SIX TOES IN ETERNITY

BOOK E

More Dedicated Widow Journals and Blogs

(2008-2013)

January 1, 2008

In the process of calling mothers of godchildren, godchildren, and old friends I came to my old friend E. She is the only close friend I have had since my conversion in 1959 who is an atheist and fairly pro-abortion, but she doesn't bait me on these subjects. She came from a weak Protestant Kansas farm background, came to her beloved NYC and got a Ph.D. from Columbia in English Literature and married a Jewish agnostic. We met in the park watching our kids in the sandbox and we have been friends for 43 years but I rarely see her since she lives in NYC and I have been living all over. When she was diagnosed about 10 years ago with Parkinson's disease I prayed over her but she is now many phases worse and can hardly talk. Last time I saw her she told me that she couldn't read any more but only listen to tapes and I bought her a huge set of the plays of Shakespeare on tape. Anyhow I have prayed for her every day all these years and today on the phone I could hardly understand her but she suddenly slipped in that she is now praying a little. I was overjoyed to hear this. I asked her how this happened and she said, "Well, I have to deal with finalities now." It seemed to me such a huge sign to keep praying for those we love no matter what and never to give up on them in terms of hoping they will let the love of God come in if only out of desperation toward the end.

January 3, 2008

Sister Elizabeth Seton, founder of the Consecrated Widows of the Good Shepherd got permission that I could start a branch here. She thought with all my background as a Benedictine Oblate and my time in other communities I could make final vows right away. I wanted to leap ahead and do this but Jesus Mary and Joseph seemed to tell me to do what Fr. Ken suggested which was to do a one year time in the habit (no veil until community larger and more approved by the Church before making final vows since this is the way the Church does things.) I feel very peaceful. Hard to think that after all my tries with this, the family will think it is just a silly whim or a compulsion, but I have to accept that. I will visit the little group in Allentown, PA. in March for the final vows of one of the sisters who has been in this new group for a long time.

January 4, 2008

My 49th year as a Catholic! Alleluia. I woke up feeling unusually peaceful – a good sign.

Got rid of the car. Jesus, Mary and Joseph seemed to say "See, we liberated you from the car. Now rest in the bosom of the Church."

January 5, 2008

Confessed to trying to get symbolic victory by detraction. Fr. Ken said, well symbolic victory is really symbolic defeat from the point of view of the Christian way. (I have explained this Recovery, International phrase earlier on. Go to word find if you want to understand this paragraph better. It is really such a key to the anger we express in telling others about others!)

January 7, 2008

I am feeling agitated about ordering the habit tomorrow. I wondered why. Vanity? Thinking I would look uglier even than now? My hair is my glory? Individualism? Wanting to look my funky dedicated widow in A-line single color dresses and denim jumpers? I went to prayer and Mother Mary seemed to tell me that wearing the traditional Sister's garb would be good because of carrying on the tradition and also that it would be more of dying to self and letting only Christ live in me. The question came to mind that if Ven. Conchita, whose name I am taking, founded an order of widows she would surely want the traditional habit.

January 9, 2007

January 11, 2008

The habit came in the mail yesterday. I will not wear it until after the March 25th reception into the community. I was dreading getting it thinking it would make me look more ugly and I would feel awful. Surprise, well God likes to surprise me, is that it is a tailored garment that is actually kind of stylish and attractive with the cap that looks kind of Amish. But not "me." I like loose garments with a free-spirited and eccentric look. Turmoil. I had thoughts it was a sign I can't be part of the order.

This morning I woke up full of insight. Because I lost so much weight a form-fitting garment reminds me of how I looked as a teen and young adult and those were my most sinful times of my life before I became a Catholic. So attractive = sinful in my mind. Also, since I couldn't be popular with the in-group because of being much poorer and also with such a different family background, I became popular with the out-group in college by acting "bohemian." So I associate hippie type clothing with being popular with the out-group. So I fear to lose out-group identity by looking like a conventional Sister of the past.

But it seemed to me Jesus, Mary, and Joseph might be telling me that the habit and cap makes me look like a GOOD old nun which is really my deepest wish – to be a good widow-bride of Christ. So that outer look might help me try to be what I most deeply wish to be vs. overly individualistic. My dress will be a counter-cultural sign in society and in the Church since there are so few Sisters in habits around these days.

Trust?

Fr. Ken thought that habit was not the right thing for me for consecrated widows; that it looked like impersonating a sister. Sister Elizabeth says she is open not to different ones for each group but a different one than that particular one that seemed to me so difficult for me. I came to adoration and I thought I might wear the one that suits her and Sr. Marian because they are dear women whom I want as sisters.

At the prayer meeting I asked for a word on this and Jesus seemed to remind me that He told us not to worry about what to wear. The hispano leader Rafael gave a strong prophecy "I want you to be free from fear and sin. I know how lonely you are." The particular habit began to feel to me in my mind like walking into a straight jacket! I started thinking I would do better having my branch wear denim jumpers and a bandana.

I spoke to a few close people who know me very well and they thought this community idea was a mistake –I have deep psychological motives for it that would not be valid: such as deep need to be taken care of by parental figures or a desire to fill in a somewhat lonely and less exciting time in my life.

The canon lawyer here says we could have different habits but one rule.

January 13, 2008

I talked to Sister Elizabeth last night. She is open to the alternate habit for different branches, but will pray about it. She was especially opposed to within the same branch different habits. I woke up with energy, joy and hope after feeling much deflated thinking it was an impasse. I prayed for the intercession of Mother Teresa and Jane of the Chantal. Sister Elizabeth seemed impressed by the argument that jumpers are $5 in the thrift shop vs. heavy expense for dress-like habits. I would like to wear denim jumpers and a denim bandana.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, said "Yes. This would not be contrary to our words to you and Fr. Ken's."

(Well, reading this now in 2013, it seems confusing since Mary seemed to be favoring the traditional habit. I prayed about my judgment on this now, so many years after and I think it fits with one of the locutions in Anne – Direction for Our Times where He said that he will always help us with "plan b" if "plan a" doesn't work out whether by our fault or otherwise. Of course this is only true when it is a choice between 2 goods, since an evil plan He will never help us with. Or, another way to think of it is that the "words in the heart" are a conversation not a command from on high where the supernatural being would be mad at me if I don't do what he/she recommends.)

I will await Sister Elizabeth's phone call on Thursday when she has talked to Fr. Becker. But I am thinking if it is a "No," that I am supposed to start my own independent group here.

January 14, 2008

As I proceed to become Sister Conchita I think I should be more silent especially before and after Mass unless people need to talk to me, and not give advice unless asked. I should avoid a compulsive need for approval expressed by telling everyone everything even when inappropriate. I could talk to Jesus, Mary and Joseph about everything instead.

January 17, 2008

Today I spoke to Sister Elizabeth Ann Seton and she said I could lead the branch in Morganton NC with the alternate habit if all the sisters would wear the same alternate habit. What she especially objects to is having each sister look different. We would wear the dress habit of the Sisters in Allentown PA at the ceremonies and retreats and meetings.

Adoration:

Now I am Sister Conchita, Consecrated Widow of the Good Shepherd. Thank you Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, Ven. Conchita, St. Jane of Chantal, St. Francis de Sales, Little Therese, guardian angel. God the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit, I give you my heart, soul, mind and body. "Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me, ich bin dein und du bist mein (I am Yours, and You are mine – an aria of Bach I love.)

Jesus, Mary and Joseph seemed to reply that I should not fear. If others join me, they, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, will "micro-manage" me to do it right because it is so important for the Church.

Mary, I will rest under your smile and enfold this branch of the community into the rosary.

Because of the snow – rare here, once a year at most – there was no one else at Adoration and I could dance and sing and crouch at the altar for surrender and beg Jesus, Mary and Joseph to make me holy so that I could be like them, with nothing but love in my heart.

Letter sent to my e-mail list:

Dear friends,

In my Recovery, Inc. for anger, fear and depression it is taught that we should not be so afraid to make mistakes. If you think this new plan is a mistake, as do many of my family and some friends, please pray for me. If you think it could be good, please pray for me. I am very joyful about it.

There is a widow in Pennsylvania who started a community called Consecrated Widows of the Good Shepherd. The rule is a mixture of my Dedicated Widows way of life and the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane of Chantal. She thought I might join them in Pennsylvania, but I said I wouldn't leave my present place and that I don't get along well usually with other leaders anyhow, etc. etc.

Now I am going to try starting a branch here in N.C. – different from Dedicated Widows which will continue on, is that I and any who join will wear a habit and be called Sister - The branch in PA wears modified formal habits but I want us to wear blue denim jumpers (hey, only $5 all sizes at ye local thrift shop) and bandanas - a la Little Sisters of the Poor. My name will be Sister Conchita after Ven. Conchita of Mexico the grandmother saint.

Who knows, maybe no one will join me and I'll just be a loner outpost but maybe some will want to try from this town, nearby, or some might want to move into an adjacent apartment and try.

If you know anyone who could be interested the contact info is Sister Elizabeth Ann Seton in PA 610-439-8646 and mine is chervinronda@gmail.com

Love and prayers, Ronda

Because of the snow we didn't go door to door but the Holy Spirit gave me a push to visit anyhow a woman in a nearby apartment who is deeply grieving, who lost husband, baby, teen son, and parents. She was glad to see me and even though a Baptist, was willing to walk over to the Church with me. I sat holding her hand and praying aloud with her and then thought to sing Amazing Grace. She said it was her favorite song and favorite also of her husband and son, and it meant so much to her that I sung it.

As I parted from her I thought – that's it – just go with the Holy Spirit on these outreaches – not too tense about results.

January 18, 2008

I became so ecstatic about the new widow's group that I thought I would jump out of my skin. Who could I talk to who would understand. Just then Rosalind Moss, my godchild and super-speaker EWTN Catholic Answers evangelist, called me and she was ecstatic about her religious community. We talked for 2 hours with much joy and mutual good advice. We totally affirmed each other's different calling.

January 20, 2008

Jesus, Mary and Joseph: You are on the right track, now ride on it, serenely praying constantly.

January 21, 2008

I was happy to hear Sister Elizabeth likes the idea now of my doing the denim thing.

Also a got a great compliment from Fr. Ken. Someone mentioned seeing me on TV and "wow, you're a famous person." I commented: "well I'm much better on TV than in life, as anyone in this room can testify." Hearing this usual self-deprecatory mode, put in, "You're wrong, Ronda, that is not true." He repeated it twice and I am still taking it in with joy.

January 25, 2008

Answer to a letter from a woman who read my book on Healing of Rejection on my web (now this has been published by Enroute Books and Media)

Dear Mira,

I was thrilled anyone actually read one of my e-books because I don't get to know if any one does on my system, but then sad about the reason you give. I have been thinking about it all day and thinking of couples I know without children who have had similar problems.

I don't know you, so I can't say specifically but here are some general observations about a situation that I don't think has anything to do with rejection actually.

1. Friendship is a combination of common values and common need. Often happy couples without children are so close others don't feel they need anyone else. They may also have a tendency to mother/father each other and this also makes them less needy.

2. My experience is that if one of the couple dies all these acquaintances rush forward to be friends, as well as nieces and nephews and siblings etc. also because they feel needed. Motherly/fatherly people only want friends who need them, not happy people who don't seem to need others.

Let me know if any of this sounds true. I've never thought it out before.

Reply:

Hello Ronda:

Thank you for replying- come to think of it, I never did see it the way you put it and neither did my husband - it does make sense. Long ago a friend (who later broke off relationship with me) had said that people were envious of the relationship my husband and I had with each other. So thank you and next time my husband feels low and unwanted by society I shall recall your email! God bless!

January 27, 2008

(I started teaching in a program for the Diocese of Charlotte for training deacons and their wives.)

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: “Little one, you have done so much for us; we wanted you to affirm those deacon candidates and their wives: pass the torch.”

February 1, 2008 from Letters given through Anne of Direction for Our Times

Jesus

My friend, heaven has accomplished many things with your service to the Kingdom. Shall I tell you what we are achieving together? First of all we have increased your holiness. It is true, dear apostle. With your cooperation, I have been able to advance you in virtue. Consider where you were in the holiness walk when you first committed to serving as My apostle. Consider where you are now. You will see that you have advanced, even though you also see that you have additional work to do in this regard. I want you to understand, though, that progress has been made so that you will rejoice and have hope for additional progress. This is good for you and good for heaven. Next, your service to the Kingdom has been used to bring light to other souls. Think for a moment. Is it not true that you have tried to treat others more like I treated others? Is it not true that there have been times when you returned love for hostility? Have you not discovered that you view even your enemies with greater compassion? Think dear apostles. Have you shared My merciful message with others? Have they benefited? Without your cooperation, this could not have happened.

Yes, many have benefited because you have chosen to serve Me. Would you like to know of another result of your service? Heaven, as you know, is filled with perfect love and comfort. I love all of humanity, of course, but not everyone returns My love. Because of your cooperation, I, Jesus Christ, have received a greater amount of love and comfort from your world. You, in your determination to serve Me, have bestowed upon Me the greatest consolations. The light from your willingness to serve as I wish you to serve has given Me comfort in a time when My heart aches with loneliness for so many. You have truly become My friend and I hold you in My heart most protectively. All of the intentions in your heart now move to the regular beating of My heart. I will not abandon you and I will not abandon your intentions. Together, we will see to each one of them. The loyalty you feel for your loved ones is shared by Me in that your holy desires become personal to Me as they are personal to you. Just as you are determined that your loved ones be healed, so I am determined that your loved ones be healed. These are joint projects embarked upon by the Savior and His beloved apostle. You are never alone in your concerns or your crosses. I thank you for helping heaven to accomplish so much and I will reward you, in part, by keeping the promise I have made to seek conversion of all of those dear to you. Be at peace in every trial, please, because I am with you.

February 6, 2008 Ash Wednesday

Letter to my sister and other friends,

How you would have loved our Ash Wednesday main Mass - introduced by the blowing of the shofar and the Church packed with hispanos and anglos (readings in English and Spanish) and a few Hmong and the choir singing an original composition, like the Allegri Miserere, created by the pastor and the choir master. Making use of the Old Testament reading about calling the assembly together to do penance since the people was having so many troubles, Fr. Ken's sermon theme was the power of the community doing Lent together vs. mostly thinking it is all about our individual salvation, also key, of course.

The best tonight was at the end of his, as usual, wonderful sermon, suddenly he got fiery passionate and called out for us to repeat after him "Juntos, Together, Juntos, Together," over and over again, charismatic style. The Hispanos started the applause. It was thrilling.

This morning I thought – process! Father always counsels me that things take time. After years and years, maybe this is the year the Anglos, Hispanos, and Hmong will be much more JUNTOS, TOGETHER, and each of us will have greater strength as a result.

Feb. 8, 2008

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph seemed to want to tell me to just be as quiet as I can and let them make me more gentle. I wrote one of my one page things about it:

Gentle vs. Rough

"But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children." (1 Thessalonians 2:7)

What a lovable quality gentleness is! Gentle people are soothing. How opposite to those of us who could be described, at least some of the time, as kind of tactless, rough or defensively confronting. If gentleness has its source in sympathy for the difficulties and hurts of others, roughness usually comes from impatient annoyance.

There is a famous hymn by a minstrel, Matt Talbot, called Gentle Woman about our Blessed Mother. Certainly she was also strong to be able to withstand incredible sufferings, but surely the mother of the Lord and of His Church would have to be also filled with gentle tenderness.

If we are called to be gentle with others, do we not also need to be gentle with ourselves? Of course we need to repent with fervor for our sins, but self-flagellating blame of self for every mistake or flaw comes from pride.

Think of roles in life where you have been gentle. Thank Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, for that virtue. Consider the people you are sometimes rough with. Ask the Holy Spirit to melt your heart with forgiving compassion toward them.

After writing this I took the kitties for their walks. (The neighborhood I was in during this time was not good for letting the kittens out free because of all the parking right around the apartment, but I would bring each of them out for a little supervised walk). I thought that Jesus, Mary and Joseph have been trying to "gentle" me in many ways: through Adoration, through the pets, through sending me more sensitive broken people who will not fight back if I get rough, music, the influence of St. Francis de Sales who is so gentle and melodious even though apparently choleric by temperament.

I was feeling discouraged about door to door ministry because about half our team dropped out because of busyness. Even so about 5 people came back to the Church! Then on Thursday 2 non-Catholics seemed as if they might drop into the Church and see. One clearly was praying to the H.S. to find a new Church.

Fr. Ken said: if you think of that ministry as God's work instead of yours you will be less concerning with success.

At the Hispano prayer meeting the theme for Lent was real conversion of heart. Miguel gave a stirring speech but then the Holy Spirit really seemed to come with even greater power when he called forth all those who feel guilt about sins of the present or past. I went up with others for the extended time of prayer by the intercessors. I began to have such a sense that I am so knotted up trying to unravel past sins that only purgatory can help. I began to long for purgatory as the only chance for purification, and then came a desire to do corporal penance. In the midst of the "altar call" part of the service, Miguel begged us to go to confession. One of the intercessors, an older man, had tears pouring down his face.

From February 10-17, 2008 I was away in Berkeley California visiting my twin sister at the death of her husband who was 91. I am not going to say much about this to honor the family's wish that I put less about them in my journals, only that it felt very loving to make the sacrifice of the long trip, and good to share the pain of my sister by being there for her worst moments such as when his corpse was wheeled into the prayer room of the crematory or when it was pushed into the ugly oven. She was always draping everything in the great beauty of her soul through the dance that was done during this time. It was good for me to hear all the tremendous admiration and love for my brother-in-law who I rarely got along with. Also wonderful to be at daily Mass with my sister.

Just before I left North Carolina I got these locutions that seemed to come from Arthur on the other side:

1."Ronda, you never understood. My soul was like a labyrinth and so I was desperate to have Carla's sincerity. Your marriage to Martin was the same."

2. "I longed to be one with everyone and everything, because I felt so different. I tried to do it with my body. Now when my body is turned to fire and ash I will be more one in spirit with God and with everybody and everything." This locution I read at the cremation and it also went into a booklet for his funeral.

At the cremation a friend read this poem of Robinson Jeffers:

It nearly cancels out my fear of death , my dearest said,

When I think of cremation. To rot in the earth

Is a loathsome end, but to roar up in flame – besides, I am used to it,

I have flamed with love or fury so often in my life,

No wonder my body is tired, no wonder it is dying.

We had great joy of my body. Scatter the ashes.

It gave me a different more positive image of cremation which I thought I might want to do in solidarity with the poor since it is so much cheaper and at my Church my ashes could then be buried right next to my beloved chapel where Fr. Ken prays every day for those buried there.

