to give it all to God every day. I wanted God to be my every day. So, I eventually set up our new mission “Everyday Christian Marketing”.

During those last five years of my corporate working life, I grew in my faith and personal relationship with Jesus. But I was identifying that the Church was severely lacking, in terms of reaching out and engaging with parishioners where they were. This transition to online social platforms, web-friendly design and helping people to engage with digital technology simply wasn’t there. There seemed to be no real appetite for priests to try and move forward in new ways fast enough to keep up with current needs. So, I took a risk and decided to bring the tools from the corporate world to the Church.

*I knew I wanted to give it all to God every day. I wanted God to be my every day. So, I.. set up... “Everyday Christian Marketing”.*

We started that mission 4 years ago in 2016, me, my wife and son Luke (in between his studies). It was difficult at first to get any commitment from parishes, but I learnt God’s way isn’t always our way. It’s not about financial



motivations anymore, as the Church’s objective is moving hearts and minds, not money. The Church is dealing with God’s currency which has nothing to do with the worlds. Results take longer, and it’s harder – it’s the narrower way.

Growth was gradual, a parish or two coming on board supporting our mission. There were hardships and difficulties, and God sent companions and angels in disguise to help in different ways; but, when you have almost lost everything, you become resilient. I had a different mindset because I was living in God now. For us, faith is not about financials – not the bottom line anymore. Because of our keenness and desire to help the Church, we go over and above at times. Sometimes even giving our services for free depending on the situation. Sometimes it hurts. However, I have discovered that it is in the hurting that blessings and grace often come.

For the first year and a half, things were hard, only receiving small trickles flowing in. We started building new websites for parishes and began helping them modernise their digital presence. We put in modern technologies which allowed

parishioners to see the Church in a vibrant, as opposed to a static, way. We utilised videos, rich in media engagement, imagery, and new functionalities allowing people to do things socially. We ensured the social aspect of digital engagement was within the platform for an all-encompassing experience for parishioners, rather than leaving the site for social engagement separately.

These small trickles also gradually developed into consultancy, because we were helping priests, monks, nuns and the laity, advising and helping with their strategies. If they wanted to do something, they would ask for advice on how to do it. For example, assisting with General Data Protection Regulation GDPR best practice recommendations with regards to communications and online platforms.

*I have discovered that it is in the hurrying that blessings and grace often come.*

Trickles started to become more like little streams with more and more work. We found ourselves with nuns in Liverpool. They needed a new website, and they were so energised. They ended up producing a video about their community life; opening up in a way they hadn't done before. I wept when I saw this video; seeing an inside, intimate glimpse of their community behind the walls. They were smiling and laughing, feeding the ducks in their pond, working in the gardens, each working with the gifts God had given them. One of the nuns was an expert on Photoshop can you believe!

I was amazed at these bright colours shining through. Then, in Scotland, we helped a priest design a website which could show recorded Masses. We have

also helped monks who want to sell their products online to help them maintain financial viability; and religious orders who offer retreats online.

We had gone from website design to digital consultancy, to now also offering live streaming facilities for those unable to attend Mass. We help parishes step out in new ways they had never considered before. Finally, we have recently identified those who can't get online or don't have the desire or knowledge to use the internet. They are usually older but are nevertheless veterans of the Church, bulwarks and guardians of our faith. So, we have just helped some Churches with a Dial for Mass service. These parishioners can call a telephone number on their phone and hear their local priest saying Mass through the wonders of technology.

Since I made the decision to turn away from the corporate world and working every day for Christ, many blessings have come our way. The greatest of which, was my wife's eyes being opened to the beauty of the Catholic faith. And subsequently being received into the Catholic Church – after being Protestant for most of her life. I had prayed very often for this, but I honestly never expected it to happen so soon. I now feel in the prime of my life; anchored in Our Lord Jesus Christ in a new way. We are doing our best to bear fruit for His cause and have learned that trying to give up the things of this world to bear lasting fruit for the Lord, results in unimaginable blessings. I now do my best to thank the Lord every day for my work, as I work my every day for Christ.

I finish with John 12:24:

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”



## **An Extraordinary Blessing** by Anthony Evans



For the last couple of years, my wife, Erica, and I have been invited to attend an ecumenical conference at the Vatican through our business Everyday Christian Marketing. This conference brought together Christian leaders from across the world bringing them together on the theme of John 17: 21 (where the Lord prays that they may all be one) in order to share our faith, ideas and mindsets in the hope to apply good fruit into the circumstances of the world. Springtime of Faith are the organizers (please see <https://www.everydaychristianmarketing.co.uk/springtimeoffaith>). The Springtime of Faith is an organization dedicated to Christian unity working hard to fulfil Christ's prayer that they "may all be one."

Cardinal Arinze was involved in organizing these events, and we were immensely blessed to attend and to be surrounded by these beautiful people who I considered to be heroes of our Christian faith. They had what I call "bellies on fire for God". Now, these were not just Catholics – these were an ecumenical mix; leaders from all over the world churches including charities and other Christian organizations who came together.

*It was an extraordinary blessing to be surrounded by these beautiful people who I considered to be heroes of our Christian faith.*

Another extraordinary blessing that came from attending these conferences was being introduced to Ashley and John Noronah, who run the Truth and Beauty Project in Rome, and who were partially responsible for my wife converting to Catholicism. My wife, before this period, was non-practicing Church of England, and I was Catholic, very into my faith who could be familiarly called a "weirdo". She decided to come to this ecumenical conference to support me. Being that she is an artist she was keen to explore some of the beauty of Rome. So, she joined the conference and the art talks, and within a very short time, I could see her come alive as the theologians unwrapped the mysteries within Sacred Art.

Our first trip to the Vatican is one I will never forget. I wanted to attend Mass, but it was full, with standing room only at the back. Erica is sometimes not in the best of health, and standing is difficult for her. It was not long before she was

feeling the pain. She decided that she needed to sit down; and headed towards a side chapel. The attendant said that she could only enter if she intended to pray. On entering Erica sat down and for the first time ever, she prayed that the Lord help her with the pain. At once, she found herself sobbing uncontrollably, and she could not explain why she was crying, other than she had a tremendous feeling of peace. She remained there for some time, and on arising from the seat, Erica had realized that the pain had gone. I remember her rushing over to me with tears in her eyes, unable to articulate what she had just experienced. It actually took about an hour for her to gather herself, assuring me that she had just experienced something strange but good, and that she felt ready to continue, and the pain had gone. We later found out that the chapel in which she had prayed was actually the altar of St Jerome, which also houses the tomb of St John XXIII.

For the rest of the week, the guides enlightened us about the art with their historical background, theology and faith. The Lord absolutely captured my wife's heart. He seduced her in such a beautiful way that she was the one running after the tour guide, trying her best to stay upfront. She was into all the materials, hanging on every word, and I was the guy who was following her. She became the "weirdo" actually complaining that I was too slow and falling behind as she didn't want to miss a thing! This was such an out-of-this-world experience for me.