Diana thought about the blue denim jumper and bandana that it made me look more available vs. trying to be the center of attention.

On the plane coming back:

Ronda: I feel numb from the pain of "biting my tongue" and the grief that the differences with strangers and also those close cannot be overcome more easily so that I can be more one in many ways with them.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph: Dear one, we embrace you in our family. You belong to us. Hide in our hearts. Now just do some slow Jesus, Mary, Joseph prayers of the heart.

Ronda: Good. I feel calmer.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph: Now, coming off a lot of tension, you must not do anything unnecessary, and go very, very slowly.

During this time I got to have a visit with Sr. Mary Neill, O.P., who lives not far from my sister in California, with whom I wrote 4 books years ago. She is now retired as a professor and doing spiritual direction. Here is the some of the wisdom she (Mattie) imparted to me:

Our fundamental problems are unsolvable. We have to grow into the solution. It is a process. I thought of how much better I am doing on co-dependency. I thought that was unsolvable, but now I am home-free, even though the tendency is still there with tension when the buttons are pushed. In Recovery this is called a set-back and it doesn't mean a relapse!

Mary Neill thinks we are good and bad according to our personality type. (I have earlier in this year a description of these types 1-9) As a Crusader (One) I have both the drive and passion for truth that goes with this and the shadow side of rage wanting to coerce others. She thinks the rage comes from thinking that others who are not struggling so much have it easy in life. She calls this the Power Wound. She counsels to avoid getting into the game of these more laid-back people, by letting go, letting God and remembering Merton's adage: there is more at stake than being right.

The Holy Spirit works in this mix of good and bad traits. I have to practice trustful letting go when I feel rage and the desire to coerce. She asked, can you love without understanding or approving? I gulped hard. Usually not, but this is a great goal.

Look for the inner unity under the differences.

I need to surrender that I will always have this broken passion to rage and control; the ego creates drama. But I love God with all that passion and rage for good. I need to praise God for my temperament. "He has made me wonderful."

What is the one word for what I want now in my life from God? Mattie asked me. Peace seemed like the right answer but I don't like peace really. Praying on the plane going home I thought it was more like FREE especially in the sense of being light vs. heavy with rage. She mentioned that Personality Type Crusaders prefer system to relationship so I want everyone to be in the system of the Church right away vs. trusting in process and Providence.

She thought bad-mouthing myself as I do is part of this coercion syndrome. INSTEAD I NEED TO KNOW THAT EVEN IF MY PERSONALITY IS RAGING MY INNERMOST ESSENCE IS TO LOVE. I am more than my personality.

She recommends deep breathing, which Fr. Ken also recommended.

Also she recommended a book by Byran Katie called Loving What is Real. The schema of this book is this:

1. Isolate a thought that is bothering me.
2. Ask, is that absolutely true?
3. How does that thought make me feel?
4. Can I let go of that?
5. Turn-about: I cannot change the feeling but I can change the thought. For example the thought "I have to be powerful enough to control these people" can change to "Jesus won by love not power."

Crusaders tend to see everything as a problem. She remarked that if you think this, then all you will get will be problems.

I love others as I love myself: with a lot of judgment in it!

What if Jesus wants to save me now, not just at the end. Reap the harvest. Don't be too busy flagellating myself to notice the harvest!

February 21, 2008

Today is the Anniversary of my son Charlie's death. RIP dear Charlie. Each anniversary since 1991 is different. This time I have much more of a sense that he is interceding for us, especially his sisters. Just the same I asked for a sign and a friend came walking into the chapel at Adoration and said that she talks to Charlie! Also she said that she wanted to learn the rosary today. That's a sign surely since she had difficulty praying the rosary due to her mother issues.

February 23, 2008

For the book of meditations I didn't finish:

Respectful vs. Ridiculing

"…whoever says 'you fool' shall be liable to the hell of fire." (Matthew5:22)

For many years when I read or heard the above words of Jesus I would think to myself, “He’s gotta be kidding! Maybe the word that is translated “fool” is something much worse in Aramaic”? Surely yapping at someone, especially in the family, with a phrase such as “don’t be such an idiot,” couldn’t be a sin!

Spiritual masters claim that when we are free of mortal sin or even temptations to it, then the conscience begins to upbraid us for lesser sins. The analogy is often made to first washing the big stains off a window but then noticing smaller smears.

Right now think of people you would describe as respectful or reverent toward others. Isn’t it relaxing to be with family or friends who never ridicule others, especially not the all important ME. Our defense mechanisms can take a vacation, and we feel open to sharing problems we would never tell someone whose response to our narrative might be sarcastic blame.

Some psychologists analyze respect vs. ridicule and sarcasm in this challenging way. A person with good self-esteem and humble acceptance of his/her own limitations looks for the good in others and draws it out. A person who feels inferior and insecure likes to shift attention from his or her failings by pointing fingers at others. If others are fools then I am smart. If others are beneath contempt then I am on a pedestal. I may be unsuccessful in reaching many of my goals, but when I ridicule others I am admired for my witty remarks.

Try tracking impulses to ridicule and sarcasm and catching yourself before you sin in this way. Can you bring yourself to show respect for the virtues of others even when they are exhibiting their worst qualities? When her husband was making a fool of himself in public, a loving wife I knew used to take his hand. The love conveyed in this gentle touch would often change his mood for the better.

Jesus, since the Scriptures show You sometimes using sarcasm toward Your enemies we know that this can sometimes be right. But usually you are depicted as gentle, compassionate and respectful even to public sinners. Help us to know that we are worthy of respect as the sons and daughters of the Divine King. Basking in the glory of Your love, may be turn to others with true respect

February 27, 2008

Lisa Sullivan came over to do door to door with me. I suggested we visit Diane who lost 2 of 3 children and a husband. It was so moving. The three of us sat in my living room praying together and there were tears and closeness. I had been doubting this ministry and so after this encounter Jesus, Mary and Joseph seemed to tell me: “See the graces we will pour forth.”

I got in an argument with a wonderful parishioner who claimed that he was a total pacifist and thought that it was right to dissent from Church teaching on this. I was not so upset that he was a pacifist as that it opened the door to the cafeteria Catholic approach which denies infallibility in morals. In fact, he is good on contraception, the usual first line of dissent. But also I was upset because I respect the police and soldiers and others when they are defending the innocent against villains and don’t want to think that other Catholics think these protectors are doing the wrong thing if they ever kill anyone even if they are, say, terrorists.

The argument was that Jesus would never want us to kill anyone. Of course it is true that Jesus hates war and hates the conditions that lead to defense but that doesn't mean that He doesn't think police and soldiers should kill people if there is no other recourse.

In prayer I asked Jesus to help me see how He views it. He seemed to say:

"I hate war and killing but if even good men could not defend against evil aggressors one on one or in just war, that would destroy the good protector side of their natures. So the Church teaching, allowing for defense against aggressors, is My will in that sense.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph seemed to say: So now thank us and don't be so afraid of conflict. John the Baptist seemed to tell me to accept that if I am prophetic I will be fought against, but also listened to. I do need to follow Fr. Ken's admonition to speak the truth with love more and not stereotype others so readily.

February 28, 2008

Adoration: I am feeling anxious about tiny chores. I am wondering why.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, seemed to say that when I was younger I had to squeeze these in; now that I am older and more tired I can do less things, especially not so quickly. Therefore I need to do less things. Each day do only what is necessary first, and don't seek to finish lists so fast. Nothing matters so much as being loving and peaceful.

March 1, 2008

A friend took me out for a day off to relax me. I have been feeling forgetful and strange since coming back from California. I thought of many reasons, but finally hit upon the shock of the crematory scene there with the body of my brother-in-law. We thought we were going to proceed to the crematory door and stand behind it praying but we went right from the prayer room into this horrible warehouse like room with a huge oven with danger signs all over it and then suddenly they thrust the shrouded body in. I ran back toward the prayer room but when my sister, Carla, was gasping seeing it, I rushed back in to hold her. I think I swallowed the shock to be helpful to Carla but that it was a sort of trauma, maybe also because of Charlie and his ashes. I buried some of them at the monastery in the desert but part of them were scattered in the ocean because Martin wanted to do it that way) – so maybe I actually have a mild PTS. I am now thinking I don't like cremation and especially don't want my bereaved ones to have to deal with my ashes that way.

Even though I brought it to prayer then, I think now in my own home and thinking of my own death I need to bring it more thoroughly to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph now.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: Sometimes we wait until you, beloved children, bring something to prayer so we can console you. Sometimes you need to bury a shock for a while to function in the immediate situation and then it surfaces later. As your mentor, Von Hildebrand, understood, even if you have a strong belief in the immortality of the soul, the death of the body is a terrible

shocking thing, and a special suffering if it is a beloved person. Know that we are there at that time. We are honoring the way we moved you back into the crematory room out of love for your sister to strengthen that relationship in spite of the reasons for turmoil in it. Feel our love for her and for Arthur and for you right at the heart of the memory of that moment. Now just gently acknowledge our love by breathing in our names slowly.

I have been pondering a peculiar incident with my friend. Somewhat playfully I was outlining a short story about cat ladies full of strange incidents where a spectator notices that the ladies (relatives) are now sharpening their nails to be like claws, eating off the dishes on the floor, wearing cat costumes, etc. After much laughter I suddenly got depressed. I started thinking, what in the world would such a story have to do with me as a writer? What Christian message would it have, etc.? My friend admitted that it sounded kind of creepy. Later when I figured out that it was some sort of regression in an attempt to flee from the cremation images of Arthur's death in Berkeley, I was so grateful for her friendly, gentle admonition. I think God uses good friends so much to help us when we have some wild ideas with no substance.

Fr. Ken said that widows are looking for security not usually for something new to do such as our Widow community. They would need to tap into a free spirited part of themselves to do it. That explains a lot of hesitancy, for example, of widows who wouldn't want to move from houses even to apartments right near the Church because the house is security for them. I thought that I am free-spirited on the mystical and charismatic side, but full of emotional insecurities.

Monthly message as given to Anne, a lay apostle, of Direction for Our Times

March 1, 2008

Jesus

My dear friend, you will learn so much about love in heaven. You will look back at your time on earth and you will understand that many things that occurred to you were both exercises in love and opportunities to love. There is misunderstanding about love in the world but those who follow Me, My beloved apostles, seek to master love as I mastered love, in sacrifice. It is true that love creates joy. This is true. But when we take on love, it is also at times like taking on a burden which must then be carried. We should not decide for love and then, finding that love burdensome at times, set it down and walk away from it. This is not how it is done. On the contrary, if you love as I loved, you will find at times that the weight of love is heavy. I experienced this on Calvary when I carried My love for you to My death. Did I make the right decision, to pay the ultimate price for love? Of course I did. What else would I do, given the wonderful creation that is you? In the same way, I want each of My apostles to expect their love for Me to be a burden to them at times. This is normal. I want each of My apostles to expect their love for others to be a burden to them at times. This is also normal. In love, there are times when the decision to love feels light, of course, and there seems to be no burden to it at all. Rejoice in these times. In love, there are other times when the burden causes you to question your commitment. Do not be afraid of these times. This questioning is necessary for your growth. I experienced this, too. I was tempted toward an easier way. When love is tried this way and triumphs, that love becomes firmer and less likely to be

disappointed later. Welcome the challenges to love, even while you decide for love. I will be with you in each situation, counseling you to humility and gentleness. View each challenge as a worthy exercise, allowed by heaven to teach you about eternity. See the opportunities to love all of those around you, particularly those whom you find it difficult to agree with at times. Please do not be alarmed when you are disappointed in love, when others fail you. This was also My experience and this will also benefit you because it will help you to learn forgiveness. I will bring you to greater holiness with each experience if you remember that I am with you and that I love you perfectly and completely. From the secure place that is My heart, you will go forward with self- assurance, confident that you are cherished. This confidence will express itself in an increased ability to love those around you. Be at peace, dear apostles. My plan is such that you will learn to live like residents of heaven. All is well.

March 4, 2008

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: See, more and more are coming earlier to rosary for Adoration. See how slow this growth has been! Process! Trust. We use you start many things.

Francis de Sales writes in the Introduction to the Devout Life that meditation can be harmful if it doesn't issue forth in concrete resolutions about ways to improve on our defects, such as the right prayers to say when tempted, etc. I related this to my vow to be more silent during Lent. I often forget all about it.

During RCIA Fr. Ken said that we walk with Christ through our problems. We don't try to escape by fantasies of living in an ideal transcendent world.

March 8, 2008

Tonight I gave my anger talk in Spanish that I have been rehearsing with my tutor all these months. Right before I asked Fr. Ken to give me a blessing. Afterwards I laughing told him I loved him for encouraging rather than controlling me and he quipped "I never try to control the uncontrollable."

Before the big meeting of the 250 or so, there was a prayer session with the leaders and ushers. It felt so wonderful to be among them. I was so happy to be a bridge this way between the Anglos and Hispanos. Even though, in fact, people have been Catholic in their Guatamalan country way before I was a Catholic, I had a sense of how missionaries felt seeing their faith take fire among a different native Indian culture for they pray in such a fiery way and I am sure God loves it even though it is not high European type of praying as in Gregorian chant, etc. I thought also of Mother Angelica's motto: God cannot do the miraculous if we will not do the ridiculous. It could seem ridiculous for a 70 year old woman to try to learn a different language and speak publicly in it after 6 months of tutoring. I had High School Spanish and then a year with the students at the seminary, but I had forgotten most of it. Suddenly, looking at the young intercessors, I thought of Charlie, my son who died at 19 of suicide and I heard Jesus say to me: "Madre, see your sons."

Even though God gave me a special peace the whole day so I wouldn't get too nervous, I did feel apprehensive not knowing if I could pull it off. Well, very soon after I started the speech, mostly reading it but half looking up they started laughing at my humorous lines. They are a somber people and I had never heard them laugh that loud and spontaneously. And then when I got to the part of my testimony about total forgiveness of my husband and his changing they clapped. They especially seemed to catch the insight that 20 years of non-forgiveness for a sin of a spouse was more evil than that sin of the spouse. And then when I asked them to come up and be prayed over for non-forgiveness and anger they had tears in their eyes. I felt especially close to the women who are less prominent and less often come forward.

I truly felt it was one of the best days of my whole life to be able to let Jesus use my failings, problems and even sins, to help others this way.

March 10, 2008

I did left a Church bulletin in a neighbor's door. This morning she knocked on the door, telling me she was locked out of her apartment with a baby inside. She said her husband told her if she had any problems to go to the friendly lady downstairs. So I sat with her while she phoned him and it turns out she had read the bulletin and wanted to go into a Catholic Church, etc. Her previous husband was a Catholic and she had been inside a Church a few times and thought Catholic churches were so beautiful.

This confirms Nancy McCall's advice that in evangelizing you need to become friends so people trust you.

March 13, 2008

From Abraham Low, founder of Recovery, Inc. (this fits me to a "t" about anxiety about tiny things now that I am doing so few "big" things)

"To (a perfectionist) every puny endeavor, each trivial enterprise is a challenge to prove and to maintain his exceptional stature. His life is a perennial test of his singularity and distinction. For him there are no trivialities, no routine performances. He is forever on trial, before his own inner seat of judgment, for his excellence and exceptional ability. He cannot achieve poise, relaxation, spontaneity. He cannot afford to have the COURAGE TO MAKE MISTAKES. A mistake might wipe out his pretense of being superior, important, exceptional. With no margin left for mistakes he is perpetually haunted by the fear of making them."

I am noticing in two private revelations that use the term "the Returning Jesus" that the meaning is not that there will be a huge external event, but that primarily Jesus is returning to our hearts!

March 15, 2008

I was so glad that the charismatic prayer group saw Mel Gibson's The Passion instead of playing joyful music. After Miguel gave a stirring preaching about it with Jesus telling us that He did all this and then so many don't respond, I gave a brief comment

about how the film was an intervention of God so that millions all over the world could know of His love more and also a proof of the resurrection to the doubting because how would the disciples have followed him to such a death without having seen the Resurrection?

Fr. Ken was irritated by something. By now with the tiny corporal penances I am doing for him and others I feel even more bonded so that any time he is irritated or saddened I feel pain inside my own self. I think it is a sign of a deep spiritual friendship to participate in this way in the soul of the other.

March 17, 2008

Today I marched with a group doing a social justice protest. They were making their way from Asheville to Raleigh. One of our parishioners who runs an ecumenical ministry to immigrants was part of the leadership of this march. A few times many years ago I tried going to such demonstrations but was put off with the fierce rejection of some of them of the pro-life movement. Like Juli Loesch Wiley who started Pro Lifers for Survival (meaning for peace), I think these issues should be joined especially by consistent life ethics Catholics. In fact, on this march today the Schunke family who is so pro-life, did come to this march also. I had many reasons to go this time.

I have a heart for the immigrants since getting to know the Guatamalan Mayan ones in our parish and prayer group. Also I wanted to try once more to dialogue with the other marchers about pro-life issues.

I prayed and prayed before and worked my Recovery, Intl. techniques to decide to only speak politely and not to argue. Blessed be God, the individuals I spoke with during the march were real peace people, not raging self-righteous ones that can sometimes be found in such movements. Also I got the grace to insert my pro-life activist viewpoints in a gentle way, not in a confrontative way. It was a great victory for me of grace plus Recovery, Intl. techniques.

At the RCIA meeting I did better also until the very end. Fr. Ken wanted to help the candidates to see that they didn't need to fuss over every detail of the upcoming Easter Vigil ceremony but instead begin to open themselves to new graces. He said that they could never love the liturgy of the Catholic Church if being safe was their priority. Somehow it touched a nerve and I blurted out that I disagreed more with Fr. Ken on this than anything so far! I insisted that the Church was our only safety. Fr. Ken polled the group and no one but me had interpreted his statement as having any reference at all to Church doctrine but only to the attitude of the candidates to their reception into the Church. Still I fretted and fretted over it, realizing that for me to be Saved in the Church equals to Be Safe. Period! I grabbed Fr. Ken the next morning to try to clear up the misunderstanding. He seemed quite angry that I persisted in misunderstanding his intent. He did explain it more clearly, making a distinction between seasoned Catholics who should find the Church safe and those about to plunge into their initiation rites. Finally I did something so unlike me – instead of debating it forever I just said meekly "Please don't be angry at me. I am trying so hard to understand." He said he wasn't angry at me, just at the circumstance of the candidates making such a fuss about exterior matters.

I thought it was a sign of healing that I could speak to him from the heart instead of trying to win the debate.

March 19, 2008

Arrangements have been finalized for me to do *Taming the Lion Within: Five Steps from Anger to Peace* with men across the street in a half-way house for alcoholics and drug addicts. I am thrilled.