*One evening Erica suddenly said to me, "Ant, do you think I am missing something?"*

A couple of days later, whilst in the hotel room, I was praying the Rosary

before bed, when suddenly Erica said to me, "Ant, do you think I am missing something?" I said, "What do you mean, Dear?" I went to carry on praying the Rosary when something prompted me to stop and listen to her. I asked again, "How do you mean?" She said, "I was the only one not receiving Holy Communion today, and I've been seeing all this artwork showing how special the Lord is in Communion." Now, my intrinsic sales nature kicked in as did my drive to close. If someone says they are close to making a decision and if it is beneficial, I will always try and help them along. So, I said, "What are you saying, do you want to become a Catholic?" I held my breath. She said, "Yes, I think I do."

She was received into the Catholic Church the following Easter, and now she is even more crazy, stupid in love with Christ than I am! Before this she would tell me, you don't need to keep reading, it's midnight or one O'clock in the morning or say, "why are you watching all these faith talks?" She used to say, "why can't you put your faith down for a minute and watch something normal?" But now we pray together, and she is often found reading or watching the faith videos.

Always, in our marriage, my prayer to God was "Lord, I want you to seduce my wife's heart, I want my wife to love you more than she loves me." as I knew that she would love me more than she could ever do on her own, through Christ. I honestly thought this would happen in our old age, and I would worry about her dying before she became a Catholic. In my mind, there was no way I was going to sell Erica on the Catholic faith. I was too afraid to even try it, so I never did. Now, due to this extraordinary blessing from our Lord, for over a year now, my wife is a Catholic, and every night we



pray the Rosary before bed.

Bearing in mind for over 20 years, I would escape with my boys to go to Mass on a Sunday morning, so for Erica, this became her precious alone time for such a long time. Now she never misses Mass and listens to Mass daily. We have discussions on different aspects of faith from talks she has heard on-line, and her faith has become all-consuming, sometimes I think it is a bit much until I remember it can never be too much!

I believe this extraordinary blessing came to us because I decided to make Christ my every day. John 12:24: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." I believe we had to let our former selves die before God

helped our new selves in Christ grow and flourish in order to bear lasting fruit. God blessed us abundantly with this. And now, together, we share our faith.

### **The Blessing of Saint Clare**

*May Almighty God bless you*

*May God look upon you*

*with eyes of mercy*

*And give you peace*

*On earth may God pour forth*

*Graces upon you abundantly*

*And in heaven ... in heaven*

*May God place you among*

*the saints*

## **The Grace of Being Sent an Old Friend in a Time of Need** by Joanna Goyaram

During my illness which I describe in the May/June 2020 edition of The Faith Companion I found I couldn't sleep, but discovered these times were spiritually fruitful as I would spend that time in prayer. Often when I woke up, when eventually I did fall asleep, I would be given some grace-filled message or communication which I believe was from God.

I had a friend who I knew from my childhood in Mauritius and when we met again after many years, I saw her beautiful long hair was gone, and she was wearing a wig. I discovered she was suffering from cancer. It turned out she had breast cancer which had gone into remission 5 years ago but had just come back again. It was spreading. She knew about my lung cancer diagnosis and sudden unexplained remission. We became best friends again and I supported her going with her to her some appointments after her cancer returned.

*I believe God sent her to be there for me when I most needed a dear friend and at the end, I was there for her...*

We went together to our local Church where people from a healing mission from Birmingham had come to visit to provide healing services. Later, we decided to take a coach and travel to Birmingham to attend a retreat held by this group. The night before we travelled, I had a dream of the Divine Mercy image with Jesus inviting me into the church. I often see many things in dream form.



When we arrived at this healing retreat the first thing I saw at the entrance was a huge Divine Mercy image of Jesus – **the exact image in my dream!** This may not seem extraordinary until you realise, I was not at all familiar with this image, I didn't know what it meant, and I had never been to this venue before. From that moment on I regularly pray the Divine Mercy chaplet and I truly believe in it.

Unfortunately, my beloved friend passed away as her cancer had spread widely – it was too far gone. When I had my cancer, she was always with me supporting me by saying not to worry I had breast cancer and it went into remission, but unfortunately for her it came back after 5 years. I believe God sent her to be there for me when I most needed a dear friend and at the end, I was there for her as she was living on her own with her son. It is very sad to have a lost such a dear friend, but I know she has gone to her eternal reward in Heaven. Thanks be to God.

## **Home of Love by Rev. Dr. Fr. Robin Sebastian O.S.B.**

Director, Home of Love, now a new Benedictine Order, Kerala, India.

We are five Benedictine monks trying to do what we can in our capacity for the Children of God who have come into our care. Originally, members of the Order of St. Benedict at St Thomas' Monastery, India, we realized that we are called to do something more than '*Ora et Labora*', and set out on a new journey finding children who have no one to care for them, who are being abused mentally and/or physically. We believe that the reward for our work with the Children is their Love and most importantly their Smile.

And we are proud to proclaim that our primary mission is to tend for children who are orphaned.

As St. Benedict said, we are trying to find Jesus in everything we do.

We have 37 boys in our care, three of whom, Vikas, Sumesh and Dilip, have been picked up from railway stations where they were being forced to beg by a group of child traffickers.

We have also taken a child into our care who was being sold by his mother as he was born out of wedlock.

There are a few boys saved from their abusive parents and the remaining ones were picked up from the streets.

At our little Children's Home, we call Home of Love, all the services required for these Children of God are performed by the Monks, be it washing their clothes, cleaning their rooms and toilets, bathing them, training them in yoga, educating them or playing with them.

We work to make the children's lives happier, as least traumatic as we can, to



make sure that they never feel unwanted or uncared for and we are trying as best as we can to see them smile heartily. For, in them we see Our Lord, and serving them is serving Him.

There are times when the supply of food isn't sufficient for all to satisfy their hunger. During those time Our monks come forward forgoing their share of the meal just to make sure that none of the children go to bed with an empty stomach.

The Monks believe that these little sacrifices are nothing compared to the sufferings that Our Saviour Jesus Christ suffered for us.

Though we are Benedictines, Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta is our role



model and her work, our inspiration. We are trying to follow the path to Jesus as shown by her.

As she said "We know only too well that what we are doing is nothing more than a drop in the ocean. But if the drop were not there, the ocean would be missing something."

Any little help that you give will be of great value to our Home of Love and our work. Please also pray for our latest initiative as we need to move premises. We live in a rented house which is too small to house us all 42 of us including the monks so we need to urgently find a willing benefactor to help provide new accommodation for us. Please pray that God brings someone to our aid.