I was planning to work on my Spanish talk on feminine and masculine but it being Wednesday of Holy Week I felt led instead to listen quietly to the St. Matthew Passion and finish reading a book by St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain. In the last chapters on delights of the spiritual life there are a few quotations that seem to fit very well with what some people in our times are experiencing in visions and locutions:

"The vision of the divine light and the divine beauty…is more sweet and more desirable than all the other attributes and perfections of God…The reason for this is the fact that as the physical light of the sun provides the brightness to the physical eyes and makes it possible for them to distinguish the visible creations in the physical world, so also is the spiritual light of the super-essential sun which grants illumination and clarity to the eyes of the soul the means by which they can discern through it all the blessed visions in the spiritual world and all the mysteries of the future age."

"According to the holy Fathers (the Doctors of the early Church) the body by necessity participates according to its nature, together with the senses, in the divine and blessed passions, both in this present life and in the future as well….Therefore, even the physical eyes see the divine light and the spiritual beauty, and the physical hearing hears the spiritual sounds of heaven. …St. Kallistos, too, has written at length to show that God out of love for mankind can be revealed and received through every intelligible and spiritual sense.

Triduum, March 21-23, 2008

When Father Ken was washing and kissing our feet so solemnly and crawling from person to person down the pews it seemed as if he became Jesus.

Good Friday all the Hispanos crawling up to venerate the Cross was so moving especially because this year I recognize so many more of them from the charismatic prayer group.

There came 2 very sharp rejections from friends these days.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: We said we would manage you. Through the hurt of different people rejecting you or falsely taking out on you their own problems, we want to bring you to spend less time with others and be more with us saying always the Jesus prayer. Don't fret, just flee to us each time.

At the airport going to Allentown, PA, to make my one year vows in the Consecrated Widows of the Good Shepherd, since it was Easter Sunday the airport was almost empty. There was a woebegone looking old black janitor sweeping up. I wished him a blessed Easter and got into a nice conversation with him. He said he wished he could quit but he can't. He wonders what God

wants? I suggested that during his work he talk to people in the airport about Jesus. He was pleased with this idea and said it was because I smiled at him that he talked to me. Alleluia.

Some highlights of March 23-29 in Pennsylvania: I didn't get angry or irritated even once in spite of some discomforts and some conflicts of ideas about the way of life. I loved being with the Sisters and enjoying their loving hospitality and also being with Sister Elizabeth Ann Seton, the foundress, as she goes about bring Jesus in the Eucharist to patients, home-bound, and those in assisted living. It was wonderful to see the faces light up when she came. The ceremony was beautiful and I liked very much Fr. Joseph, the hospital chaplain and their chaplain.

Monthly message as given to Anne, a lay apostle.

April 1, 2008

Jesus

My dear apostles, I speak to you from My heart, the seat of love. I speak to you freely at this time to teach you about love. I desire that each of you accept My love, which includes the love of all of heaven. Those who are lukewarm and do not accept my love cannot help Me in My goal of renewal. Those who are concerned with establishing their kingdoms on earth will lose opportunities to seed the renewal each day. Those who postpone a full commitment to My goals will find that they are sadly disappointed later, when they realize how important their service was to Me. I rely on My apostles to be passionate about service, seeking always to store up heavenly treasures in the souls of those around them. Truly, no kind word, no compassionate silence, no act of love is lost. Each of these is both used immediately and preserved eternally. I understand that you are tired at times. I understand that you become discouraged. I understand these things because in My humanity I experienced these things. I allow these feelings in My beloved apostles because their service to Me then becomes even more beneficial. Rest assured that you have been given all that you need in strength and courage for each day's service. There is no difficulty, from heaven's perspective, in an apostle serving in weariness. Most apostles served in weariness and the weariness that an apostle feels does not mean that the fire of the Spirit is at risk of being extinguished. Have no fear about this because I Myself tend to the presence of the Spirit in your soul. This fire has been expertly banked so that it will burn for as long as it needs to burn. Some day you will be finished with your service on earth. The tasks that I need from you will be completed. This will be a joyful day for you. You will see all that you have accomplished for Me. Yes, weariness comes and goes, but love creates stamina that keeps the servant and the service steady. In the time to come I intend to increase the capacity for love in each apostle. This is necessary for heaven's goals and will enable My beloved ones to serve with even greater dedication and humility. I will teach you more and instruct you closely in the use of this gift as time passes. This heavenly concession will greatly increase the effectiveness of My presence in your soul. I am so grateful that you seek to remain close to Me. Rejoice, dear apostles. I am with you.

April 2, 2008

Reading for the Hermit St. Francis of Paola April 2 in the Office of Readings. It is so relevant to us who struggle with anger:

"Put aside your hatred and animosity. Take pains to refrain from sharp words. If they escape your lips, do not be ashamed to let your lips produce the remedy, since they have caused the wounds. Pardon one another so that later on you will not remember the injury. The recollection of an injury is itself wrong. It adds to our anger, nurtures our sin and hates what is good. It is a rusty arrow and poison for the soul. It puts all virtue to flight. It is like a worm in the mind: it confuses our speech and tears to shreds our petitions to God. It is foreign to charity: it remains planted in the soul like a nail. It is wickedness that never sleeps, sin that never fails. It is indeed a daily death."

Notice that he doesn't add "but it is okay if you are in the right."

Feeling grief this morning over a friend who withdrew from me and also about the problems with the Sisters in Allentown that they are my "triplets" in some but not all their values. I begged Jesus, Mary and Joseph for a word about what I should do: They seemed to tell me this:

"You need to let us be your "quads." If you stop wanting so desperately that others be your twins, even your real twin, you can be lighter and then you will see more clearly how to proceed day by day with the problems that come up. As long as you want others who come to be your twins it cannot work."

Fr. Ken remarked humorously when I conveyed this idea to him that "if I met my twin I would kill him!"

I thought I should "chat" during the day with Mary about household things, food, and cats as well as about trying to be more gentle. St. Joseph I beg to help me when I need to understand men better. Doing the Stations it seemed as if St. Joseph told me that from heaven he had inspired the Roman soldiers to get Simon of Cyrene to help carry that cross!

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, seemed to tell me that every time I think of something that outrages me about someone who I wanted to be a twin soul I should offer that pain immediately for graces for them, and then let it go. Every time I see something I like I should praise the Lord.

During adoration Jesus seemed to tell me: "Sursum corda. Remember, we win in the end. Now, today you pray the glorious mysteries and just rejoice in them. That can be a way of visiting us."

I was reading about St. John Vianney and the writer says it is reported that people saw him talking to Jesus and Mary and the angels and laughing aloud.

April 4, 2007

By means of a dear friend who has locutions and visions, Jesus seemed to want to give me this message about the Sisters in Allentown:

Peace be with you, Ronda. All that you labor for is warranted, but here is a situation that is likely to change. This will not be a long term thing for you, nor will you find long term satisfaction if you try to stay.

Then I asked Fr. Ken the next day what he thought about this. He thought that just by living widowhood in the dedicated form I am doing it, I am providing a way for widows to have a sense of what they could do in many, many, forms, not necessarily a specific one such as the Order or my Dedicated Widow rule. So, I am thinking in this connection that the EWTN show will be potentially reaching 50 million over and over again all over the world and that might be more important than starting a community myself or with Allentown Sisters even though personally it is painful for me not to have "twins" doing it with me.

(Rereading this in 2013, it is even clearer than it was then that I am not meant to be in any kind of community run by me or by another and that just being a Dedicated Widow in my own way is a good witness for others.)

April 11, 2008

Fr. Ken came for a visit to the house of Carla and Steve, mostly to see Diana, my California daughter who was visiting the family here. We all had a little wine and it seemed like a real in vino veritas visit. Because I am not drinking any kind of alcohol any more except at family visits, not out of some penance, but because I don't like to drink alone, one glass of Merlot tonight had me sharing riotously my fantasy that one day at the Saturday night charismatic prayer meeting I will levitate and they will call Fr. Ken and he will see and then he will have to listen to me even when he disagrees! I also humorously shared with the whole gang my longing to see my daughters back in the Church, and to ask God to send me some painful dread disease I could offer as a penance.

Well, only one day later I passed out at Adoration and the daughters got me to the emergency and I spent a terrible 2 days there feeling so alienated by the atmosphere, by the TV I succumbed to out of restlessness and wanting to be diverted totally. The good part was offering everything up for the daughters, and identifying pain of needles with Jesus from the Passion film. I think Jesus, Mary and Joseph did honor my prayer but I did very poorly on putting up with eating issues and the defects of hospital service for diabetics. I managed not to scream at anyone but to talk with tears in my voice about how anxious their lack of communication made me about availability in between their horrible meals of snacks that would be good for diabetics. Apparently I could have gotten them if I had begged more clearly.

I am not going to work up the anger by itemizing the details. I just finally begged them to do it differently with the next diabetic. And it made me eager to try to do more Eucharistic ministry to the hospitalized and home-bound.

April 12, 2008

My Priest, My Friend

It's not in the job description –

well, friendly, yes,

but not to offer hope,

he’d be a real friend.

The tone in the voice

that changes

so swiftly

from amiable availability

to compassion for my pain.

The gleam in the eye

that catches

so swiftly

the humorous nuance

beneath my speech.

The diverted attention

that darts

so swiftly

away from a display

of my lesser weaknesses.

The occasional hug

that extends

so swiftly

to prove I’m welcome

in spite of all my faults.

The admonishing stare

that startles

so swiftly

when I cross him

and he’s actually right.

The life-line

that plunges

so swiftly

down to the bottom

when I’m in a pit.

The open acceptance

that greets

so swiftly

my family on visits

we so cherish.

Our responding love

he absorbs

so swiftly

with joyful glee

but never dependence.

His greatest wish?

that we would

recognize his love

is but a mirror of

our mutual friend Divine!

from Ronda, with gratitude for Fr. Ken's upcoming birthday: April 16, 2008

April 13, 2008

Zacko's first holy communion was beautiful. Sadly, Carla had a terrible flu attack and couldn't come but Nicholas came and Zacko was so pleased and Carrie sat next to us.

April 17, 2008 Papal visit to the United States: Let me be like Benedict, speaking the truth in love to overcome divisions in the Church. I was so intrigued by the compassionate diplomatic way he spoke about situations where I would want to be so confrontative. His strategy seemed much more like the way Fr. Ken thinks about process, taking people where they are and trying to move them one inch closer.

April 18, 2008

After much inner turmoil, in conjunction with seemingly clear messages from Jesus, Mary and Joseph during the session with Mary Rose, I decided to think of my link to the Allentown Sisters as more like being in a federation and worked up this alternative Way of Life I think is the final idea of what I am called to:

DEDICATED WIDOWS OF THE HOLY FAMILY

A WAY OF LIFE FOR A COMMUNITY

led by Ronda Chervin, Morganton, N.C. 2008

Many devout Catholic widows are seeking commitment to a more structured way of life with greater community with other such widows. Some time ago I formed an association called Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family – see www.rondachervin.com click on Association of Dedicated Widows for the way of life of members of this association. This association does provide a way of life, but not much community since its members live so far apart. I feel called to provide the possibility for greater closeness near my present residence for widows who would be interested in trying it out. Here is the way of life I have in mind.

Common practices with flexibility:

a. Daily Mass

b. Frequent Confession (once a month)

c. Rosary and Chaplet of Divine Mercy

d. Liturgy of the Hours daily especially morning, evening and night prayer.

e. Silent Prayer each day (at Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on parish days of Adoration whenever possible – at our parish we presently have Adoration M-Th 10:40-11:40 AM, Fr 6:30-7:30 PM)

f. Spiritual Reading daily from Scripture, writings of the saints,

Office of Readings, or other.

g. Yearly retreat

h. Community Prayer: whenever possible the sisters should gather as a community for Mass, Liturgy of the Hours, Rosary, Chaplet or visit to the Blessed Sacrament

i. Eucharistic Adoration Spiritual Motherhood prayers for priests, our bishop, seminarians, vocations as recommended by the Congregation for the Clergy at the Vatican 12/11/07

Other Observances:

a. In the interests of simplicity of life we will wear any calf-length or longer blue denim jumper (available at second hand shops for $5 a-piece) with white or blue tops with a large crucifix. For family visits a dedicated widow may wear any simple, modest, garments of other colors.

b. Observing a simple life-style without unnecessary possessions (but with allowance for needs of her extended family), detachment from things of the world such as cosmetics, perfume, jewelry and hair coloring, perms, with discretionary funds given to the poor. Dwellings will be furnished simply with many religious pictures and statues.

c. Each dedicated widow is self-supporting and lives in an apartment or house near the parish. Some may choose to live together and share expenses and resources but this is optional. We will try to help a widow with health problems and disabilities but financial help cannot be guaranteed.

d. Our pastor, Fr. Ken Whittington, will be our chaplain, but each widow may choose her own spiritual advisor. A widow in our community needs to be eager for help in dealing with any character disorders discerned by the coordinator, presently Ronda Chervin. Differences between the widows will be settled with counsel from the chaplain.

e. All widows need to believe and accept the Magisterial teachings of the Church on faith and morals.

f. Apostolates of the community include needs of the pastor and the parish, and other works the gifts of a sister suit her to perform.

Requirements for Entrance into the Community:

There is no upper age requirement. All that is required is a widow's desire to serve God and the Church. Most of the members will be widows and the head of the branch will be a widow, but single women may also become members.

It is presumed that the applicant will be of good moral character and she will make a promise not to marry.

Applicants to the Community will visit Ronda Chervin to see whether our callings and personalities are compatible. A recommendation from a priest who knows each widow well is required.

After a year of residence in the vicinity of the community, the dedicated widow will make a private promise not to remarry and to consecrate herself to Jesus and the Church. During this year the dedicated widow will work with the coordinator and any other helpful groups on any character issues including any addictions such as to alcohol, drugs, nicotine, gambling, co-dependency, work, over-eating, over use of e-mail and the net, excess shopping. As well the dedicated widow will work on growth in prayer and Christian virtues and on her apostolate.

A dedicated widow may choose to leave at any time. Also she may be dismissed at the discretion of the coordinator of her branch for legitimate reasons.

April 19, 2008

Ruth Ballard did her wonderful icon workshop. Before this, Fr. Ken explained why Western eyes, used to 3 dimensional sculptures in Church, don't immediately understand icons and how they are a gateway into heaven not a depiction of human life. I was especially moved by the idea Ruth conveyed that when you pray before an icon you move through it back through all the similar representations of the past and then into the living being of the person(s) depicted.

Uproarious hispano(a) birthday party for Fr. Ken. Right before in the Papal visit Benedict said we must love our priests even more and this event so depicted the way the closely knit Mayan community would express this. We, more individualistic, anglos, wouldn't think of having lines and lines of people coming up to kiss and hug him and some throwing money on his dinner plate. Fr. Ken detached the huge birthday balloon from the back of his chair and fastened it to his belt and then walked around with it, clown like, throwing candies to the ninos and even mounting the stage area in the hall where the band was playing loud electric guitar songs and tapping on the drum. I thought that the lay preachers would not have organized this fete unless they all know that Fr. Ken's giving us the Eucharist is even more important than the prayer meeting. Also that they were all so joyous because they felt that Fr. Ken, their spiritual father, loves them.

April 21, 2008

I put up on poster boards collages in the hall of my apartment of many old photos. It was healing – as if all these long dead family members, mentors, friends, and my children and grandchildren of so many beloved people were smiling at me with love. It made me feel less lonely. Thank you, dear God, for so many wonderful people.

One of the posters is just photos of me in different communities in my religious garb of different sorts. I experienced it as a breakthrough not to see all these attempts as failures but more as stepping stone to my new venture to form a community of Dedicated Widows.

April 25, 2008 Evening

It looks as if Juliana, a widow from far away, will come to visit June 11-18. I am very excited if wary. When I said I had not thought I could lead a community because I wasn't like Rosalind Moss – sweet, diplomatic, prudent, Julianna remarked: "Well, Mother Angelica isn't like that." I replied: But she is much more sacrificial than I am. It looks as if Gen Lesko may come in first after all. My cup runneth over.

May 1, 2008 Gen came into Dedicated Widows for her 6 month trying it out. I was so happy to see her in the jumper and we went out to celebrate. What a dear person! I feel so graced. This is my 7th try of some kind of community life. May it be the best one that really works. Thank you Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

Letter from Anne Direction for Our Times

May 1, 2008

Jesus

Dear apostles, My heart is bursting with love for each one of you. Indeed, I cannot contain the love that I possess for all of mankind. Many reject My love. They are not open to accepting love directly from My heart. You, My beloved apostles serving in this time, do accept the love of the Savior. You rejoice in My love. You allow My love to transform you into carriers of heaven's

healing plan for humanity. Because so many reject Me, I give in a ridiculously lavish way to those willing to accept Me. Many of God's children, living in the sadness of sin, will not admit that God could offer them anything of value. They are closed to My love for them and they are closed to My plan for them. But these people will, nevertheless, accept kindness from you, God's apostles. They will accept good example from you, God's apostles. Ultimately, if My plan is successful, they will accept love from you. The love they find in your heart will belong to Me because I placed it there. When the people around you are loved by you, they experience Me. This works because you are connected to Me each day through your apostolic pledge and through your apostolic service. I have told you in the past that you bring light to a dark world. I want you to know, dear loyal apostles, that the light you bring is changing the world. We, those of us in heaven, see the light growing. Some of you begin unsteadily. You are not certain that you are called. My beloved one, I am speaking to you now. Listen to Me. You are called. You belong in this family. I need your help. I do not ever want to be apart from you again. It hurts Me to be apart from you and it hurts you to be apart from Me. Only I love you perfectly. If you remain close to Me, I can continue to love you in such in a way that you will value yourself as heaven values you. You are not perfect. It is true. I accept this about you. If you believed you were perfect, My beloved friend, you would be no good to Me. Far better for every one of My goals that you believe you are flawed. Believe in My perfection and be willing, and together we will bring an unstoppable flow of love into the world. I rejoice in your love for Me, dear apostle. I want you to rejoice in My love for you. If you do this, you will show others an accurate example of the peace that comes from resting in the Savior. Rejoice in your heart. I am there and I love you.

May 5, 2008

On my way to my Christian Writing Group in the parish I prayed to just BE LOVE instead of always living in expectations. It was a good day for that because a woman who comes from Rutherfordton had her wild puppy in the car and on her walk on the road the dog broke free from the leash and was run over. She put her corpse in the trunk and kept driving to us. I was able to overcome a certain squeamishness about corpses and we went out to see the dog in the trunk of her car and I prayed over our friend and the dog and even patted the dog and then fed the friend soup and chicken before her long ride home. It felt very loving and without the Messages of this week I might have just given my friend a quick hug and on with the meeting!