**Note from editor-in-chief:** As we go into production we received news that Our Holy Father Pope Francis has accepted Fr Robin and his Brothers as a Pontifical Monastery of Holy the Catholic Church in recognition of the great work they do with orphaned children. If anyone would like to donate money to this worthy cause please contact Kathy Bishop at [thefaithcompanion@gmail.com](mailto:thefaithcompanion@gmail.com) or call 01403 7547808. If anyone knows of a benefactor willing to help these orphans find a new home please contact Fr Robin at [robinmsij55@gmail.com](mailto:robinmsij55@gmail.com) More importantly please pray for them and their situation.



## **Resting in God's Beautiful Providence**

**by John & Ashley Noronha**



John and Ashley Noronha are theologians, professors, speakers, and media personalities in the new evangelization and teach the faith through customized Immersion experiences in Rome, Italy - [www.johnandashley.org](http://www.johnandashley.org) John is a professor of theology, sacred art & architecture, and technology in Rome, he was a corporate executive in

technology, a television producer, and was appointed by the Pope to the Papal Reform Commission at the Vatican. Ashley is the Rome Correspondent for the Relevant Radio Catholic Network and a professor of Crisis Communications for priests and seminarians in Rome. She was the host and anchor of a weekly TV Rome news show and a Vatican Official at the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in the Holy See.

Rome is the Eternal City and visitors can't help but be enchanted by stunningly beautiful piazzas, edifices and art. Actually, it's quite easy to speak of beauty in context of the arts - visual art, music, poetry and dance - and Rome offers those things in abundance. But there's also an intangible beauty that permeates the city of Rome, that's perceptible only to the faithful. It's the thread of faith that has been woven through the tapestry of history and time, to bind together the lives of all the faithful. This is a part of the metaphysical aspect of beauty that, if we were to pause and look within, we can also see in our own lives,

in those of others, and in continuity with the entire communion of saints. We can see Father God's ever-loving, protecting and guiding hand which is a reality of His sublime Providence.

*...there's also an intangible beauty that permeates the city of Rome, that's perceptible only to the faithful*

For Saints Augustine and Aquinas, Providence is the governance of the universe ordering all things to their end and Good, by God, the author



of their existence, nature, powers and potential. The complexity of freedom in rational beings involves His intending and permitting states of affairs resulting from our free choices. Because God's love is perfect, infinite, and omniscient, it is evident that we as limited and fallen beings will be fulfilled only when we are perfected and behold our loving Creator in all His glory, splendor and beauty (1 Cor 13:12). In His mercy, He unconditionally loves us (Ps 103:11,12), and His ultimate desire is for us is to receive true Good by participating in and experiencing His Providential love. So then, Providence is not



just a force or a power, but is a free gift from a personalistic, loving God who can't help but act based on His nature, which is love itself. His Providence orders not only "my" or individual good, but the good of every created thing in the universe to its fulfillment. This is a beautiful mystery, well beyond our grasp in this life. However, we get a taste of it when we learn to see God's hand of Providence over every aspect of our lives (1 Cor 2:9).

But when life gets difficult, tragic or messy, it can be awfully hard to see that hand of Providence. In 2017, we found ourselves in a bind. Our landlord informed us that he wanted to sell our "perfect" apartment and for us to move out as soon as possible, without any contract termination penalty. Anyone who's lived in Rome knows how complex it is to navigate the expat rental situation.

Fortunately, we miraculously found another place, but sadly our landlord passed away in the meantime. His wife refused to comply with her husband's

agreement and insisted we pay six months' rent before we could move out. We were in a real fix. We'd already signed the contract for the new apartment, so now we had two apartments and two rents for the next six months. That night, we went to bed and prayed, "Lord, we've been given lemons here, but we know you have a reason. Show us how to make lemonade."

*Let's evangelize the world by helping young adults know their Christian roots and how to share the faith, and (so)...set the world on fire!*

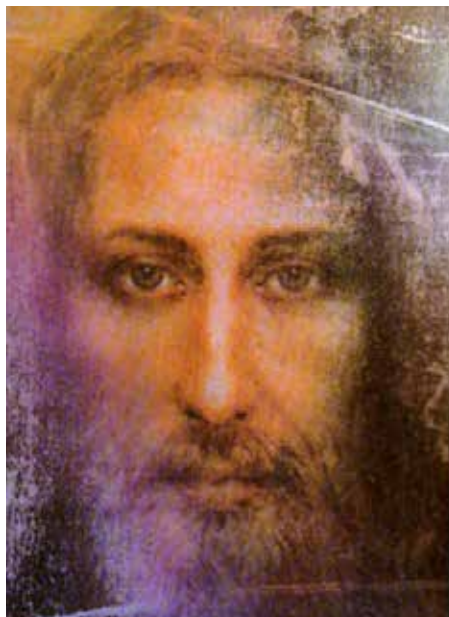
The next morning John was awoken in the wee hours of the morning by his excited wife, saying, "John! The Truth & Beauty

Project! Let's use the new apartment as a residential space for young adults to come to Rome where we can teach and pass on the truths of authentic transcendental beauty and the faith, right here in the living classroom of Rome! This could be a way for us to donate our time and resources toward the mission of the New Evangelization. Let's evangelize the world by helping young adults know their Christian roots and how to share the faith, and through the ripple effect, set the world on fire!"

That same day we built a website and the next day launched the program. The details of the program weren't yet clear in our minds, but we were confident that if it was of the Lord, He would take care of the details. He sure did and we marched off to make lemonade!

Six months later we had mentored nine participants, helping them peel back the layers to have deep encounters with beauty. We offered them critical life-skills formation and brought to life theology, philosophy, anthropology, liturgy, history and art. When the program finished, we were exhausted but happy. And we moved from our old apartment to the new. We didn't realize at the time that that was just the beginning. The Lord would ask us to do the program again. First the nudges came from the participants themselves who said things like "This changed my life. You have to keep this program going!!" When we got the same indication in prayer, we decided to go for it and run this educational program again. This time the participants stayed in a bed and breakfast.

At the end of the second program, we received a call from the father of one of the participants. He wanted to thank us for transforming his daughter's life and faith through the experience. He urged us to



## ***The Holy Face of Jesus shaped from the Shroud of Tourin***

continue the program. Since the program was such a large financial expense for us, he suggested that we look into applying for an official non-profit status and encourage people to donate to help the mission of evangelizing youth. We agreed that his idea made a lot of sense, but hardly knew where to begin with the bureaucracy. Instead, a few days later our prayers were answered when out of the blue, some friends called to say, "We love the mission of the Truth & Beauty Project and how it's changing lives. We own a non-profit status that we'd like to legally transfer to your project. And to pay for all of the legal fees too!"

Over these years, God has shown us in so many ways how He desires the best for each and every single one of us - His undeserving creatures - and how He has the power and capacity to take care of every little detail for our good, even



when we ourselves do not fully know, understand or choose what is truly good for us! This is how Providence guides our steps along life's journey and plunges us right into a rich encounter with His beauty.

Beauty, when encountered and perceived, can bring immense pleasure. It can elevate our spirit from within and can even cause us to lose ourselves in a state of ecstasy. But what if we don't live in a beautiful environment? What if the closest art museum is miles away? What if we don't know how to see, read and interpret transcendental beauty in its fullness, even in the best of museums? Nevertheless, we are all given the privilege to encounter beauty constantly, by simply resting in God's Providence.

*...we received a call from the father of one of the participants. He wanted to thank us for transforming his daughter's life and faith...*

Now we offer week-long Truth & Beauty Immersions in Rome not only for young adults, but for any group of six or more. We help people from around the world, from all backgrounds, professions and ages, to learn to stop living on the surface and to penetrate the layers of life to encounter authentic beauty. The Project designs customized group experiences in Rome that integrate theology with scripture, art, philosophy, metaphysics and the liturgy. Since 2017, we have helped countless people have an up-close experience with God's beauty and have seen faith and lives transformed. We have front row seats to watch how real beauty changes people. One woman told us through tears, "Not only were my faith, life and confidence elevated by my experience, but I could never have

gotten through the difficulties of the virus lockdown without the tools and formation I got from the Truth & Beauty Project."

Through God's merciful and loving initiative, we are not only saved from our fallen state and from the pain of superficial living, but through the Incarnation God became Man - et Incarnatus est - (Jn 1:14) and boosted our nature to a new height of Capax Dei. Although we no longer exist in a paradise-like happy condition as before the fall, through the Incarnation, Paschal Mystery and Ascension, it is utterly mind-blowing to imagine that our human nature now shares in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). Our nature partakes of the Most Holy Trinity and one day, through God's grace, we will contemplate the sweet beauty of His face (1Jn 3:2). This is when we will finally penetrate the Divine Mystery in an unfathomable manner.

Every time we allow ourselves to rest in the beauty of God's Providence, we catch a glimpse (1 Cor 13:12) of Happiness. The Truth and Beauty Project was formed by Providence, to lead people to an experience of the beauty of God's Providence and to share a fuller understanding of Beauty in all its facets.

These experiences help us more fully realize the sublimity and continuity of God's Providence, which weaves through this life to our ultimate and perfect End, when we behold Him face to face.

*Psalm 27:4*

*"One thing I ask of the LORD,  
and this I seek:  
to dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD  
and to inquire in His temple."*



## **The Society of the Little Flower**

**by Miranda Litchfield**

Miranda Litchfield is the Director of The Society of the Little Flower UK whose offices are based in Horsham, West Sussex.



In the late 20th century, the Carmelite Order was moving into countries where it had never been before: Bolivia, Mexico, El Salvador, Ukraine, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam. But the provinces which had traditionally funded the missions were contracting and unable to provide funds to the same extent as in previous years. A former Prior General realized that funds from alternative sources would be required to support these missionary projects in the future. The Society of the Little Flower in the USA – a Carmelite founded and managed organization – had existed for many years with a two-fold purpose: to spread devotion to St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and to raise funds for

the pastoral activities of the Carmelites. They offered support to establish a similar organization in Europe and thus The Society of the Little Flower here in the UK began. vision with a like-minded community.

Originally the office was based within the Carmelite parish in Faversham, Kent but moved to Horsham to accommodate the growing organization in 2008. The decision had been taken in 2002 to fundraise, as they did in the USA, by direct mail. The response to the devotional mailings relating to St. Thérèse was amazing and we were overwhelmed by the generosity of people in their support of the Carmelite missions. Initially there were 2 part-time staff; now – some 18 years on – we are 6 staff of whom 5 are part-time, responding to donations and to queries and requests from our wonderful supporters. Although the majority of our donors live in the UK and Ireland, we also receive support from donors in Malta, France and Spain, as well as Australia and the Far East.

*“The principle behind the Little Flower fundraising is simple: tell the story of Thérèse, remind people of her “Little Way”, tell them about the Carmelites across the world and their work...”*

The principle behind the Little Flower fundraising is simple: tell the story of Thérèse, remind people of her “Little Way”, tell them about the Carmelites across the world and their work and invite support through prayers and offerings. This is an approach which

makes the ideal connection between faith and action. In other words, the Little Flower teaches us that in God's sight no action is too small or insignificant if it is done with love; Carmelites try to spread this insight into their work all over the world; anyone can support and help this mission and no matter how small that support may seem, God sees the love with which it was offered. St, Thérèse of Lisieux is one of the most popular saints in the Church precisely because she understood the need to spread the basic intuition that love is at the heart of the Church. People understand this message very readily, but they also want to express their faith in a concrete and tangible way and supporting Carmelite missions is an excellent way of doing this. Certainly, our experience in Ireland and Britain bears this out.

*St, Thérèse of Lisieux is one of the most popular saints ... because she understood the need to spread the basic intuition that love is at the heart of the Church*

Since inception, the Society has passed more than 6 million euros to the Carmelite Curia in Rome to distribute around a variety of projects. Additional funds have been invested to provide on-going support into the future. Some monies are used in the education of young Carmelite friars and sisters to equip them for their missionary and pastoral roles. We are currently supporting young men in formation in Kenya, East Timor, Mozambique, India, Congo and the Philippines. Support was given for many years to a Monastery in the Philippines where the sisters were providing a Novitiate for young women from Vietnam who wished to join the Order. The first two of these took their Final Vows in 2019 and returned to establish a new house in Vietnam, along with some of the nuns from the Philippines.

Other funds provide buildings and equipment. In Kenya some years ago, a multi-purpose building provides a school, a community center and a place of worship. The donation of a commercial food mixer to sisters in Kenya assisted in the running of their bakery and their classes to teach young people cooking



skills thus equipping them for the world of work. Friars in Bogota run a farm just outside the city where the produce is sold to help the mission become self-sustaining. Funds from the Society provided much needed equipment. In India, the Little Flower provided resources for the land purchase and construction of Chris Cappell College, Paravur.

The Society is also ready to help in emergency situations.

Most recently funds assisted the provision of emergency food together with funds to rebuild homes for those whose houses were destroyed in the floods in Kerala. In 2013, when Typhoon Haiyan devastated a number of islands in the Philippines, funds were dispatched to the Carmelite parishes on Leyte to assist in the rebuilding of homes. The Society supported the relief efforts of Kenyan Carmelites for Somalian refugees in late 2011 with the provision of food and medicine.