We are being trained.

(Note: It was at this time that I got a whole series of words in my heart from the Holy Spirit that lasted for 4 months. They became a booklet called *God Alone.* You can read these wonderful "messages" by going to Enroute Books and Media, and clicking on Free Downloads)

Fr. Ken's Reflections given during a retreat:

God Within/God AboveEach era in Christian history has a different way of wrongly emphasizing more or less of the divinity or humanity of ChrisFrom Retreat for Dedicated Widows by Fr. Ken, weekend of July 15, 2008 On the topic "walking more intimately with Jesus," Fr. Ken referred us tr asked Based on the men at Emmaus listening to Jesus who they didn't recognize at first: Fr. Ken asked us to think about what prevents each of us from seeing Jesus. I thought "If I saw Him visually I could not do anything else and He wants me to do other things, at least so far. I liked how Fr. Ken emphasized that the greatest intimacy with Jesus is not through imagination but in the Eucharist as they found out at Emmaus.

On "letting go but staying bonded," Fr. Ken emphasized the way the liturgy for the dead is so much deeper than making it into a celebration of life. The liturgy is about bonding with the spiritual reality of the person who died.

He talked about how embalming can help us see how the person who died looked before the ravages of old age and awful illnesses such as Alzheimers.

On Life-Style for Widows I was looking for advice on dealing with choices but Fr. Ken emphasized more simply being a Christian and how that involves contemplation and ministry. He was happy that our tiny group could be a mirror in our times of the early Church's Order of Widows who sat together at the Liturgy. It was helpful to me that he thought that for most of us the old archetype of the old widow living in the bosom of the extended family just didn't fit any more. Still not everything has to be a big crisis. He thought that we should realize that chaos in our families is not the same as perdition. We should be aware that our need for security can cause difficulties for our adult children in terms of wanting to control them. If they are doing well we think we have more security. He thought that some of our fears for them can come a bit from prideful ego.

Refreshing our Spiritual Life – the last topic included surprising challenges to be kinder to our bodies, to refresh the body through exercise, for example.

I was told to cultivate greater lightness. I went into the chapel and danced around just lifting my hands and walking. I thought I could do this physically but also do it as an image in my mind when I am feeling burdened.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph said: anything you think about or plan that makes you disturbed and fearful, let go of it and let it come to you if it will, but don't plan it, just because it is exciting in some way.

It felt very good to see the other widows sitting quietly in the retreat room doing lectio divina.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph said they wanted to be my best friends. Maybe they will give me a woman friend to match Fr. Ken as my best male friend here, but I don't need to worry about this. I am hoping Gen, my other dedicated widow, will be that friend, but this will be slow because she is essentially a loner and I am a twin.

About Mother Mary as my friend I realized that she was, when on earth, surrounded by uncontrolled passionate women. She tells me that she tried to bring them trust and peace as she is trying to give that to me.

I asked the Holy Spirit to give me greater insight into the pain of others so I can be closer to them. I think it is not just a matter of cultural difference that makes me not understand others very well but also being too self-absorbed or taken up with my projects.

The Holy Spirit told me that when I enter into a place where others are I could ask Him to show me their pain.

Mother Mary seemed to tell me: you are so funny, Ronda, with all your lists. How do you think I got by without them? I understand that it was because your birth home was so emotionally chaotic that you like order and lists so much, but that is really exterior. Your heart is still often turbulent and anxious in spite of the lists! Gradually we will free you from the compulsion of the lists, but for now we leave them for the relative security they give you. Laughing at the lists is a step toward greater freedom of spirit.

Mother Mary also told me that I was created to be an idea person and that was good but that the shadow side, as Jungians would call it, is this feverish mental activity. It is okay to write down these ideas as they come but then let go of them and give yourself to the theme of the now.

St. Joseph said to avoid the burden of expectations. I thought "one day at a time" is very good for those like me who want to plan obsessively.

I realized during a glitch in the middle of the retreat where I thought my computer died that I don't really want to live without it. The connection with people all over, friends and readers, helps me stay in one place without traveling which is too hard on me at this age.

Mary said "I had to see so much that was tragically awry. When you see something that isn't working you can say something, but don't push. Failure to connect between people may lead them to come to us. You, too, are disappointing to others and we fill the gap. Offer your pain for the person you feel is not being treated right.

Mother Mary urged me to realize that as I age I will need more comforts such as daily baths vs. every other day or more relaxation.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph seemed to want to tell me that at my age I have no obligations and therefore should do everything cheerfully.

Worrying about certain differences between some widows and myself, Fr. Ken advised that I could try for the impossible – exact replicas of the best in me and then try to coerce them into doing it my way – or accept some amount of difference. Of course I want to do the latter.

I asked Mother Mary to help me see, for instance, how home-making women would feel differently about a house vs. an apartment than women like me raised in apartments and more interested in the work-site often than in making my own home a reflection of love.

Mother Mary seemed to suggest that they had given me the gift of simplicity and most other widows the gift of hospitality. "If all of your widows have hospitality of heart for each other you will not feel threatened by the differences. Nada te espante…"

More Insights from Fr. Ken in Retreat for Widows (July 14 – 17)

"Walking more Intimately with Jesus" He asked us what obstacles bad or good might stand in the way. Sometimes when I feel very physically tired I think that I would be better off dropping all ministries and becoming a total contemplative. But when I prayed about the obstacles it seemed to me that it was not the ministries but being preoccupied by them in an anxious way. I went through the whole list of them and seemed to hear in my heart Jesus, Mary, and Joseph telling me how to do them a bit differently:

- Writers' Group: don't push anyone to write more or send out queries. Make a suggestion once and then let go of it. Don't push for greater friendship than comes naturally. Accept what might make it hard for each of them to come closer.
- RCIA: Say as little as possible. Offer up, for the future Catholics and returning Catholics, having to wait now to see how my role will unfold.
- 2x2 Pray and work out a plan with Ron when he returns.
- Philosophy Club – after metaphysics offer Person. Fall do talks on M/F and Conscience.
- Gen, my first dedicated widow: very gentle and Marian
- Charismatic: respond to their needs.
- Family: Lighten up. Have fun. Leave earlier during the visit if you start to feel depressed.

August 24, 2008

My dream came true when my sister Carla, visiting us, danced spontaneously with me after my talk at the charismatic Hispanic prayer meeting. For a year I had been dreaming of her dancing for them.

That night in prayer with Carla sleeping in the bed with me instead of a locution I got a sense of the ocean's waves carrying us out to sea, and death would be letting the waves carry us out into the ocean of God. All night I had a sense of my soul leaving my body.

The Holy Spirit said: In thanks for loving My people I am giving you ecstatic union.

I thought of St. Teresa saying "death is ecstasy."

August 25, 2008

Anne (the widow I did the series with on EWTN) is staying with me. We went to Carla's house. We had wine and then Kahlua drinks. It was very joyful but I felt I was a bit too garrulous and "outrageous."

Holy Spirit: It is good that you were free and funny. What is not needed is for you to grab center stage. Try to stay in the background and serve. You felt good doing the dishes. You felt good all day helping your guests. In this period of building up Dedicated Widows the theme is to encourage them. Some will not be able to make any moves because they need their own space. So you need to be affirming but not attached. Avoid trying to offer them "sugar plums."

August 26, 2008

Holy Spirit: Do you see the convergence of people writing to you on the e-mail? Do you see how we let circumstances force you to persevere with the computer so that you could coordinate mystical bonds? Yesterday you certainly detected that each time you tried to get a symbolic victory by talking about the faults of others with Anne you felt diminished. We are teaching you to avoid sour feelings. Notice that she is not an angry person and this helps you. When you are not angry, you feel weak and anxious. It is a sort of beatitude, part of "blessed be the poor in spirit." Stay in the weakness until We can fill it with a positive emotion. When the feeling of weakness and anxiety comes over you, intensify your Jesus, Mary, Joseph prayer.

August 27, 2008

Holy Spirit: Did you see some instances yesterday where you were ready to give up but you stayed in long enough to see good instead? Roland, late for anger group? Fun of shrimp and blueberries and chocolate? Try just staying with each thing you started with trust. Giving up can be hurt pride that something didn't succeed more gloriously. Let us surprise you with little successes. We want you to be such a ripe old woman. Peace be with you. Concerning other possible dedicated widows, let those who want to do Dedicated Widows a different way and in a different city do so, adapting the way of life and with a different name such as Dedicated Widows of Jesus of San Francisco. If they use the name Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family then they should visit and follow your way of life and you need to supervise them.

August 28, 2008

Concerning working with other leaders in the parish, don't let them tell you what to say and don't tell them what to say. Part of the prophetic role is to speak out the truth in season and out of season; in the midst of kindred souls and minds and in groups that are not like minded.

Ronda: Are you loosening me up for a change?

Holy Spirit: We don't want your mind to be on flight at this time. Things could develop where you are needed elsewhere. Think of St. Paul. It is good for you to be where you are now. How about a little trust! Offer up the pain of the areas of disagreement. A prophetic person will always experience this pain more greatly than one of another type. Anne is more of a helper. We use her differences.

August 29, 2008

Holy Spirit: You fight and fight against evil. That is good, but not as an end in itself.

You are feeling challenged by Anne's word that you lack heart. All the prophets were so categorized for speaking the truth. Still you can learn more about speaking the truth with love by not speaking so quickly and being sure it is Us that want you to speak the truth in any given instance and listening more.

Ask Mary to be very close to your heart always for she is full of compassion. You do have compassion when a situation is like something you have suffered. Through better listening you will be able to let Us expand your heart. You are doing better than usual with Anne in listening. Make that a special goal in this time. We want to help you. If you are more silent you can listen better.

Joy about Sarah Palin.

August 30, 2008 visit of Annette (Annette is a very literary friend who took up truck driving in middle-age to earn a living. She came with her semi while Anne was here.)

Holy Spirit: Mary is softening you for being more hospitable. They are interesting follower personalities. You see how good humor is for going with the flow. At the same time, yes, We are deepening you that out of compassion you could take in more of the sufferings of others. It is not so much a victim soul spirituality as simply empathy. Because you and your twin were brought up as children to be Nietzschean stoics you don't know how to relate directly to the tears of others.

Jesus said He would wipe away all your tears. That is heaven. But if you are to be a part of the kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven," then you need to start now with the wiping away of tears. Charismatic praying over others is a ritualized way to do this. When possible, whenever someone shows his or her pain, you can ask to pray over him or her. Ask Mary to do this through you with her heart.

TOGETHER WITH THE HOLY FAMILY

(This shorter journal begins after Full Circle with journal entries when I was trying to lead Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family.)

September 1, 2008

Message received seemingly from Mary, Mother of God, by Ronda Chervin for Dedicated Widows (The Association and the Community at that point Doreen, Diane and Marilyn (not in North Carolina and given to Gen, the Dedicated Widow in my parish):

Dear Dedicated Widows,

I embrace you with motherly love and affirmation as you begin a new way of walking together with the Holy Family.

At first it will be through locutions to Ronda that I will be conveying to you the wisdom of the Holy Family. As we continue, there will be messages from Jesus and Joseph as well.

I want to speak to each of you in your hearts in words or images or other signs and I want you to share these with each other.

For our new beginning let me use those favorite words of my Son: "Be not afraid!"

September 1, 2008

Message from Mary, Exalted Widow to Ronda personally:

You are used to a pattern of welcome, conflict, fight or flight. You feel trapped now because you have a new challenge: commitment to the widows who come to you and a way not of sad resignation but joyful hope in the midst of differences.

We know your severe limitations with this new phase of your life. We have chosen you to try for a way for widows not because you will be good at it at first but because we have made you humble enough to seek grace and wisdom from us to lead you.

You are afraid of the pain of it. You want to run away from the pain of the coming together of those with conflicting ways of escaping from change.

Let us, your Holy Family, give you hope for a new way.

September 2, 2008

I am reading again Kazantzakis' St. Francis. It is enchanting. Jesus, Mary and Joseph purify me of the fear of suffering.

Message #2

Dear Dedicated Widows,

When you saw the Passion you readily believed that demons were about. You have each been walking with Jesus separately. Now I want you to walk together and together to ward off any demons you meet on the road.

Ward off demons of fear, despair, anger, envy, even as you would ward off demons of the occult or of deadly addictions.

To do this, every time you feel those emotions or find yourself in contact with people afflicted with such demons pray simple:

Jesus and your angels, deliver me and us from the demon of _____.

If you want to have the other dedicated widows pray for you in this way, you could have Ronda send an e-mail to the others asking that, say, "Marilyn asks that you pray that Jesus and the angels deliver her from the demon of _____."

Doreen asks that you pray that Jesus and the angels deliver her from the demon of _____

Start with praying these prayers just for yourselves rather than for others.

As your group grows in number so will the number of prayers you could say for one another each day.

I will be interceding for you. As you ask often during the day Holy Mary, Mother of God pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, you can add 'that we be delivered from demons of _____and add the one you need deliverance from most.

In this way you will identify the work of the demons instead of just letting them toy with your emotions.

I love you, Mother Mary, Exalted Widow

September 1, 2008

(From Anne of Direction for Our Times)

Jesus

Dear apostles, I want you to know joy. Eternal joy will be yours in heaven, of course, but I want you to know joy now, during your time of service. If you do as I say, as I am asking you, this heavenly joy will become more and more available to you and you will share this joy more and more freely. You will be a true representative of heaven in your joy and others will be attracted to the heaven that you represent. I want you to believe Me when I tell you that you can trust Me. If you could not trust Me, dear apostles, why would you continue to follow Me? The answer is that you can trust Me, of course, or you would fall away as others have fallen away. You do trust Me. You rely on Me and you are safe with Me. You have made a wise decision by putting yourself into My care. It is always the best decision to rely on the One who loves you perfectly and holds, in His heart, the perfect plan for your time on earth. Why would you let fear diminish your joy? Why would you let anxiety for yourself or others eradicate the joy that is available to you in the present moment? My dearest apostles, you live in the present, not the future. If the

present is difficult, I am there. If the future becomes difficult, I will be there, too. You will not be abandoned and your loved ones will not be abandoned. Ultimately, the greater the trust in Me, the greater the joy in each moment. I want you to abandon fear. I want you to cast yourself into the providence that surrounds you. Fear is a snare for you or I would not treat it so seriously. Ask Me now for greater trust and I will give it to you. Ask Me now for greater joy and I will give that to you, also. It is important that others see in you an accurate reflection of the graces heaven makes available to apostles. Do not hide these graces away. Let these graces flow out from you to those around you. Share what is good, dear apostles, not what is bad. Share what comes from Me and you will help to draw others back into our family. I am telling you that I have greater graces available to you so make your Jesus happy and ask for these graces. You will be blessed with all that you need and joy will be yours. Be at peace. I will never abandon you.

September 3, 2008

Dear ones, I think there must be a reason that Mary seemed to start sending me these messages just prior to the EWTN program when we are still so few.

About praying against each other's demons, I don't want to mention any with your name attached unless you explicitly say to share that it is you with the others since you may be just writing some of this to me privately. So, when you get this message, if you want your name attached to the prayer request for the group, write me that this is so.

I will just summarize by saying so far we need prayers against demons of impatience, despair and discouragement, pride and self-love, attacks by family members.

Here is the message I got early this morning, September 3

Dear Dedicated Widows,

I am glad when you share your real problems with each other so that you can be closer in prayer.

I see how your little hearts are crushed when you make a leap forward and then feel pushed back by the weight of your problems. Many of these problems have deep roots in your family histories.

Please keep bringing your feelings moment by moment to your Holy Family in prayer. We understand how hard it is for you. You want to tackle problems head on for quick solutions. We want to transplant you so that your roots are in the good earth of our love for you and yours. That way, new flowers can bloom.

For example, can you see in the midst of conflict based on old patterns that laughter can be a new flower?

Be of good cheer, feel chosen and cherished, Your Mother, Mary

September 4, 2008

Message from St. Joseph

Dear Dedicated Widows,

Ronda calls on me for help because she believes I helped Mary from heaven in her widowhood. Let me be the head of your "house ways and means committee."

You are often flustered by practical decisions. In those Scripture passages you read concerning my role you can see that I had to face seemingly unsolvable problems. I was a just man looking for just solutions. God led the way.

In the small and large decisions you make, start with prudent common sense. Ask the advice of your directors. We will usually work through them to help you. If there are no clear answers, ask your Holy Family for a sign.

We want you to be known in your parishes and families as women to be admired. The means steering clear of two dangers:

worldly decisions coming out of fear of crosses;

or

crazy decisions coming out of escape from crosses.

Prayers of surrender to any sufferings God the Father permits in His providence can help you avoid such bad decisions.

Each of you also has certain personal calls, usually in line with spiritual attractions developing throughout your lives in the Church. Cherish these.

St. Joseph, your protector.

September 5, 2008

(Context – first EWTN widow show and Republican Convention)

Personal message from Jesus to me:

Yesterday was a complicated confusing day for you. Because of the EWTN show there was a contrast between the inner world and known world of your usual daily life and this being thrust into the world of TV alien to you in many ways and then the hours of watching the convention with all the good in it but also the part that upsets you so of the speakers (Note from Ronda: I object to the speakers acting as if this was simply a great country vs. alluding to the killing of the 50 million aborted babies).

In humans there is a basic tension between the interior of the soul vs. the exterior life of each person and then the interior of the home vs. the exterior of the neighborhood, school, village, city, country, world.

We (the Holy Family) are everywhere, but you find us in different ways. During the Convention you saw us in the photo of Cindy McCain mothering the baby in trouble and in the way we brought McCain through the POW torture chamber, stronger.

Through the TV we let the outer world enter into your life with God. Bring your feelings of hope and fear to us in prayer, that never-ending dialogue that in heaven will enter into the glory of total understanding.

September 6, 2008

Dear ones - this message seemed to me something I could meditate on fruitfully for a long, long time. Let me know if it speaks to your hearts also.

Dear Dedicated Widows (from Jesus)

You thirst for love and even more to give love. To a greater or lesser degree this thirst was quenched in your marriages and families.

Now as your heavenly bridegroom, I wish to show you My love in abundance and to spread that love through your heart to others who need it so desperately.

You may question: "If your love for me is so abundant, my Jesus, would I not feel it more? I see that those around me are desperate for love, but then why do they so often reject my love for them?

The answer is that you have barriers to my love you are not aware of. I love your deepest heart and soul, but you sometimes want Me to love the plans of your minds and so you think I don't love you at all since I don't make your plans come true.