A recent appeal has been to supply chalices to various missions. The response has enabled us to commission four chalices and a fifth has



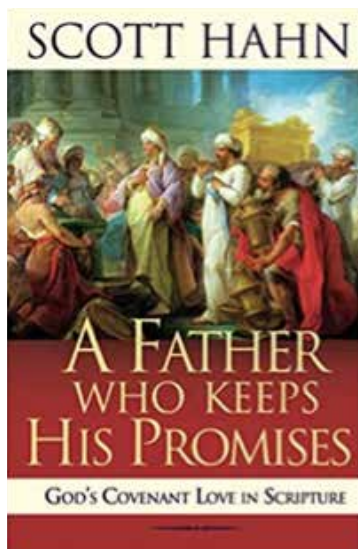
been commissioned and paid for by a donor in memory of his wife. The chalices are being made now and will be blessed at our Feast Day celebration at Aylesford Priory on 27th September this year. Additionally, a donor has a chalice which was given to her by an uncle and she is generously handing this over to the Society for use overseas. A further gift of a chalice has been received from another donor in memory of a deceased family member with the request that it goes "to a mission badly in need". So, we now have a total of seven to distribute as a result of this appeal.

In our office we continue to see the Little Flower's influence in the world today. She touches the lives of so many on a daily basis as evidenced by the letters we receive from far and wide. She truly does continue to "spend her time in heaven doing good on earth".

Should you wish to donate to The Society of the Little Flower please contact us on: 01403 274242 or through our website: [littleflower.org.uk](http://littleflower.org.uk)



## **Book Review** **A FATHER WHO KEEPS HIS PROMISES** by **Scott Hahn**



**S**cott Hahn is an American author and national and international speaker on Scripture and the Catholic Faith. He was ordained a Presbyterian Minister in 1982 and entered the Catholic Church in 1986. His book “A Father who Keeps His Promises” is a book outlining his covenant theology discovered through many years of prayer, discernment and study of Scripture.

Scott Hahn’s starting point is that Scripture testifies to how God cares for His family, making a way for His children to live with Him forever despite His children always disobeying and turning away from Him. In his first chapter Hahn gives a picture of salvation history and explains the concept of covenant which is woven throughout Scripture. He puts this covenant concept in the context of the meaning oaths and covenants had in Ancient Israel to help us understand. Hahn says in examining divine covenants we will grow in

knowledge of God’s fatherly ways as Our Father’s covenants reflect the inner life of the Trinity, the very nature of God.

Starting with the notion of Kinship Covenants, Hahn then goes through covenants made with Adam, Noah, Abram, Moses, David, then finally reaching Jesus and the New Covenant in the New Testament fulfilling/completing the Old Covenant of the Old Testament. Again, and again Father God renews His promises to Israel as they continually fell short disobeying God’s commandments. Our Father who created us knew humankind’s fallen nature but kept opening the door to His children by renewing covenants/promises as He desperately tries to save His children over and over again.

Hahn goes through these covenants citing their mediators – Adam, Noah, Abram, Moses, David and Jesus and

the roles they played; husband, father, chieftain, judge, King, and finally Royal High Priest in Jesus. Then Hahn looks at the covenant form and sign; marriage and Sabbath, household and Rainbow, tribe and circumcision, Nation and Passover, National Kingdom and throne and finally Catholic Church and Eucharist.

*By the end you will have a whole new understanding of not only the Bible, but of our loving, faithful Father*

It is well known many Catholics don't have a great understanding of Scripture, particularly the Old Testament. I recommend this book as a way of gaining a knowledge of the Bible by providing a wide sweeping general overview linking the Old Testament to the New. In reading this book you will gain an understanding of how Our Father kept renewing Covenants due to Israel's sinful behavior - humankind's nature due to Original Sin. In doing so our loving Father kept calling them back and opening the door once more when time after time the Israelites and humankind kept turning away from Him - which we continue to do to this day.

The good thing about this book, as in all Scott Hahn's work, it is very accessible and reads almost like a story or narrative

where he links the stories of the Bible together. He also shares his personal experience of how he came to work out the validity of what he teaches here. This lends an authenticity to his teachings as this is not just an intellectual endeavor - it is something learned through experience and God's revelation through prayer and spiritual experience.

However, this overview can, at times, seem a weakness because as Hahn unfolds the story Scripture tells, you can get a bit lost as it gets more complicated. However, after completing this book what appeared complicated suddenly became less so with the understanding I gained from reading through the lens of Covenant Theology.

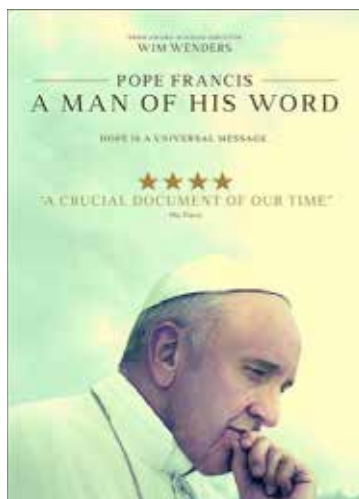
For all those Catholics who struggle with understanding Scripture, especially the Old Testament and how it links to the New Testament, I would highly recommend this very accessible, easy read. By the end you will have a whole new understanding of not only the Bible, but of our loving, faithful Father who always rescues His beloved children from the darkness and death. The Scriptures are indeed a love letter from Our Father which shows his faithfulness, love and care for His beloved family. I hope you get as much out of this book as I did.

***Reviewed by Kathy Bishop***





## **Film Review** POPE FRANCIS, A MAN OF HIS WORD



Universal Pictures production.

A film by Wim Wenders.

Available online for purchase from Amazon and other retailers, for approx £6 to 7.

Also available to rent through various streaming services.

DVD format, running time: 1 hour 32 minutes.

Please make sure if purchasing that you order a 'region 2' version for UK and Europe dvd players!

**W**im Wenders, a noted and experienced film director, has produced a beautifully made and presented film which he describes as not a biography of Pope Francis but more a personal encounter with Francis the man, and it must be received and judged on this basis.

Wim Wenders himself voices a narrative throughout this film, spoken in English, but much of the Pope's own words are subtitled - and at the heart of this film is the Pope speaking to us of his values and beliefs, so there are a lot of subtitles!

If I have a technical criticism of this film, it is that the subtitles are small, not framed in contrast, and flash by at quite a fast

rate, making them difficult to follow, and very hard to speak out loud if you are reciting for a disabled friend as I tried to do. Of course, subtitles have to match the pace of the speaker, so we have perhaps to put this technical difficulty down to the reality of communication in different languages. At one point in the film when Pope Francis is addressing the American Congress in English, it becomes obvious that English is not an easy language for him, and again, let us acknowledge here the universality and broad sweep of the Catholic Church with the first pope from the southern hemisphere!

A major part of the film is therefore taken up with Pope Francis speaking.