In a similar way you seek to show your love for others by planning for them. Then you feel rejected if they reject those plans. Even if you have better plans for them than the ones they have for themselves, what they need more is affirmation of their selves and qualities. Without such affirmation they flounder, seeking substitutes instead of higher spiritual goals.

I don't write you this to make you feel bad, or hopeless, but rather to open you to new possibilities.

In prayer, open to the pure love I have for you that transcends earthly plans. When you go out to others, leave your plans for their lives on earth aside. Ask Me to show you different ways to convey your love.

Never think you are too old for fresh experiences of grace.

"That they may have life and that abundantly."

With love from your Savior.

September 7, 2008

St. Francis to Ronda: I have delighted in all your little ways of trying to live out my love for Lady Poverty. I will help you continue in this new phase of your life. Don't be afraid. Of course the little cats are your friends in this, for they have so little and trust in your bounty.

Mary to Dedicated Widows on Simplicity of Life

Dear Dedicated Widows:

I understand that out of the love in your hearts you wanted to have many things in order to give to your husbands, children and all who crossed your door steps.

As you divest, let me give you criteria:

What does the Lord want me to keep as His gift to me?

What does He want me to give away as His gift to others through me?

(this might be giving photos to family out of love or giving of what you don't need as a widow to the poor through second hand shops.)

The more, like St. Francis of Assisi, you can pray "my God and my all," the less you will find you need excess of things.

For each of you, the divesting is personal, for only you know what you truly need and what will be a joy to give, even if it is a wrench.

It might help you to imagine how I lived. Of course I had what was needed in my times for family and guests, but no one ever felt that I loved things more than people! My things were never a burden or a distraction.

Will you let me help you clean house?

We, the Holy Family, love you, Mary

September 8, 2008

Jesus to Dedicated Widows about Penance (I think this powerful message is also for other individuals.)

Dear Dedicated Widows:

To modern people choosing voluntary suffering for your own sins or those of others can seem crazy, useless or just not understandable.

What do you want to do, instead, when you have to confront your own sins, the sins of those you love, or the sins of strangers or enemies?

You can try to justify your sins. You can try to deny them. You can hide from them.

The sins of others, you can also try to excuse or blind yourself to them. You can blame, hate and punish when you are able.

If you look at your lives you will be able to find examples of many of those attitudes towards sin.

God, the creator of your freedom to choose, sees your bad choices. In the Old Testament you read passage after passage about how sin betrays and offends God. In the New Testament you see something different. You see Me, the Son of God, bleeding for your sins and the sins of those you love and the sins of all mankind, even your enemies.

Some saints followed Me in this, even to the voluntary shedding of their own blood in penitential acts. I do not say you are all called to that path. Some may be. To find what you are called to personally you can start with these promises:

- Instead of denying or excusing them, I will acknowledge each of my sins and bring them to confession for reconciliation.
- Instead of denying or excusing the sins of those I love, I will pray for them the more often and the harder.
- Instead of just blaming and castigating them in my mind, speech or acts, I will pray against the sins of strangers and enemies.
- Throughout the day I will bring my own sinful soul and the sinful souls of others to you, Jesus, as I pray "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" and bring my own soul and the souls of others to my Mother as I beg over and over again, "pray for us sinners, now and as at the hour of our death."
- In imitation of You on the cross and my Mother standing under the cross, I will offer the sufferings of each day in reparation for my own sins and those of the ones I love and all others I observe or hear about.

If you live in this way, I will be able to bring you out of denial, excuses, anger and blame into a purified suffering of compassion for yourself and others.

Your loving savior, Jesus

I witnessed the heroic virtue of my pastor dealing with a person who drives him crazy. I thought, a good part of the heroic virtue of a priest is having to be seen in every act by his parishioners.

September 9, 2008

Letter to Dedicated Widows from Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Let us be present to you all the time.

Dear Dedicated Widows,

Sometimes you think of ourselves as alone, but very occasionally visited by us, your Holy Family.

It as if the innermost core of an onion thought that there was only light in the kitchen when all the layers of onion around it was peeled away.

In reality, we are always around our children, especially the baptized, but you are too busy with your many layered tasks and thoughts to notice us.

As dedicated widows of the Holy Family we want you to be immersed in our presence. In this way, very gradually, our love will shine through you to others, especially in silence. Think of the way a baby takes in the mother's love by being in her arms or at her breast, or how a child follows a father around and becomes a small replica of his motions.

Talk to us and let us talk to you. Turn your thoughts to us and let us teach you from the stories of us in Scripture and in the images we will send each of you personally.

Most painfully, let us teach you through the criticisms of those around you. They don't see the innermost core of you, but they have to deal with the "rotten" layers they cannot avoid seeing and smelling. When their remarks 'cut you to the quick" run to us always present. Let us show you what is true and what is false in those criticisms. If the criticisms come from another's fears and envy, your mild replies can open a door to the room where you live with us.

If you really believed that we were always present, wouldn't you run into our arms more often?

With love from your Holy Family.

During Adoration it occurred to me that St. Joseph could have repeated the words of the Hail Mary to Mary each day. I think I read this once in a long book about St. Joseph but it came up to my mind and I think it is a lovely idea. As I gaze at the statues of Mary and Joseph and the infant at the altar I can think of this.

September 10, 2008

Jesus, Mary and Joseph to Ronda: Look closely at the incident where one of your dedicated widows seemed to be ready to give in to temptations to give up on the Church and widowhood but her spiritual director helped her. He could not change her circumstances, but with our grace, he helped her change her attitudes to be willing to suffer in very hard circumstances. Her director saw how the devil was trying to work on her. Your little sacrifice (crawling the stations) was used.

We are not telling you to choose that route of sacrifice yourself or recommend it to others in all cases, but you should not cringe from sacrifice as if it were only a path of the past.

September 10, 2008

Letter from St. Joseph to Dedicated Widows

Suffering Together

Dear Dedicated Widows:

Think about the time Mary and I could not find the young Jesus in Jerusalem. Do you not think our hearts beat as one as we searched for Him?

You may think that is impossible to be close to those Dedicated Widows you have not met except on the e-mail. “With God all things are possible.” You will find that in your spiritual warfare prayers for one another that we are making this closeness possible because we want to redeem the web for our use as a linking of hearts.

When you feel unexpectedly burdened or lightened, consider that you are linked to each other and to your Holy Family who loves you.

September 11, 2008

Ronda to Mary: As I approach watching the second EWTN episode, I feel crushed, as if the end (of helping widows) does not justify this strange alien impersonal means of stilted TV conversations.

Mary to Ronda: A hard acorn does not look like the beautiful tree. The tree will come from the impulses in the hearts of many widows to entrust themselves to us, each in her own way. You don’t have to know about all this. Offer the pain of everything hard for you in viewing the episodes for the weeping widows and also for those with areas of unresolved bitterness in their marriages who cannot weep.

If you think of it all on a natural human level it will seem hopeless. Remember, instead, that I, with open arms, will be sitting with each widow who is watching, including you and Anne.

September 13, 2008

Letter from Jesus to Dedicated Widows: Visible Weakness

(the context is a gas stoppage here due to gas trucks being delayed in Hurricane Ike in Texas. I felt very anxious but Gen of the Community of Dedicated Widows here prayed over me and that plus adoration calmed me down.)

Dear Dedicated Widows,

You would like to show yourselves to be strong witnesses of trust in Me when you have moments that you view as crises.

Sometimes we give you special graces not only to survive but to do it with radiant trust. But often we let you show your human weakness. It is not bad to have to lean on friends at such times for prayer and counsel. Did I not form the Church upon Peter, a visibly weak man, but just for that reason once confirmed by the Holy Spirit, a rock of faith?

The way you turn to Me when you are really weak is different, deeper and more urgent than when your life is smoother. It is humbling to your pride to feel yourself to be weak, but that is worth the relief you feel when your confidence comes not from yourself but from my help.

"Nothing can snatch you out of My hands," Jesus

September 14, 2008

St. Joseph to Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family: When you can't protect them.

Dear Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family,

You want to protect your children even when they are adults. Sometimes you can. I couldn't. Meditate on my fears when it seemed we lost our young Jesus in Jerusalem. Think about how I felt when I realized that this boy of perfect virtue chose to do something that would hurt us so.

With your children it is in many ways different. They are not perfect and the choices they make that hurt you don't always have a divine motive, to say the least.

What is the same, though, is the terrible fear you have for them; the desire to control them; and the realization that you cannot control them even if they temporarily agree to obey you.

The way of angry fear makes your children defensive and makes you "a nervous wreck" as you would put it.

Letting go out of spite makes your children feel rejected and leaves you with only bitterness.

What is the good way for the dedicated widow:

First: call by name and pray against the evil you fear either in them or in their paths. For instance "Lord, come against the demon of laziness and the outcome of failure in my child (name the child.)

Second: offer the pain they cause you in reparation for their flaws or sins.

Third: ask your Holy Family to surround you and them with love. When you think of each child and when you are with them picture our arms around them as, indeed, they are.

Fourth: Ask us to show you if there are any openings for a gentle word of wisdom.

Try!

St. Joseph

I had a beautiful experience at the Hispanic prayer meeting. The talk was by a fatherly man, Miguel Jimenez and it was about education of one's children. He spent a lot of time on the problems when fathers neglect their sons and fail to discipline them with love. After his talk many of the young people came up for prayer and the older men prayed over them. One, the leader of one of the music groups who had been singing with such panache stepped down to where they were being prayed over and wept. It stung my heart thinking of Charlie, my son. Of course his father didn't neglect him and spend endless amounts of time being close to him but he went on the wrong path anyhow.

September 15, 2008

(It is the Feast Day of Our Lady of Sorrows)

Ronda to Our Lady of Sorrows:

For how long have images of you with the 7 swords in your heart made us think you never smiled? Perhaps we need the knowledge that you are our mother of sorrows much more than we need to think you are rejoicing in our joys? Thank you for being with me in the worst sorrow of my life (death of my son) but also to bring me the joy of conversion (for that story go to www.rondachervin.com, then to my e-books and scroll down to *Saved: the Story of My Conversion*)

Our Lady of Sorrows to Dedicated Widows:

My feast days in the Church are times when I want to draw you close to my heart in its sorrows, joys and glory. As you become more and more contemplative in your prayer, I will bring you to see how my sorrows, joys and glories are closely linked as in the rosary. Then you will see that you, in my image, also live in such a way that your sorrows, joys, and glories are closely linked.

Would the glory of the Assumption be the same if I had never known the sorrow of the Cross? So it will be in your eternity. The glory of eternal life will transfigure your worst times.

How can you have hope unless you believe that this is true?

Your mother, Our Lady of Sorrows and Exalted Widow

September 16, 2008

I was amazed and pleased to see this strong confirmation of the basic image of the locution of yesterday about Mary's smile with what the Holy Father said at Lourdes the same day as reported on Zenit:

“He traveled to Lourdes in the afternoon to participate in the celebrations surrounding the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady to St. Bernadette Soubirous…

The Pontiff celebrated two Masses in Lourdes. Some 190,000 pilgrims attended the Sunday Mass in the prairie that marked the 150th anniversary of the Marian apparitions, and some 70,000 people participated in today's Mass for the sick at Rosary Square…

Pontiff Contemplates Mary's Smile

Urges Afflicted to Turn Toward Our Lady

LOURDES, France, SEPT. 15, 2008 (Zenit.org).- For those who suffer and are struggling, the strength to carry on can be found within the smile of the Virgin Mary, says Benedict XVI.

The Pope said this today at the homily he gave today, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrow, during the Mass with the sick at Rosary Square at the Marian shrine in Lourdes. Some 70,000 people participated in the Mass.

The Holy Father offered a reflection on the smile of Mary, who he called the "teacher of love."

He noted that the tears Mary "shed at the foot of the cross have been transformed into a smile which nothing can wipe away."

"Christians have always sought the smile of Our Lady," Benedict XVI explained, "this smile which medieval artists were able to represent with such marvelous skill and to show to advantage."

"This smile of Mary is for all; but it is directed quite particularly to those who suffer, so that they can find comfort and solace therein," he said. "To seek Mary’s smile is not an act of devotional or outmoded sentimentality, but rather the proper expression of the living and profoundly human relationship which binds us to her whom Christ gave us as our Mother."

The Pope continued: "To wish to contemplate this smile of the Virgin, does not mean letting oneself be led by an uncontrolled imagination. Scripture itself discloses it to us through the lips of Mary when she sings the Magnificat: 'My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit exults in God my Savior.'

"When the Virgin Mary gives thanks to the Lord, she calls us to witness. Mary shares, as if by anticipation, with us, her future children, the joy that dwells in her heart, so that it can become ours. Every time we recite the Magnificat, we become witnesses of her smile."

The Holy Father said that St. Bernadette Soubirous "contemplated this smile of Mary in a most particular way" when Our Lady appeared to her.

"It was the first response that the Beautiful Lady gave to the young visionary who wanted to know who she was," he said. "Before introducing herself, some days later, as 'the Immaculate Conception,' Mary first taught Bernadette to know her smile, this being the most appropriate point of entry into the revelation of her mystery."

"In the smile of the most eminent of all creatures, looking down on us, is reflected our dignity as children of God, that dignity which never abandons the sick person," the Pope said. "This smile, a true reflection of God's tenderness, is the source of an invincible hope.

Benedict XVI continued: "The endurance of suffering can upset life's most stable equilibrium, it can shake the firmest foundations of confidence, and sometimes even leads people to despair of the meaning and value of life.

"There are struggles that we cannot sustain alone, without the help of divine grace. When speech can no longer find the right words, the need arises for a loving presence: We seek then the closeness not only of those who share the same blood or are linked to us by friendship, but also the closeness of those who are intimately bound to us by faith."

Strength

"I would like to say, humbly," the Pope proposed, "to those who suffer and to those who struggle and are tempted to turn their backs on life: Turn toward Mary!

"Within the smile of the Virgin lies mysteriously hidden the strength to fight against sickness, in support of life. With her, equally, is found the grace to accept without fear or bitterness to leave this world at the hour chosen by God.

"In the very simple manifestation of tenderness that we call a smile, we grasp that our sole wealth is the love God bears us, which passes through the heart of her who became our Mother."

"To seek this smile," he said, "is first of all to have grasped the gratuitousness of love; it is also to be able to elicit this smile through our efforts to live according to the word of her Beloved Son, just as a child seeks to elicit its mother's smile by doing what pleases her."

September 16, 2008

Jesus to Dedicated Widows "Under Fire"

Dear Dedicated Widows:

You can become numb with horror when too much that is frightening is happening in your own life or in what you read or see about the world around you. The reassurance you need goes deeper than any words or thoughts. Cling to whatever is good and bright at such times and let your Holy Family find a way to give you hope in the innermost depth of your being.

Your Savior, Jesus

September 17, 2008

St. Joseph to Dedicated Widows – Spiritual Awareness

Dear Dedicated Widows,

As your contemplative life deepens you will become more sensitive to many kinds of spiritual realities. This is inevitable. That is why the Holy Spirit provides gifts of discernment. Since some of these realities are frightening you may not be able to judge them well. What is why spiritual direction is necessary.

Satanic powers want to create fears in you, usually in areas where you are powerless. We, your Holy Family, want you to fear where you can make a change. I was told to fear Herod and take Mary and the child into Egypt.

When you sense evil or get a word about the future that is frightening, you need to immediately take control by calling on St. Michael and your guardian angel to rebuke any evil spirits that could be involved. Then give your fear to us. If we are telling you that you are to take action, you will sense not so much fear as strength and peaceful resolve. Above all, do not let such words or images about the future distract you from what is called for in the present in the way of steady devotion to works of love.

We are near, Joseph

September 18, 2008

Jesus to Dedicated Widows:

Dear Dedicated Widows:

Do you hear the pain and fear under the rage when people shout in anger?

You cannot reason when people are engulfed in that kind of anger. What they need is love. Such love can take many forms including sometimes advocacy, sometimes punishment; sometimes silence, sometimes words of compassion.

Let not your pain and fear express itself in vengeful anger. When you do that you continue a cycle of hate.

Why are the words “I forgive you” and “forgive me” so powerful if not because they break out of the cycle of anger to heal the place of fear and pain?

Feel forgiven, your Jesus

September 18, 2008

At first I thought this was only for me because I am so like what Mary describes, but then it seemed I was to address it to the others in our tiny group as well.

Mary to Dedicated Widows

Dear Dedicated Widows:

You dream of some permanent grace that would lift all crosses from your weak shoulders but we are strengthening you for the battles ahead.

You are startled by some change in your perception of even small things. Someone acts or thinks differently than how you would think they would and you immediately become tense. This is because your trust is still too much in weak humans instead of in your Holy Family.

True when Jesus was born the angel sang to the shepherds "peace on earth to men of good will." That was to show forth the peace the Messiah would bring but we don't promise you any permanent peace on earth. We want you to work for it in the world around you, and to experience it deep in your hearts when you pray, but not to just have it always without any seeking of it by you. We want you to have one foot in heaven.

Take my hand and we will go forward one step at a time.

Your mother, Mary

During Adoration I had a sense that I was to use all my free time to be in Church, especially the beauty of the Mass came into my soul.

Sister Mary Neill to Ronda received September 26, 2008

DEAREST RONDA,

I was so glad to hear from you; I was about to check in. I thoroughly understand about the difficulty of living with someone in your space. It has been a good learning for you. Just wait and watch and hold the divine conflict between your need for space and solitude and the need to be connected, these polarities are a cross from your birth as a twin, sharing womb space to the long road to autonomy ==YOU GOT TO WALK THAT LONESOME ROAD ALONE.

The synthesis of these opposites comes in holding the truth at the core of opposites until the Holy Spirit creates the synthesis in you. These are false when made ABSOLUTES; your devotion to Christ who made two into one is the healer. Stop planning; be humble in your limitations and own the divinity of the garden of agony. The peace and serenity you are seeking as a Type One cannot be worked or willed, but only your surrender again and again to God, and saying lots of gratitude prayers for how you are and who you are and where you are now …Much love, Mattie

Gen Lesko said she thinks that I have a lot to give and that I decide too quickly to give without thinking things through. I immediately joked that I was just stupid. I think that's a way to ignore the comment and instead I should ponder it. It sounds accurate.

September -?, 2008

Mary to Dedicated Widows – the Liturgy

Dear Dedicated Widows:

I want you to imagine what I felt when the apostles began to pray in the words of my Son at the Last Supper (Passover Meal). Think of what it meant to me to hear His words in the mouths of His disciples and to see His gestures in their hands and to receive He who first came into me as a tiny baby now entering me in the Eucharist.

My dedicated widows should love every word of the Liturgy, every gesture, and honor their priests greatly for the sacraments. When they see any defects in the character of their priests pray for them ardently. Do you think the apostles had no defects of character? The Scripture records those defects.

Ask me to go with you to the Liturgy and to show you more of what I see each time. Become my true daughters in this.

Mother Mary, who loves you.

September 21, 2008

Mary to Dedicated Widows: Loneliness and Guests

Dear Dedicated Widows:

Because you are lonely you are elated to have guests…at first! At first all that you have in common with the guests is in the forefront, but then come the differences and you go into grief or anger or both.

It is hard for you to understand that no one is closer to you than us, your Holy Family and we are "easy" guests to take care of. Or so it seems. When we visit it is really you who are visiting us in the innermost room of your hearts. If you don't visit often enough it is because there are differences.

Some of these differences cannot be overcome until heaven when we will be totally one with our children. Other differences come because of your lingering defects: especially lack of trust which drives you to hide from us in your habits, or sometimes sins.

We are trying to wean you away from those. With the habits, some of these are wholesome. You don't need to drop them but rather to let us in even if they seem too trivial. Do mothers reject their children because they are at play?

What has to change is your way of doing each thing, for instance, with too much compulsion or competitiveness, or pride. A gentle prayer to us before each activity with gratitude can be a first step to not being controlled by activities, but rather using them for the kingdom.

With your sins, it is a matter of humble confession, but also of the graces from your Mass and prayer times gradually giving you enough peace not to cling so tightly to the futile escape from suffering each sin tries to be. For instance, detraction. (Note from Ronda: gossip can be any kind of relating of incidents in the lives of others – and is sometimes harmless, or even for the sake of getting good advice. Detraction is where you reveal faults of others that no one else needs to know because you enjoy gloating over their defects in order to feel superior or to express your unredeemed anger). Detraction is the flight from being serious enough about others' failings to pray for them and do penance for them.

Not all at once. Courage, we are with you.

September 22, 2008

(Context: A member of the Association of Dedicated Widows is craving some form of Carmelite Widowhood with a habit but living in her own home)

Jesus to Dedicated Widows – Ways of Living

Dear Dedicated Widows:

We are inspiring many, many, widows to different forms of dedication and consecration. Without concerning yourselves right now with trying to fit into previous modes of religious life, you should each try what you feel attracted to. Learn from your experiences. As you live in new ways, others will be drawn. Do not fear. Am I not your Bridegroom? Place yourself under the mantle of My mother. Let her be your mother and teacher.

You can inform your Bishop that you are trying a certain way of life for widows that others may wish to follow.

During adoration came this personal locution:

St. Joseph:

Notice how as you walk hand in hand with Mary you will be less angry and therefore you can do more.

September 23, 2008

Mary to Dedicated Widows:

Dear Dedicated Widows:

(Context was someone I was trying to help at the parish)

In the time you are living there are many people around you with severe addictions. It can take you a while to recognize the patterns that are involved in the external behavior and others emotions.

Sometimes your hearts go out to them and you want to help but you don't know how. Give them to me in prayer.

Sometimes you are just angry at the futility of their harmful addictions. Give them to me in prayer.

Whenever it is in your power, get them to counseling and programs that can help them. Often that is not in your power. You don't want their pain, fear, and anger to flood your minds and hearts so that you have no peace.

Sometimes you have to stay away from addicted persons, but when that is not possible whenever you are in contact with others who are addicted you need to avoid reactions coming out of fear.

Come to us and ask us to reach out to them through your gentle love.

September 24, 2008

Ronda to God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Guardian Angel:

September 25, 2008

St. Joseph to Dedicated Widows; Layers of Fear, Layers of Security

Dear Dedicated Widows,

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve walked in fearless companionship with God. After the Fall they hid from God. Then, out of fear of their enemies and unpredictable trials such as barrenness, the people clung to idols for protection and favors.

God drew leaders close to Him, right into His presence. Think of Abraham, Moses and the Prophets. In this way the people could be led beyond their fears.

In Baptism you are brought out of the world back to closeness with the Trinity. But you don't escape from the external causes of fear from natural enemies or material deprivations. And then there are the interior enemies; anxieties coming from your childhood family surroundings and evil (supernatural) enemies working on your thoughts and feelings.

Are you surprised that you would have many layers of fear? Our supernatural life in the Holy Family did not preclude fear of external enemies such as Herod or, ultimately, for Jesus of the Jewish and Roman leaders who opposed Jesus. Still, within the family circle of our home, there was no fear, because we were totally bonded in faith and hope and love.

You will notice that when we could not find Jesus because He was teaching in the Temple, the external fear for His life was mingled with having to face the reality that Jesus belonged more now to His heavenly Father than to me or to Mary. He came back with us, but now we knew this was only for a time.

After the Assumption of Mary, our time of complete unity as a family was brought to a heavenly fullness.

Do you see how to different degrees your own lives have mirrored ours in the Holy Family? You found a partial security in marriage and family. There came a time when your children left your embrace. You were afraid. When your husbands died you became even more insecure.

You are dedicating yourselves to God in the embrace of the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary, and myself, Joseph. You are not only plunging your frightened hearts into our reality as it was on earth, but foremost into our reality as it is now in heaven.

We are trying to wean you away from the idols you cling to in your insecurity: idols of money, status, approval. This we do by drawing you, when you are afraid, into our presence. As you open to our love for you more and more you will become conscious of the layers of fear. Sometimes these will be fears of exterior emergencies. Sometimes these will be fears of interior enemies such as sin or collapse. Finally these come together in your fear of death.

Even Jesus in the Garden experience terrible fear but then was able to surrender, and then on the Cross commend His spirit to the Father.

We allow each fear to surface so that you can bring it to us for understanding, compassion and finally such a sense of our love that you will be secure in the depth. We will bring you to the Father. "Perfect love casts out fear."

It is not something that you do, but that we do. Listen to the words of St. Paul: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ; Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword…no, all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 8; 35-39)

Holy Spirit to Ronda: When much of what people say seems trivial and meaningless it can be because We are weaning you from this world into the total mystery. Don't resist. Speak much less yourself and let us bring you into the ecstatic union.

After this locution I felt a heavy (in a good way) sense of quiet come over me and a great desire to talk only when addressed by others, unless there is a compelling motive of charity.

September 26, 2008

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to the Dedicated Widows

Dear Dedicated Widows;

You need time to absorb what we have been teaching you. Expect that each day you will have moments, incidents, where what we have taught you can be applied. At other times you will see your life being illumined by those truths.

It is not like finding a truth in geometry illustrated when you are cutting up a pie. It is deep and cumulative, like a growing awareness that you are not alone because we are with you.

Walk in trust, Your Holy Family

September 27, 2008

Ronda to Jesus, Mary and Joseph:

I am afraid you are stopping the locutions.

Dear Ronda and Dedicated Widows,

We are stopping the ones for others for now. We want all of you now to plunge into our presence so we can instruct you from within. Pray constantly by opening yourselves to us. We will speak in your hearts from time to time but mostly we want you to live in us more totally.

Do not fear, your Holy Family.

Note from Ronda to Dedicated Widows to whom I was sending these messages:After getting this in the night I did feel a little frightened that maybe I did something wrong and they were leaving us. Now I think they mean that we need more than words of prayer but we need Jesus to come right into us as in the Eucharist. So, now I think when I read and reread this locution that they are telling us they want to come into us now much closer even than words. All morning long I have been talking to them in my heart and feeling their gentle loving re-assuring presence. I think each of you should ask them for similarly graces of intimacy.

October 1, 2008f

From Anne, Direction for Our Times

October 1, 2008

Jesus

Dear apostles, how strongly you desire holiness. This desire pleases Me and I will bless this desire. I will increase your holiness. There are times when you despair of becoming as holy as you wish. At those times when you are tempted, I would like you to know that I can make you holy in an instant. If you require heroic holiness in a moment, I can give it to you. The Holy Spirit blows where it is both welcomed and needed so if you welcome the Spirit, the Spirit will sanctify you. I, Jesus, lived on earth and in My humanity I understand the struggles that plague you. I understand the frustration you feel when you examine yourself and find that you have work to do in virtue. Dear ones, consider life like a walk. If you are taking a walk on any given day, you walk. You do not sit down on the path and call that action walking. That would be sitting down and that is different from walking. Your spiritual life is meant to be active. If you look at yourself and find that you need to work on holiness, then you are looking at

yourself in truth. You are on the path and you are walking and you see that ahead of you the path continues on into the unknown as far as the possibility for your holiness. I, Jesus, am comfortable with this for you. I am not pleased, however, when you move backwards on the path or leave the path altogether. You were meant to serve Me and you were meant to serve Me in this time. Please, do not be distracted. Do not believe that My plan can do without your service. My plan does not require your perfection, My dearest one, but it does require your presence. If you remain with Me during your time on earth, My treasures are transmitted to you. You can then open your heart to others and allow these treasures to be distributed to them. Ask Me for these treasures for others. I will send them to others through you. Have no fear that this prayer will go unanswered. It will not. It will be answered more generously than you can imagine. Draw closer to Me in holiness, dear apostle, so that I can sanctify you and move into the world through you. Do not be afraid of changes. Just as you must always be moving on your path, so the world must always be moving through time. As the world moves through time it changes and it is changing now. You, dearest apostle, are a part of that change.

SPIRITUAL MOTHER

(Due to a severe problem with my parish in North Carolina concerning Catholic options about the Presidential elections, I felt led to look into a parish in Connecticut with convictions more like my own. This part of my journal begins with a visit to Fr. Martin Jones and the emerging Bride of Christ Community. (see www.brideofchristcommunity.org). Fr. Martin saw me as a kind of Imma – Hebrew for Mother – of this community. I realized that in many aspects of my life I am now a spiritual mother, so I am using that title for this part of my journal with covers the end of my time in North Carolina through August of 2010 in Connecticut).

March 31, 2009

I gingerly checked out Fr. Martin by saying many communities get into difficulties because of lack of financial transparency. He lumbered out of the dining room and returned with the checking account records showing the $400 or so in the account that were mostly his input and said, "I can put you on the account if you like." This was humorous and reassuring, indeed. While at Adoration prayer I felt lots of peace about coming back to try out the community. Also I was wonderfully welcomed to do part time teaching at Holy Apostles Seminary.

I am putting in here the theme song, so to speak, of the Prophetic Word given at the Bridal Retreat, 10/16/2004 to Father Marty Jones, the founder of the community I will be trying out:

Jesus to Fr. Martin:

"My beloved! You are My beloved. Your gaze overwhelms me. I am filled with your love. Remember the days of your youth, the days of My experience with you, the days that you were in love with Me and I with you.

My love has not changed. Let your love and change be like your first love for Me with all the newness of the flowers and the springtime. I call you back to that springtime in our relationship where everything was new.

Be bold with love of Me. Share that love with those whom I send you. Call them to that love. Prepare them for that bridal experience of Me who am the Bridegroom of the Church, the Bridegroom of each of your souls.

Awaken, arise, cast off the sleep this world engulfs you in but plunge rather deeply into My most Sacred Heart. My Heart is the symbol of My Divine and human love for each one of you, the love that overflows from the heart of the Blessed Trinity itself, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the love which created the universe out of love.

Call others to Me. That is My task for you, My mission for you, for I thirst for their love. I will keep thirsting until the whole world is in love with Me and then I will come back to you when the Spirit and the bride say "Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus."

There is much that needs to be done in preparation and the time is short so I need you to go out and call those into the depths of My love. My daughter, Margaret Mary Alacoque, was the herald of that love for you, the love that is flowing from My most Sacred Heart from the moment that it was created. From the moment that it was pierced with the lance and blood and water gushed forth from My Heart: torrents of love and mercy that enveloped the whole world.

I see this evil generation that you live in, a generation that is far away from God; a generation that calls itself atheists and has turned far from My commandments, from My law of love.

Know that there are things that will come upon you, things that you cannot imagine in preparation for the new world, the new springtime, the new church that I will bring forth from the death of many, from the death of many. Many will have to suffer. Many will have to undergo trials and tribulations. Know that I am with you always, that I bring you through this time; that you are held within My most Sacred Heart.

I give you the Mother, My Mother as Mother of the Church, as Mother of the bride, for it is in Her Immaculate Heart that I have called you to take refuge. She is like the ark of Noah, the ark of the New Covenant, the ark that I call you into so that I Myself will close the doors of that heart that you will be safe and kept close to her most maternal heart that always beats in love of you.

That's what I heard when my ears were first forming within her womb – the beat of her Immaculate Heart, the heart that still beats in love for each one of you. When you are afraid to go close, go close and draw near to her heart. There were many times throughout my life I laid My head upon her heart and listened to that Immaculate Heart, the most pure heart that was ever created beating in love for Me and now beating in love for you. Go to her, rest with her, listen to her words as she call you back to My words, to obeying Me.

Know that the time is short. The evil one has done much in this world to confuse many, to draw even the elect away from me, to draw many away from even My church. I speak through our Holy Father that I have given to you as a gift for these times. Listen to his voice for I speak to you through him. Follow him as you would in a row of ships, for he is in the barque of Peter and he will lead you safely into the eternal shores where there is always rest and peace. For it is my Mother herself who guides him and speaks to him in his heart; who inspires him through her Spouse, the Holy Spirit, who guides and directs him at every moment.

Call forth My Spirit upon you also that you may be able to listen to My voice as the Spirit speaks deeply to you within your heart, for today I have given you my own heart in place of your stony hearts, hearths that cry out "let me do your will, oh God" for it is your hearts that know the will of My Father.

Each time you pray to My Father you pray that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That will is always done in heaven. Now I pray that it be done on earth by you following the will of My heavenly Father.

My will for you is love. Love one another as I have loved you and I will carry you back someday. I will carry you back to those heavenly mansions that I have prepared for you, that are almost ready, that are beckoning for you, so that we will have there a great honeymoon of love, a tryst of love that will know no end, a honeymoon within the depths of My heart overflowing with torrents of joy and peace that you cannot even imagine here below.

Then you will plunge all your petty sorrows into the immense joy of My heart, an abyss, an ocean, an ocean of joy gushing forth, gushing forth from My most Sacred Heart.

O My beloved one, My bride, My beautiful one. If you only knew how much I love you, all the other cares that you have would be melted in the furnace of My love, a furnace that grows hot and flames shoot forth so that I will purify everything in your life as I will purify everything in this world

So, be ready for Me, for Me, the Divine Bridegroom, who comes to claim you, My bride, and I will take you with Me so that you will return to the eternal joy of happiness, a happiness that will know no end."

April 5, 2008

Dear friends,

I will be leaving NC for 6 months to discern being in a community called Servants of Bride of Christ as a consecrated widow. This ecclesial movement is Magisterial, Marian, Charismatic, Pro-Life, helping of the poor, into simplicity of life and has or will have priests, brothers, sisters, lay people single and families - they are building in the Berkshires of Massachusetts a retreat center and retirement colony. If it sounds interesting to you write me for more information but first go to brideofchristcommunity.org. I will also be teaching part time at Holy Apostles Seminary. Please pray for me as I discern as I have tried numerous ways of life since becoming a widow and I am hoping here I will be able to use my gifts and benefit greatly from those of Fr. Martin Jones and the other members. They pray together the entire Liturgy of the Hours.

NOTE – AT THIS TIME IN 2018 WHEN I AM DOING A FINAL EDIT OF THESE JOURNALS, THIS COMMUNITY HAS BEEN DISBANDED BUT I AM LEAVING HERE EVERYTHING THAT SEEMS GOOD FOR YOU TO READ REGARDLESS OF THAT CHANGE.

April 8, 2008

During the night I had a feeling of rapture and anointing. I had a sense of aptness of a new name as Imma = meaning Mother of the Bride of Christ as Fr. Martin calls the woman he envisages working on this by his side. I had a sense of all that Jesus, Mary and Joseph have given me that is being fulfilled in this new venture.

April 10, 2009

Dear Jesus, Mary and Joseph,

I feel so excited about Bride of Christ but so jumpy thinking about the white garment they wear. I guess because I feel old and ugly and white is bridal, I need you to tell me if this is right, this garment, or just a vain adrenalin rush.

Mary: In my apparitions I look bridal without ever looking flashy or vain.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph: We told you to become stronger and then love and do what you will. Here is an example.

April 15. 2009

Total surprise, Archbishop Dolan of NYC at his installation. He is outside on the sidewalk cheering the people for coming. New type – tough but full of fun. My head is spinning – in the background Gregorian chant but the Bishop is laughing and cracking jokes in full regalia! And he's yelling to the seminarians and priests and the people, I need you, thanks for coming! So American! Openness overcoming all formalism.

April 28, 2009

My daughter Diana's poem for a widow friend who used to walk on 110th St. and Broadway and wanted her to go back with her to NYC to renew these memories:

There are echoes in the pavement,
there's reluctance in my feet
I am walking hallowed ground -
bits of life that won't repeat.

There are owls in the windows,
(there are owls everywhere)
Dreams and themes that used to matter
become tangles in my hair.

Will I hold your hand in mine?
Will we step back to the past?

Having gone, will we discover
any lessons that can last?

Does it matter, does a bird
who can whistle, nothing more,
find a melody that matters
somewhere in the whistling's core?

There are lessons in the sidewalk,
there are bruises in the street -
the kind you turn your mind against
when your relentless feet

against your will, are marching still
despite the certain night -
bills unpaid; unsure and scared
toward some sacred light...

I can see you in the corners -
I can see you everywhere -
at 110th and Broadway,
in the sun and in the air,

in the rainbows that arrive
when I least expect their grace,
in the shadows on the sidewalk,
in the lines that bless your face.

There are owls in the window,
there's a dance we've yet to do,
a finger's touch that means much more
than what I say to you.

Will you meet me for a night walk,
(though our hair is growing thin),

will you own the road that ends,
and see that now, the road begins?

I am dancing down the sidewalk,
whistle-haunted on Broadway,
with the ghost of our tomorrows
whispering our life today.

I have got your hand in my hand,
there is no such thing as time,
there is love, and here! We've got it!
Hold on tight, babe. Let us climb.

Love you, special one...

April 28, 2009

About the plan for joining this community in Connecticut one of my daughters thought it was just my old pattern of looking for strong men, in this case the priest-founder, to lean on. The other daughter told me she is very proud of me that at 72 I can jump into something new and she sees this as a model for her someday when she is older.

(IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT THE COMMUNITY DIDN'T WORK FOR ME, AFTER ALL, NOW READING THESE COMMENTS IN 2018 I THINK BOTH OF THEM ARE TRUE.)