Sometimes we hear him addressing vast crowds but frequently he speaks alone and directly into the camera and you realise that he is speaking to you! In this incredibly personal encounter with the viewer (like a fireside chat) he speaks without notes, and clearly he is speaking from the heart, but make no mistake, he is speaking to our hearts, and this produces a quite intense emotional impact to the film. Here we see Francis up close and personal, and I would go so far as to say that only the hardest heart and most closed mind would fail to warm to the man. Wim Wenders is not exaggerating when he describes this as a personal encounter, a real heart to heart.

A striking filmic device in this powerful study of Francis the man, is a series of cameos of St Francis. Not St Francis himself, but an actor portraying him, as Wenders relates the profound similarity of outlook between the Medieval saint and our Pope. Not for nothing has Francis taken on the name of his saintly predecessor and inspiration. These short but powerful cameo pieces greatly help to position the Pope's core message in what has always been a theme running through Catholic tradition – namely the need to care for the least. And as both saint and pope emphasise, the Church, if it is to minister to the least in faithfulness to Jesus' command, then it has to be "a poor Church for the poor".

Thus, we hear the Pope continually stress the Gospel call for practical service, and being the man he is, he is seen doing what Jesus did: washing the feet of the poor. Not some token ritual such as we do at Easter but the Pope washing and kissing the feet of immigrants, prisoners and other marginalised people. We see Francis embracing as many individuals as he can reach, and these embraces are

not a token brief hug but are intense person to person encounters that clearly leave the other person hugely moved. We see Francis travelling in a small car, ironically sandwiched between huge American limos, and the TV commentator marvelling at the 'Mr Bean car'. We see Francis appearing, clearly unannounced, in poor ghettos and we hear the unrestrained joy of the people that he has come among them, the voiceless, the unimportant ones of the world. We see him with world leaders, but we mostly see him among the poor, the oppressed, the victims of conflict, greed and climate change. We see his concern for our planet, but as well as key global issues we also hear him talk emotionally about a phone call with a dying child.

Francis has hard words for the powerful of this earth, and that – in a fascinating scene – even includes the powerful figures in the Church, the cardinals and high officials of the Roman Curia. They sit quietly listening, perhaps wondering at this man they have elected. Hard words for the mighty but gentle, caring words for the 'little people'. In one particularly poignant scene, he is addressing the victims of a recent and terrible natural disaster and he in honesty acknowledges their pain and admits his inability to change their awful situation. I have to say, this film is properly titled 'a man of his word' but we could equally interpret that as 'a man of His Word' for he not only speaks from his heart, but his voice is the voice of Christ, his message the cry of the Gospel.

Wim Wenders, as a film maker, doesn't need to ratchet up the drama, as every scene is rich with emotion, but he clearly has chosen the last brief interview with Francis as his parting scene. In this Francis again speaks from the heart with a

profound simplicity and tells us about two key facets of our Christian witness: that we should smile and that we should keep a sense of humour. His smile as he relates a 'funny prayer' of St Thomas More is utterly real and open. There is nothing that appears false about the man.

You may have sensed that I am a fan of this film, and a fan of Francis. A critic might suggest that this is a public relations presentation, a paean of praise meant for the converted, and that there is no element of criticism, even when Francis is asked to comment on some of the trickier aspects of modern life. Wenders is clearly a fan too, but one suspects that there is really little scope for critique, simply because Francis tries to practice what he

preaches, even when that puts him up against powerful and reactionary groups. I, for one, am so very proud of this man who is our Pope.

This is a film that every Catholic should watch. A film that heartens even as it challenges. A film that lapsed and wavering Catholics would benefit from. A film that even non-Catholics and non-believers could appreciate. A film that might make us all stop and consider our personal morality and how we care for our neighbour.

But a word of warning: make sure you have a box of tissues nearby!

**Review by Martin Ryan**

## **A Wedding Story by Sue O'Donnell** **– author of Listen Carefully to Me**

It was the most exciting and significant experience of my life. You see, I am the steward organising the wedding and we have some very important guests coming. My master's son was to be married and my master had given a generous *mohar* (dowry) to the bride's father – and he in turn gave it all to the bride! She also received a precious *mattam* (gift) from her betrothed. It was set to be the finest and most joyous celebration we could offer. Also, a radical itinerant preacher who had a growing number of followers, his mother and close friends were invited. Nathanael, a respected Cananite neighbour, had told me this preacher was the Son of God. How extraordinary!

The betrothed and veiled daughter appeared from her father's house with drum and trumpet blast, banners and flags waving in many colours, and cheers of joy in a splendid, excited, procession. The day started with the *Ketubah* (Jewish

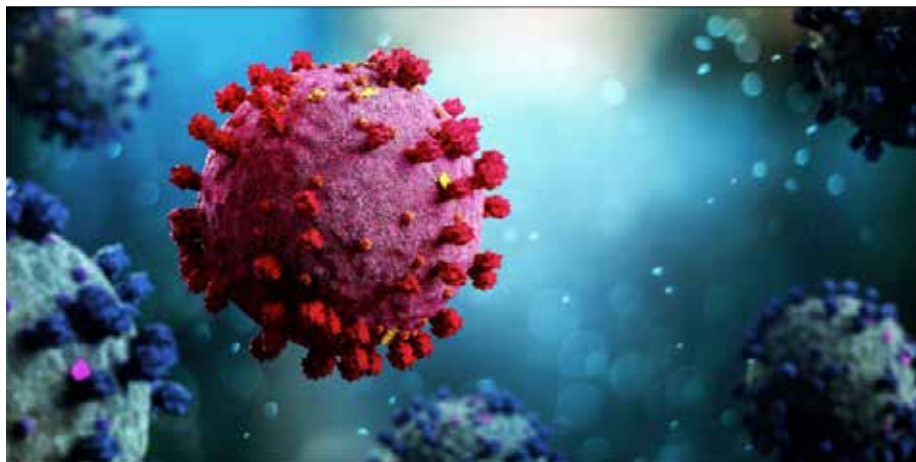
wedding contract) followed by the solemn vows, the sumptuous and exotic banquet, then lively music and dancing with flute, zither, lyre, pipes and harp.

But in the evening disaster struck – I had not ordered enough wine and it had run out. There could be no greater humiliation for my master nor for me, I shivered and quaked in a helpless panic. Then this smiling, reassuring lady appeared and said "*Do whatever He tells you*" and I will never forget such expectation, hope and peace in her voice.

And the water changed into wine with a unique, bubbling sparkle – the most fragrant, sweet, rich and delicious wine you could ever taste.

I knew then that Nathanael was right about Jesus: at last, at last, *His time had come!*

The kingdom of God is near, very near. In fact, *it is here!*



**Q** John 6: 53-54; Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.” During the COVID19 pandemic this year many of us were locked down in our homes as Churches were closed. We all enjoyed attending Mass virtually in our own homes and receiving spiritual communion which I have been very grateful for, but after reading this piece of Scripture it made me ask the question during this time, were we barred from eternal life? If not, why not, as this is what Scripture tells us, doesn't it?