May 1, 2009 From Anne, Direction for Our Times Monthly message:

Jesus

How often have I called you 'My little apostles'? Have I ever called you 'My big apostles'? Why do you think it is that I call you 'little'? I will tell you. It is because each apostle, by his desire to serve, becomes little. He becomes little so that God can be glorified. If a person is serving Me, that person desires only My glory. If a person is serving Me, he desires to be seen as a servant of men, not as a master of men. In the case of leaders, this desire for humility must be even more pronounced lest the leader begin to believe that he himself is leading, as opposed to My great hope which is that I, Jesus, am leading through the man. I intend to send leaders during this time. You will know them by their spirit of service. You will know them by their humility. You will know them because they will help you to think of Me and what I need from you. No man is entitled to the glory reserved for God.

No man is worthy of this glory. I only speak in this way today so that each man will consider his call to service as a call to holiness. I want each man to give credit to Me for the good that I allow to come through him into the world. Do you understand, little apostles? I am reminding you that all good comes from Me so that you will not be tempted to pride by the great fruits I send through your service and your commitment to Me. It is important that every apostle examine himself for signs and symptoms of pride. I ask this of you in a serious way today. We, together, are ushering in a time of grace, and graces will be apparent, not through your power but through Mine. Little apostles, do not believe that Jesus is scolding you. I am not. I am helping you to examine yourself to prevent difficulties, both for your holiness and for My plan. I will help you in this each day if you ask Me. Ask Me to send an outpouring of the Spirit to you whenever you are afraid that pride is troubling you. I will do this for you because I love you and because pride makes you so terribly sad. Pride is the great devourer of joy. You, My beautiful apostles, are entitled to joy and I send My joy to you today. All is well. We work together to perfect your soul.

May 3, 2009

Farewell letter to Nancy (the homeless woman I sheltered for 6 months)

FOR NANCY

You came to me,

desperate but charming!

You prayed with me,

anxious but trusting!

You shared with me,

trembling but believing!

You cried with me,

fearing but hoping!

You sang with me,

quaking but soaring!

Nancy, the woman who made my apartment into a home.

Friends forever, Ronda

May 6, 2009

Joy, joy, joy about the apartment in Connecticut I arranged to rent over the phone so close to the Church.

Dear Fr. Martin,

Because of your lines in the big locution for Bride of Christ about following the Holy Father like ships following a barque, I am watching and listening more carefully to Pope Benedict's words. I love his mild sweetness combined with such firmness. Surely one who speaks the truth with love, one of my many goals for myself. It happens his face and personality are very like my godfather Balduin Schwarz a disciple of Von Hildebrand.

I am praying mid-afternoon prayer and there is this wonderful verse for me:

Psalm 45 "Listen, O daughter, give ear to my words;
forget your own people and your father's house.
So will the king desire your beauty:
he is your lord, pay homage to him."

May 11, 2009

I plan to have a little time with Fr. Ken the last day I am here to try to see whether I have misunderstood anything he said or thinks about me so that the friendship with this priest, one of my favorite people in the world, could continue in spite of my disagreeing so strong with some of his words of the past.

As I was pondering this future talk I got an angle that would help, at least help me understand:

In God all the attributes are united rather than separable, but most of us have a greater love of one than another and this is how I would see this between Fr. Ken and myself:

I put first Truth/Justice, then Beauty, then Love, then Freedom (in the sense of freedom of spirit), then Mercy.

He might put first Beauty, then Freedom (in the sense of non-coercion), then Love, then Truth/Justice, then Mercy.

So we can meet very well in Beauty – musical, artistic, dance. And when it comes to love in the sense of compassion we will be at one. I can love his free-spiritedness.

Since Jesus, the Mass, and the Church are my highest values I can love and admire and be grateful for his incredible commitment to showing the Real Presence of Jesus in the Mass with the highest Beauty he can make happen with his many gifts. I can love him for his delight love of my family and of me, in certain respects. I can love him for his deep compassion for those truly weak and in need including me when I display that side of myself. I think where the painful conflict comes is where I think Catholic truth conflicts with his idea of freedom as non-coercion.

By the time each of us leaves this world, perhaps we will meet not so much in the realm of beauty, or truth or love, but of mercy.

Well, as I look over this statement it sounds a tad grandiose. Would it be so hard for me to say something simpler such as I love you and I hope you love me and I am sorry for any sins of mine that have separated us? And, of course, given the nature of this epistle, I have to make sure not to allude in the slightest way to any of his faults! Ahem, Amen.

IN CONNECTICUT:

May 20, 2009

Trip to beautiful beach at Old Lyme. Surprisingly Fr. Martin showed the poetic-mystical side of himself by taking each of us down a path where there was a cleft in the rock where you could sit and see the ocean and then recited the Song of Songs passage!

May 24, 2009

Letter to Nancy about my trip to North Carolina to Connecticut driven by my grandson, Nicholas:

Praise the Lord I am finally settling in. I had all these misery glitches.

It started with cat problems: Conchita refusing to get into the cat carrier with Felix for the trip. She hissed and fussed and reared her dear little body. Happily Bonny came by to say a last goodbye and she insisted we buy another cat carrier. Since we couldn't get all the stuff in with the second cat carrier I had to leave some with my daughter.

Then we ran into fog and storms and got to the motel that takes pets for $25 each only at 4 AM in the morning. Nicholas insisted on rising at 7 AM. We got to Connecticut at 2 PM. The apartment is in a house built in 1890! Felix disappeared after a few days and I was sure he was dead since the landlord said he saw a dead grey cat on the highway. I mourned and prayed and he returned after 4 days of prowling about the neighborhood! Then the landlord refused to keep the cat door in the window saying burglars could push that in with a hammer in 2 minutes and get into his apartment also. So now they are mostly outside cats and come in at night primarily.

Lots of graces with the team here who are all into daily Mass and prayers and charismatic prayer. This is all going well.

May 31, 2009

We had a wonderful first Healing Celebration Sunday night prayer group. Fr. wanted to combine first Adoration, then praise and worship, then a talk, then praying over the people on kneelers. They seemed like brides as they held icons with us the prayer ministers standing behind them while they faced Jesus in the monstrance. Fr. Martin came with the monstrance to each of us and blessed us. I felt so maternal and soft praying over some women. Then Bob and Evelyn prayed over me and Bob said as from my father "I have been forgiven. Can you forgive me for hurting you?" It felt releasing. I had a sense of Bob and Evelyn being healing parents to me.

June 1, 2009 from Anne, Direction for Our Times

Jesus

Dear apostles, I ask that you remind yourselves each day that I am participating through you in the course of history. What comes from Me can only be good. When you see goodness and kindness, you must thank Me. When you see mercy and compassion, you must thank Me. These occurrences originate in heaven and are brought to earth through the participation of those who cooperate with grace. Always, there are those who claim to participate in grace, but who do not. There are also those who claim to reject Me and yet they participate in grace by allowing goodness to flow through them. How confusing this can be for My children. Dear children, ultimately, this will be clear, in that each man must answer yes or no in each moment. Be alert to the choices in your day. Be alert to the example you set for others in your decisions for good or evil. Be alert to the peace that I bring to you when you decide for what is good. My apostles, you crave Me, I know. You crave My return into your world through a wide acceptance of the Spirit of peace. How can you satisfy this craving? I will tell you. In order to relieve the pangs of your hunger for goodness, you must bring goodness to others. Speak of goodness. Celebrate goodness. Rejoice in goodness and then try your best to participate in goodness through your cooperation with My renewal. In this way you will know that you are never helpless against evil. You will understand that I have healing power, yes, and I can flow My healing power through each person who accepts their responsibility for bringing Me to others. I am so pleased with My beloved apostles because you have accepted your tasks. How gratefully I listen when you pledge your allegiance each day. How I count on you. Spend a moment considering what I have managed to do through your cooperation. Have you shown kindness? Have you tried to become holier? Have you spread my message of compassion? You are only one. Now consider how many I have called into service at this time. Consider all of those I am calling into service through your service. Consider the healing graces that flow through My mercy. My friends, all is well. The renewal continues.

June 2, 2009

I have been feeling confirmed that this Bride of Christ is going to work and that I am meant to be here in the role of Imma in spite of all my faults and the difficulties.

I prayed, thank you Jesus, Mary and Joseph, Guardian Angel, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit – I got what I wanted most: to be able to walk to Church, not to have to deal with dissenting Catholics, and to have the same people to see each day and talk to.

Alleluia.

June 8, 2009

Dear friends,

Don't be insulted that I am sending this to you on a list! Of all the good things I am experiencing one is not so good - I am as busy as a bee and can't get to each of you separately.

Contrary to all dire predictions I am doing well here. It's a unique situation in many ways - Our small community prays all 7 Liturgy of the Hours aloud in the parish Church. This is part of the founder's vision to mingle a sort of Benedictine spirituality with parish apostolates. I am so used to doing liturgy of the hours silently by myself that this was quite a strain at first but now I see that it is kind of like a mantra, immersing the soul in truth and beauty throughout the day.

The priest, who is diocesan, loves community so he cooks for me and for anyone who would enjoy his crock pot cooking - which especially includes priests who have no cooks and otherwise just open cans or go to MacDonald's! Those of you who know me will realize that nothing could be more "me" than to eat lovely meals cooked by someone else in exchange for conversation and doing dishes.

I am setting up all my usual workshops, but the icing on the cake is that since Fr. Martin is charismatic he is having me and two other charismatic retired leaders start a healing prayer group which he combines with Adoration by bringing the monstrance right up to the face of the sufferer being prayed for! Also he lets us give 2 minute witnesses after the Mass.

I miss the family and my old friends greatly, sniff, sniff, but I am hoping this is my final place.

(NOTE RE-READING THIS IN 2018 HERE IN CORPUS CHRISTI, I AM REMEMBERING THAT BIG MESSAGE FROM JESUS LONG AGO WHERE HE TOLD ME I DID NOT BELONG IN ANY COMMUNITY AND HE WANTED TO SET ME DOWN ANYWHERE IN THE CHURCH THAT MIGHT BE GOOD.)

August 1, 2009 from Anne of Direction for Our Times

Jesus

Dearest apostles, I thank you for your efforts for Me. Do you see the fruit of your labors? Perhaps not. Perhaps you continue serving, living out your commitments with no understanding of how I bless the world through your service. I hear your sighs. I am with you in your uncertainty. In humanity, there is always uncertainty. In humanity, there is always doubt. There also comes fear and each human will experience heaviness in his heart someday. None of these things should persuade you that you are serving in vain. None of these things should distract you from a zealous representation of the gospel message. You see, the message is so much bigger than each of you. And yet, each of you is necessary. The gospel truth pushes itself into a world that

craves truth, even while it rejects truth. You, beloved apostle, are part of that push. You will feel the strain in your body and soul. You will feel the sacrifice. If you did not feel any such strain or sacrifice, there would be cause for concern because living and spreading the gospel is work. When you feel tired, remember that I also felt tired. Never separate your sufferings from My sufferings and you will be at peace, even as you carry your share of the cross for this time. I am with you, loving and sustaining you. I am ever watchful. When you need Me in a special way, you shall have Me, with every grace required. Do not be afraid of anything. Your Jesus will never abandon you.

August 26, 2009

I am working on a manuscript by Pere Thomas Philippe being translated from French to English. He writes about how receiving God's love in wordless prayer is deeper than anything else. I hear Jesus, Mary and Joseph telling me:

"Yes, Ronda, you became too obsessed with locutions. We needed to stop and bring you by an indirect route of grounding in Bride of Christ praying of Liturgy of the Hours aloud, and back to contemplative reception of our presence. You can use Thursdays for this silent prayer. I am pondering Alice Von Hildebrand's remark after reading my autobiography that I should not let hatred for my sins blind me to God's love for me.

August 29, 2009

(NOTE: After working with Fr. Martin on the plans for his community, he mentioned to me that this great seminary was only 5 minutes away and they might need help in teaching philosophy. It turned out one of the teachers was having surgery and they did need me.)

First class at Holy Apostles Seminary.

What an amazing class. Wonderful seminarians, wonderful, sweet Vietnamese, wonderful lay students with a virginal feeling to them vs. students burnt out from parties and booze as I sometimes dealt with at some other schools. The standout was Br. Yousseff, a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, who sat near me with eyes brimming over with grace and love. I thought I was in heaven. They seemed to accept my rollicking funny teaching style after a short period of looking at me as if "this woman can't be for real." But I kept reminding myself, they are mostly concerned with the requirements, what they have to do, not with my personality style. I am walking on air, praising the Lord. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, are smiling and saying, "didn't we tell you we'd take care of you?"

September 1, 2009 from Anne, Direction for Our Times

Jesus

Dear apostles, I remind you to ask heaven for the graces you require. In order to work in My plan, united to My will, you must be in the habit of asking for all that you need. This constant petitioning for help in your service creates in you an awareness of the

unity within which you serve. In this way, you will begin to understand that nothing can be attributed to you except your willingness to serve. You will receive the graces you require, of course, and with these graces will come humility because you will acquire an understanding of the relationship between your requests and heaven's answers. If heaven is supplying you with all that you need to complete the tasks heaven has assigned to you, then you cannot take credit for what is being accomplished. You may say that you are already doing this. I respond that I want you to increase both your dependence on heaven and your awareness of your dependence on heaven. Each day, every day, ask heaven for help throughout the day. My beloved apostles, I am preparing you for a new time which will bring you joy because you will serve peacefully in complete trust. Why would a child fret when his Father sees to his every need? Truly, you are united to heaven. I seek only to instil in you a greater awareness of your unity. I, your Jesus, call on you for dedication and sacrifice, it is true, but not without cause and not without benefit. See to My interests in your day, please. In turn, I will protect your intentions. Spread joy and goodness. Spread unity and peace. Spread trust in God who will never abandon His children.

September 3, 2009

Joy of being at the seminary. Decision to teach here in the Spring.

From Pere Thomas:

Man and Woman

Let us take a different perspective. God created humans as man and woman. Adam was created first, Eve afterward. The prerogative of woman is not to be first but to be the last, while knowing that the last one is the most perfect. Perfection is not at the beginning but at the fulfillment. And the misfortune of woman is that she always wants to be first, instead of accepting to be last and to let herself be filled by God. This was the sin of Eve, who wanted to take the place of Adam. And it is always the same, now more than ever. I believe this is what explains the role of Mary in the 'end times' "

Notes on a book by Angelyn Arden, a professor here, called *The Articulate Silence*:

"Fearful, even terrified of the Hole, we attach to how we know each of
our parents/caregivers defend from it."

(My mother by 24/7 analytic conversation; my father by work.)

"Our attraction has to do with what we think brings flavor, mystery, charge, miracle, and distinction into our life ...their pull is through coercion, intrigue, secrets, promise of security. ... fear of bland, insipid, common ... nothingness....whereas if one goes through the insipid and weak to the vulnerability one can sit in front of the cross and let Christ enter..."
(I have been acting out all of the above at a frantic pace since arriving here.)

September 18, 2009

A woman I wanted very much to get close to rejected me. Praying today Mary seemed to tell me that she, Mary, is my Mother and my Sister and to pray to her incessantly. I had a good talk about the basics of it with Fr. Martin who thought that my being so communicative and self-revelatory is a virtue, but can be overwhelming, especially to those who like to be hidden. This sounded right. He thought I should hang in.

September 26, 2009 Answer to an e-letter from someone who watched me on Marcus Grodi's Journey Home.

Dear W.,

Okay, let me try. Since I am not a theologian or Scripture scholar some of this will just be "my take" and others I will refer you to sources:

Why did Christ have to die to save us? Why was a blood sacrifice required?

It helps me to think that life is more like a story than a syllogism! Did you ever read the Chronicles of Narnia of C. S. Lewis? Well, the sacrifice of Aslan the lion seems somehow "right" even though we would never have invented such a scenario ourselves. Of course it seems right because we have Christian imaginations. He could have saved us some other way. The question is why did he choose to save us this way? If you read St. Augustine's City of God he has a lot about the evolution of religion without using the word evolution of course. Primitive man seemed to have a huge archetype of sacrifice of beasts and even humans.

I remember when I was in the process of conversion asking the same question you are asking about why the sacrifice. Somewhere I read that in old Yiddish tradition, women twirled dead chickens around their heads chanting, "let the chicken die instead of me." Out of some archetypal memory this image from my Jewish background, even though we were atheists, helped me understand Jesus.

So the evolution was from primitive animal sacrifice, to the prophets insisting that God didn't want these sacrifices but instead wanted the sacrifice of the heart to Jesus being the unbloody sacrifice. He obviously has a sovereign right to be the author and the main actor in the drama of salvation, no?

What I can see clearly is if one of my kids did a big no-no, and his elder sister begged me not to punish him but that she instead would take the punishment I could hardly fail to forgive the original culprit.

The Catechism is a good reference for all questions such as this. It is beautifully written in a very spiritual way - I mean the big Vatican Catechism published in the 80's.

Okay, next question: What is the nature of our sacrifice at Mass each week? The Priest says sacrifice be acceptable to God. Why is a sacrifice required and I have never been sure what sacrifice he is referring to?

A little explanation of time and eternity in relationship to the Mass. Most of the peoples of the world have cyclical time - i.e. they think time goes around in a circle, and it doesn't have a start and an end.

Only monotheism of a creationist type has God starting time and ending historical time. Picture a line from Creation to the end of time. Now picture a dot above this line called eternity. Eternity means either endless time or timelessness. God is timeless, i.e. outside of time. Eternity enters time at certain key moments such as Creation, the Ten Commandments, the Annunciation, etc. This is called sacred time. In religious rituals we enter the sacred time. When the priest consecrates he actually enters into the sacred time of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion. We live in that time in a virtual sort of way. Through the priest, Christ gives us His body and blood in Holy Communion. Since Christ died for our sins, we participate in His sacrifice at the Mass.

As G. K. Chesterton shows in a wonderful philosophical book you should get called *The Everlasting Man*, that pagan religions and fairy tales are pre-figurations of the Truth. John Paul II in *The Threshold of Hope* describes God as sending beams of light. The big beam comes through Judaism to the Catholic Church, but other religions are seeing light from lesser beams.

Placement of holy days? Church History is not my forte. How do I see it? Just as early Church Fathers baptized Greek philosophy - as in taking Plato's sense of the immortality of the soul and showing how Catholic belief in the Resurrected Body completes Plato's dualism, etc. - so the Church baptized holidays in pagan cultures and making them into Catholic feasts. So winter soltice becomes Christmas day. Maybe Christ was actually born on the shortest day of winter...you'd have to look that up on some Catholic Answers web.