**Answer by Kathy Bishop and Br. Andrew Brookes OP**

**A** Let The simple answer to this question is, no you weren't/aren't. As we go into production Churches are now open for public worship and prayer as COVID 19 infection rates lower, however, this

deadly virus is still with us and there may come a time when we may be asked to lock down again in our homes. So, this is an important question for us to be clear about. At the beginning, on 7th March 2020 Pope Francis led by example by announcing he would not be appearing at his study window to recite his Sunday Angelus to pilgrims in St Peter's Square. Instead, he live streamed to the world from the Library of the Apostolic Palace. Shortly afterwards, live streamed Masses and prayer all over the world followed. The Church gave one message, "... to halt the spread of the Coronavirus nourish your spiritual life with Mass and prayer but do it from home" (Merlo March 2020).

*"...to halt the spread of the Coronavirus nourish your spiritual life with Mass and prayer but do it from home"*

With so many Catholics unable to attend Mass, because of the restrictions on public celebration of the liturgy, on Sunday 15th March 2020 Pope Francis recalled the Church's spiritual communion as the Body of Christ united in prayer. Spiritual

communion in the Eucharist was “a highly recommended practice when it is not possible to receive the sacrament,” he said (Lamb, C, et al March 2020). On 18th March 2020 Cardinal Vincent Nichols echoes the Pope’s dispensation from attending public Mass when, in communion with the Bishops of England and Wales and as their leader, he issued a statement that from evening of 20th March 2020 Catholics must not gather for public acts of worship in churches. The Cardinal went on to say:

“We want everyone to understand that in these emergency circumstances, and for as long as they last, the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days is removed. This is, without doubt, the teaching of the Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2181). This pandemic is the ‘serious reason’ why this obligation does not apply at this time.” (CBEW/Nichols, 18th March 2020)

Spiritual Communion with the Lord should be a permanent part of our Christian life. Making an act of Spiritual Communion and seeking closer union with the Lord in this way, is an ancient practice. It can be, and has been expressed, in different words, and one can make up one’s own words too, addressing the Lord who is close to each of us. A prayerful act of spiritual communion much used during these times is a prayer said to originate from St Alphonso Liguori in the 18th Century:

*My Jesus,*

*I believe that you are present in this Holy Sacrament of the Altar.*

*I love you above all things*

*and I passionately desire to receive you into my soul.*

*Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,*

*come spiritually into my soul so that I may unite myself wholly to you*

*now and forever.*

*Amen.*

Saying this prayer, or a similar one, whilst attending a virtual live streamed Mass immediately after the priest receives Holy Communion, offers us receipt of spiritual communion at a time when we cannot receive physically under the appearance of bread and wine (CBEW April 2020).

It is important to realise that Mass has not stopped: the sacrifice of the Mass continues to be offered daily all around the world, giving honour and glory to God, pleading for mercy, uniting us to God, and bringing down graces on humanity. Though we cannot attend in a physical way, we can attend spiritually and prayerfully online. We continue to receive the fruits of the Mass in lots of ways, and one of them is through spiritual communion.

*Making an act of Spiritual Communion and seeking closer union with the Lord in this way, is an ancient practice*

Yet we do tend to feel we are missing something. This flows from the fact we are embodied souls. Our bodies, and social gathering and interaction matter. God became human – he was incarnated in Jesus – to affirm and bless these dimensions of being human. The Mass expresses and continues this incarnational way of meeting God and receiving grace and eternal life. So embodied presence and physical participation at the Mass are





very important and spiritually enriching. The language of Jesus in John 6 (cited in our question) is strong, precisely to make this point. Church teaching and discipline stresses all this, but it has also recognised there are situations, such as this Covid-19 crisis, when it is not possible. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (n 2181) says:

*The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. 119 Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin. (CCC 1997)*

All if this indicates clearly that during these times we have not committed any grave sin by being unable to partake of

Holy Communion under both kinds; bread and wine, as we have been given dispensation to do so from the Pope himself and particularly from the head of our Catholic Church in England and Wales due to the serious reason of the COVID 19 pandemic. As such, if we partake in spiritual communion in the proper way, we are still in communion with the Church and still united to Christ so there would be no reason to assume we would be barred from eternal life or the life in Christ that comes from receiving the full Eucharistic Sacrament during this time of crisis. Indeed, making a good act of Spiritual Communion, is a way of drawing grace from the Mass and it builds us up to live eternally with God. It is far better to make a spiritual communion, and receive the Lord and his grace that way, than not to receive him at all.

However, on May 1st 2020 the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales say that whilst during this time of pandemic live

streaming Mass and other devotions played an important part in maintaining the faith life of the Church, it is no substitute for Catholics being able to physically attend and participate in the Holy Mass. They say:

*"Our faith is expressed powerfully and beautifully through 'seeing, touching, and tasting.' We know that every bishop and every priest recognise the pain of Catholics who, at present, cannot pray in church or receive the sacraments. This weighs heavily on our hearts."*

It is clear, although live streaming Mass has been a blessing when Churches were closed for public worship during this dreadful time, there is no full substitute. To really give thanks, praise and worship God, in due course, we will be invited back to Mass and encouraged to attend, though taking into consideration the specific health and other life issues that each person faces. Discernment will be needed. But going to Mass in person calls for each Catholic to brave some of their fears and cross over the threshold of the Church once more and meet Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

May God go with each and every one of you, and draw you into ever deeper communion with him through Christ our Lord.

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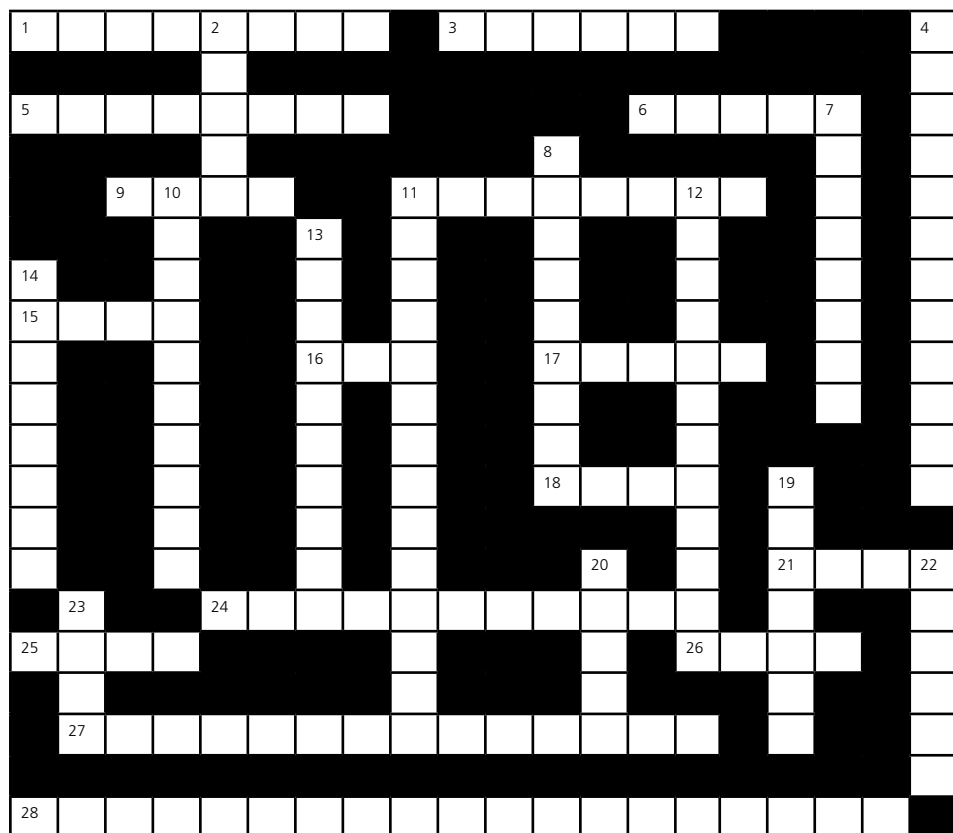
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# The Answers to Last Issue's Crossword

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# Crossword



## CLUES ACROSS

- 1 The highest order of Angels
- 3 Groups or Angels are known as these
- 5 The good works of mercy referred to in 11 across relate to this part of every being
- 6 A group of angels may be found playing these
- 9 First part of the word which means the study of God
- 11 The other of the two types of good works of mercy
- 15 Moses was commanded to take off his shoes because he was on this type of ground
- 16 That which distances us from God
- 17 Jesus was put through this mock process and falsely condemned to death

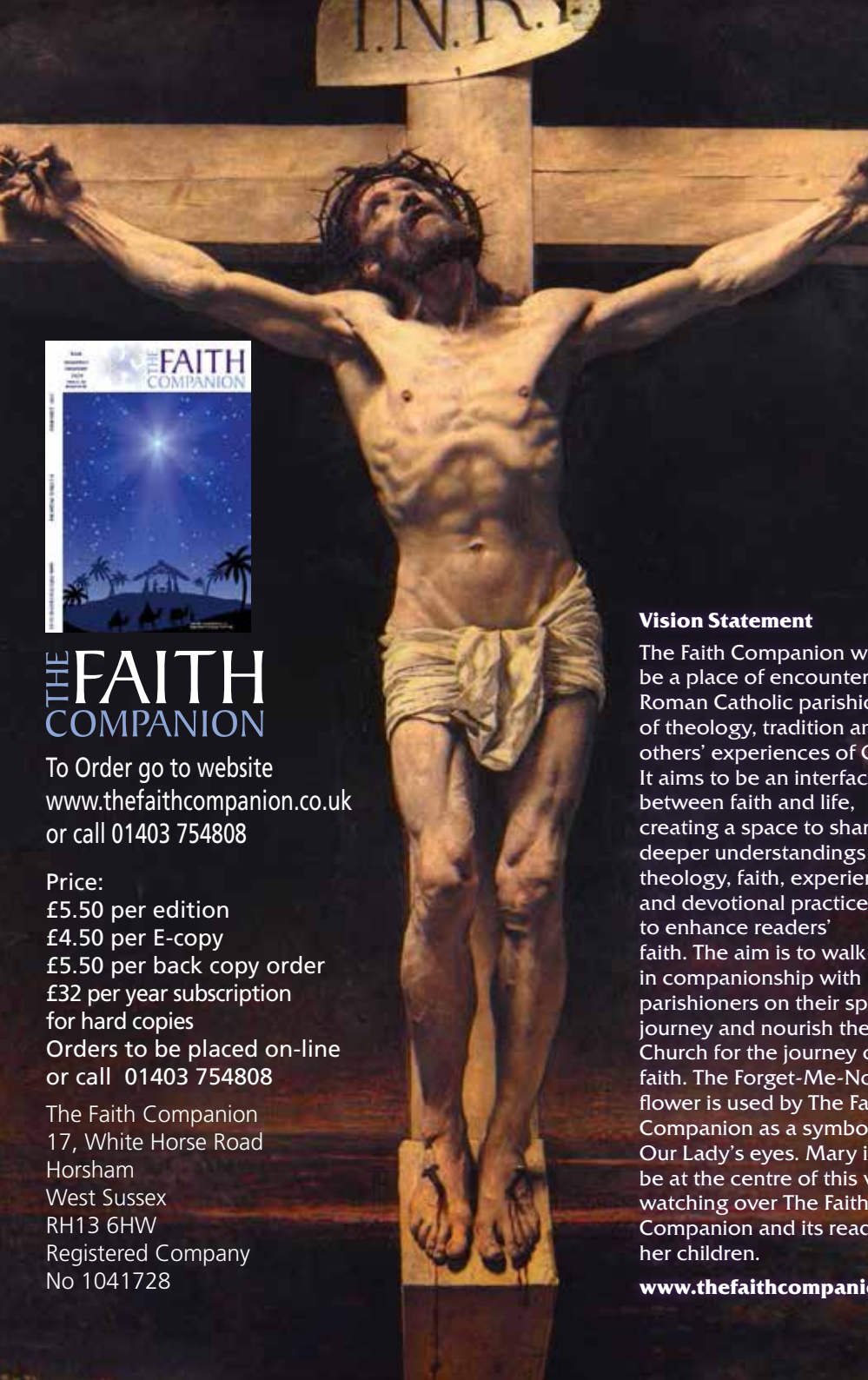


- 18 The deepest and most profound feeling for God which rewards human beings with Paradise
- 21 This saint is the patron of several trials and tribulations – eg. Parenthood, widowhood, difficult marriages, abuse etc,
- 24 The feast celebrating Mary leaving this earth to return to God
- 25 Moses saw this ablaze and on approaching close heard the voice of God
- 26 Number of groups of Angels
- 27 The 8th of September is dedicated to celebrate this joyful event (8, 2 4)

## CLUES DOWN

- 2 Crucifixion and death was the ... He paid for our sins
- 4 Latin translation for Word of God
- 7 A religious item of 2 parts held by string worn on the shoulders and round the neck, originally monastic but also became devotional
- 8 One of the two types of good works of mercy
- 10 October is the month dedicated to this
- 11 The last Glorious Mystery (8,2,4)
- 12 The group of angels to which Gabriel belonged
- 13 12 above usually came to earth as these
- 14 Group of angels often depicted as babes with wings
- 19 Another category of angels which is also the royal seat of a monarch (plural)
- 20 24 across has been declared by the church as this
- 22 Mary was carried from earth to Heaven, by them
- 23 In 25 across Moses saw this and was awestruck that it remained intact and did not ...





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