Debating the days between Easter and Western Churches - I interpret that to come from political feuds being projected onto Church policies. For example since Constantinople hated Rome for other reasons they would also feud about holiday dates. Like a couple who is on the rocks putting their anger into a debate into which restaurant should we go toon our anniversary - the one you like or the one I like.

How do you know it is God's presence you feel and not your imagination? The standard criteria is the fruits - if you feel peaceful and loving that is a good sign, presuming what you are doing or deciding on isn't contrary to Catholic faith or morals. Since I am
a nervous wreck, I can't fake peacefulness under any circumstances andalways attribute it to divine grace.

Women's roles? Did you read my leaflet on Women as Second Class Citizens in the Church? It is on www.rondachervin.com

click on books and then e-books and leaflets. Read that first and then ask more. Also read John Paul II's On the Dignity and Vocation of Women. As to leaders of house Churches try Martimort on Deaconesses.

Slavery in the Bible. I read a few books on this for teaching ethics. The gist: there are many things in Old and New Testament that were tolerated not approved in the sense of saying they are intrinsically good. If you google something like slavery and Catholic Church teaching you can get lots of stuff on things like Popes denouncing slavery and not being followed by Catholic slave holders. I see it as analogous to how the Church teaches social justice but most parishioners tolerate many unjust aspects of our society. The Church teaches that you should live simply and austerely to give to the poor, but how often is that preached! A middle class lifestyle with stuffed closets and enough garbage to feed the whole world is tolerated not approved. It would be better, I think, if every priest raged against injustice at least once a month, but they fear losing all their flock.
Or they themselves tolerate relatively luxurious living.

In NT times slavery was a substitute for just killing prisoners of war. St. Paul hopes that the slave owner will liberate the slave but legally he couldn't change that.

Basically Jesus came to give us spiritual salvation, not liberation from earthly injustice. That doesn't mean he approved of injustice.
In answer to this statement of the woman who wrote to me for answers:

"At the end of the day the Priests, Bishops, etc. hold the power and ability to make decisions for the Church and we can't even be in the club."

It can seem that way, but if you study Church history from a Catholic feminist point of view you discover other balancing elements – such as saintly women mystics telling the Popes what to do or guiding male members of religious orders. Also Mary trumps all. There she is teaching the whole world at apparitions. As a strong woman, brought up to be an aggressive woman, of course, I love to order people around, but that is not what the real scenario is about to begin with. There is God Himself, Jesus, accepting to be judged by Pharisees and Pilate.

Isn't God genderless? God is pure Spirit, but God reveals Himself in the Father role as progenitor, initiator. If you read JPII Dignity and Vocation of Women he says that since Jesus is God and He calls God Father that has to be normative for us.

Mary Magdalene announces the Resurrection and in that way is an apostle, but Jesus chose men to be apostles even though His mother was holier. A seminarian I was teaching this subject to opined that if God did it this way it was because more would be saved - I think women have an easier time following male leaders than men have following
women leaders.

Offering up sufferings? This is based on the famous passage of St. Paul that we are filling in what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. That doesn't mean that Christ's redemption wasn't good enough, but that He willed that we could become close to Him and help others by offering our sufferings to God in prayer. So all day long I mutter "I'm offering the pain of having to wait on line, etc. etc. for the conversion of my adult children, etc. etc." Heaven is going to be a communal banquet, not the soul alone with God. This praying for one
another in this way bonds us as a foretaste of heaven.

God is everywhere in terms of everything partaking of His being in some way in order to exist. A more specific and special way of God being present is Jesus telling us that He will be with us in the Eucharist. If God is present everywhere why would He reveal Himself in
HIs Son in the first place. I guess because we didn't get it. The idea that God loved us so much as to let His son die for us melts our hard hearts, so He desires to be most present when we take up His invitation. As in a husband is present to his wife over coffee or
taking out the garbage but much more thematically present in sexual union. See my free e-book summarized as *Signs of Love: About the Sacraments* in www.rondachervin.com.

Sept. 29, 2009 Feast of St. Michael

Father Martin brought holy water from a shrine in Mexico in Tlaxacala (?) called Milagro where a peasant saw St. Michael many times and was told to dig for a well of healing water. I drank some of it for the healing of shivering. I felt heat go through my body. Then after that I felt the cold but it didn't bother me. This lasted for about a month.

October 1, 2009

From Anne – Direction for Our Times

Jesus

My dear children, I am with you. I watch closely as you struggle for holiness. Often, you are uncertain of your spiritual condition. You strive to serve but feel conflicted by the times in which you are serving. There are some things that all humanity deals with regardless of where in history they are placed. First, there will always be a difference between the world's path and heaven's path. These two paths, while they can run alongside each other for increments, will always separate. Ultimately, each man will have to choose. Every man, to a greater or lesser degree, will have to contend with choosing first good over evil and then he will have to make another choice and that is the choice of choosing My plan for his life over his own plan for his life. After that, the choices become even more studied in that the man must choose My plan in each day, in each task and even in

each moment. You may say, dear apostle, that this is a difficult call for a man, to study his actions in each day. You may say, this is asking a lot. You are right. I, Jesus, am asking a lot of you. I ask for your full commitment and I do so without apology. Dearest apostles, if you give me your full commitment, there is no limit to what I can do. Look at your life. You have said yes to me on many days. Examine what I have done with your yes answers. Consider what I am building with the commitments of so many children of God who are willing to be directed by the Savior, their King. I am building a structure of love. I am building a structure through which many are returning. Truly, your hearts, open and filled with My love, call out to others. You provide for Me a welcome to those who feel separated. If they can be taken into your heart for even a brief moment and experience Me, with My love, then they will have the courage to both approach Me directly and to accept Me directly. Please, do not count the sacrifices when you consider your service. Do not count the loss of worldly respect. Count only the souls who are comforted and consoled. Count the repentance and healing of so many who have been restored to unity with heaven. Count the humility that I have bestowed on you, dear apostle, since you began to learn about true holiness. I am your King. I can give you anything. I choose to give you peace and holiness. I choose to make of you a resolute servant. Accept My will in your life and you will then be able to accept all of the graces heaven has stored up for you.

October 2, 2009

Fr. Martin will be transferred from the parish I lived near to. I will move into the seminary.

October 5, 2009

In Sept. 1937! Sister Faustina started to get heavy pains and Jesus told her this was in reparation for abortion and to save some souls. We were born in 1937!

Because of Fr. Martin's transfer I moved into a little room at the Seminary. Great joy of having a room at the seminary. All in one place so near cafeteria, class, chapel and barter of room and board for classes taught! St. Francis of Assisi thank you, thank you, thank you. More money for the poor with no rent or food bill!

October 9, 2009

Jesus: It is not that you're a "dingbat" (that I go from place to place) but remember I told you that you were my pilgrim bride. So this is the 10th place you are going since Martin's death. I send you . Rejoice in all the good done to you and that you did in this 5 months at St. Francis Church. If you were not into Franciscan simplicity I could not do this with you.

October 16, 2009

The seminary got me a lovely big new bed! Felix the cat is back from the snow day. My cup runneth over – I am thinking my role besides teaching is to affirm these noble priests and seminarians, the hope of the Church.

October 30, 2009

We had a glorious visit of an Abbot of Cistercians from North Vietnam – luminous. I had a sense of how the Gates of Hell will not prevail and God bringing good out of that awful war. The Abbot said that the communists are letting up on them because the spies had to go to every Mass and began to see how good the faith was!

November 1st message from Anne:

Jesus:

My dearest apostle, how pleased I am with your efforts. Shall I tell you all that pleases Me? I am pleased that you accept My words and welcome them into your heart. I am pleased because as you welcome My words into your heart, you welcome My graces into your life. Many come and go in My service. But you do not do this. You remain in My service. It will take eternity for Me to show you My gratitude. When I say service, you no doubt think practically. You think of work, of heaven's work, which includes the tasks that you complete for Me and for others in My name. This is good. I so badly need those who are willing to work for Me. But when I say service, I want you to also think of love. Your see, we need bridges built that will transport God's children safely into My heart. But the invitation to cross the bridge from isolation to the love of God will be extended through your love, through My presence in your heart. My love will flow out from you to others and they will find out that the wounds they suffer are vulnerable to love. Wounds melt away when they are exposed to love. Love, rooted in Me, is always selfless. It is quiet rather than boisterous. It waits patiently, willing to accept suffering for the greater good of the soul in front of it. The greater good will always be reconciliation with Me but this reconciliation between the Creator and the created is deeply personal and takes place in the privacy of the soul. Dearest children of God, you have been chosen to accept My love and to use that love to draw others back to Me. I am watching closely as you struggle for greater holiness. I am watching closely as you advance. I am with you in your own suffering and I allow loneliness for every serving apostle because it is only through this loneliness that you understand how badly you need Me. Your loneliness then becomes a heavenly port in a storm of activity through which you draw graces down into the world. You see that you suffer. When you return to Me forever, you will see that your suffering, accepted in My name, advanced not only My intentions, but yours. Be at peace, little apostle. I am involved in all that occurs in your life. I am with you. I will not leave you.

November 4, 2009

Could purgatory be having to forgive?

November 7, 2009

Insight on “second childhood” and old age. We are trying to replicate what we loved in our childhood without the negatives. For me, a mother who wanted to talk all day and a sister to play with who wasn’t critical.

We can get some of these ideal situations some of the time but not in a lasting way because we are being weaned from this earth. In the meantime Mary is the mother/sister who will talk to us all day and be challenging rather than scolding. And, Jesus is the Man, God the Father, and Mary the mother/sister.

God gives us what we need emotionally on the human level to survive, but keeps drawing us toward eternity.

November 11, 2009

In the 60's there was this sentimental little "children's book" The Velveteen Rabbit. The theme was how the child loves the old worn out rabbit even more than the pristine new version of the gift as an analogy to loving others in their batteredness, etc.

I had such an experience the other day. I have a dear friend I was annoyed with for various reasons. It happened that he was injured. I hadn't seen him for a while. He was trying to get off a couch but his injury made this hard to do so he got red in the face trying to maneuver off the couch and looked like a huge awkward bear. Suddenly I felt great love for him at that moment. Instead of seeing what annoys me, I saw this dear struggling person – not just the physical part but the whole struggling person in all his dimensions.

Another version of one of my long term images that instead of seeing people as fallen idols we should see them as funny little creatures.

November 14, 2009

An Amazing letter:

Hi Ronda,

This is Jesse, Charlie's (my son who committed suicide) old friend from LA. Actually, I'm writing to you from Colorado Springs where I'm living now. Recently, I went onto your website and was very moved how you are able to turn such challenges in your life into an inspirational, and no doubt, transformational message. I'm sure you've helped many people. I am writing to you now about Charlie and what I've tried to learn from his terrible loss. I look back on the person I was when he left us, and I think how truly young and naive I was about the world when I thought I had all the answers. Charlie's death made me question everything I thought I believed in, but it's taken many years to realize that. Still faithful to the arts, I graduated Juilliard in 1995 and have been teaching and performing in my own series of solo shows ever since. I am now workshopping a theatrical performance that deals much with the nature of my friend's suicide. The show is called "Face the City," and one of its primary purposes is to address this subject with young adults particularly at an age where the lines between adolescence and adulthood are blurred. Rather than go on a length about the show, it's probably easier to give you the description as viewed in our press release:

The story of "Face the City" is set in the High School, College and the early professional lives of four friends (The Painter, The

Composer, The Journalist, and The Performer) who begin with a shared dream of artistic invincibility. When one of them decides to take his own life, his pathway to destruction is explored by The Performer who is forced to come to terms with loss, compromise, and finally escape from his own false dreams as he discovers himself walking down a similar road. Integrating Rock, Theater, and Audio Visual Live Action & Animation in an unparalleled theatrical presentation,"Face the City" is an honest, moving, true story about redemption and the recapturing of innocence in a society that so readily tries to define who you are.

Originally premiered last October, "Face the City" has undergone quite a few revisions structurally and narratively. One of the main areas I've been on the fence with for a while, though, is Charlie's suicide. In the show, I never mention his name, but I feel if I truly am to tell this story honestly I need to go into some of the reasons why he made his decision to end his life. Ultimately, I feel this show can help many people. I have been building a relationship for some time with a woman named Jane Benet who works closely with Suicide Prevention in Colorado Springs and whose own son tragically took his own life a number of years ago. She is helping me form an alliance with Suicide Prevention organizations, using "Face the City" as a vehicle to create awareness. This is a show that does not pull its punches by any means. And I feel I have a very unique perspective based on my own experience to share with people.

As I mentioned, however, so much of my own memories of Charlie when it came to his death are really foggy. I feel if I am to tell this story accurately-- and to actually begin a dialogue with people who may be suffering-- I need more help dealing with such a sensitive subject. I am remembering now his journals. I believe if I were to spend some time with them that might open some doors and enhance the heart of this story. I understand this is probably an extremely sensitive issue for you, and want to ask this as respectfully as I can when I ask if you would be willing to part with some of them for a short time. Obviously, I'm considering you may not even have them in your possession, but if you do, would that be a possibility? If that makes you uncomfortable, which I completely understand, would you at least be willing to talk to me a little about it sometime on the phone?

I will await your response, and respect entirely whatever decision you choose. At the very least, it will be wonderful to hear your voice again!

Sincerely,

Jesse Wilson

(As you will see, he did write this wonderful play and many in my family, including myself, went to see it.)

November 23, 2009

I talked with Fr. Brad, my spiritual director at the seminary. He was all joyful and full of transcendent visions of why our sense of self-identity should rest on God's love vs. opinions of others and low self-esteem caused by such things as childhood wounds.

When I went to pray I got this sense that Jesus, Mary and Joseph were telling me that I have reached all my goals in terms of wanting to be a creative person and a famous person and a woman of wisdom. Now all that is left is not impressing anyone or caring about what they think but only letting them, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, form me into a saint by one simple path: "Let go, let God." This means just slowly doing what is needed in every situation without tension or ups and downs based on approval or disapproval and basking in their love. That is all. This gave me lots of quiet and peace and joy.

(Reading this word in the heart from three years ago, I have made some progress with God's grace in that I do less and do it more slowly. As to "let go, let God" that is slower.

December 1, 2009 from Anne of Direction for Our Times

Jesus

My dear apostle, you must remember that we are not separated. Sometimes, in your weariness, you pray and seek understanding of the situations in your life. When you do this, please remember that I am with you. You are not separated from Me when your thoughts seek to provide you with answers. If you remind yourself that I am not separate from you, you will search for truth more calmly and with more confidence that there is an answer to your many dilemmas. Please do not concern yourself if you are distracted in prayer. Use these times of distraction to talk to Me. Tell me what is distracting you and we will talk about it together. We are together, after all, so I am there. If a certain pattern of sin is troubling you, ask Me how I feel about it. Ask for My observations. You, my beloved apostle, are a studier of Me and how I treated others. Because of your desire to know me, you have a familiarity with My heart that others lack. I will give you the answers you seek, both in terms of your spiritual condition and in terms of the holiest way to conduct yourself in each situation you confront. We are not separate. We are together. Worries of major proportion would only be problematic for you if you were being asked to assure a holy outcome alone or if you were being asked to travel through the period without Me. I promise you that I will be with you and that the outcomes occurring around you will be consistent with My will. I cannot promise you that in your humanity you will always rejoice in My will, especially when there is pain. But I can promise you that the greatest amount of mercy will be obtained through your commitment to remaining with Me, united in the life that is yours. All is well. I am with you. I will be generous to My beloved apostles in this holy time of Advent. Be acutely aware of My presence. When you look at all around you, look with My eyes. This will give you the understanding that will insure peace for you. All is well. The infant returns through your heart, as the King.

December 4, 2009

Holy Spirit:

For you, "leaving mother and father" means giving up the idea that you will find a twin soul. Cleave to the Trinity and to the Holy Family and love everyone you meet, but don't depend on them. We are making you stronger. You have many good traits others here don't have and you lack many they do have such as prudence, serenity, steadiness, long-suffering. That is why they provide for you a place where you can flourish and grow. Be more silent. Let us guide you, especially in your inner and outer conversations.

January 1, 2010 from Direction for Our Times

Jesus

There are many different ways to communicate love. One of the ways that I communicate love to My apostles is through My constant presence. I am in each moment, in each day, offering you My heavenly companionship. I offer you a constant stream of love which heals and reassures, which steadies and directs. When allowed, I can help an apostle to adjust his viewpoint to My viewpoint, which is very different from the viewpoint of one who has either forgotten about My presence or rejected My companionship. With this viewpoint comes calm purpose. The days flow past, one by one, and My will flows through each one of you who has accepted My presence. You do not see big changes at your hands. Perhaps you wonder if your cooperation is helpful at all. I assure you today that if you were to reject Me tomorrow, My kingdom would suffer. Without you, I would have one less home for My great love on earth. Each time I use you to love another, I feel gratitude. My gratitude is a force for change in the lives of those around you. You are gaining graces that only heaven can understand. Only heaven can see how an action of grace is stored in waiting. This grace surrounds each person you intercede for and at a moment when it is possible, meaning that heaven sees the opening, that grace is utilized to protect and advance the soul. Dear apostle, serving heaven so steadily, leave all of your difficulties to Me. Abandon yourself to My providence completely. Serve with discipline in this moment and I will care for your loved ones. I am using you for the purpose of love and I want to use you even more fully. When you become discouraged, please sit with Me and I will help you to grasp the limited nature of your vision. Concentrate on My will for your day. Concentrate on remaining in the present, connected to your service in each moment. Avoid being trapped by the past and avoid being drawn into a future on earth which may not include you. You do not know when I will come for you. But I am with you now, as you read these words, and I have work for you today. Look, together with Me, at what I am asking of you and together we will be a successful force for love. I crave love from you. When you trust Me and reject fear, I am delighted. Calm, steady service is what I require from My beloved apostles who seek to serve Me. Be at peace. I am with you.

February 1, 2010 Anne – Direction for our Times

Jesus

My dear apostles, I am directing you. I am giving you guidance. I am prompting you, again and again. Do you hear Me? Are you learning to separate My voice from the voices of the world? Do you hear Me when I urge you to greater and greater abandonment? You are suffering, I know. I am listening to your prayers and I am with you in your pain. Please do not think that you are experiencing suffering simply because you are serving Me. Look at those who do not serve Me or even those who do not know Me. Are their lives free from suffering? I am helping you to reject the temptation to believe that if you were not walking this path with Me you would be freed from suffering. It is not true. It would be true to say that if you were not united to Me, you would be suffering without the benefit of My companionship. Such lonely suffering. Such hopeless pain. Instead, I offer you the widest variety of consolations. I offer you understanding of the relationship between sacrifice and holiness. I offer you soothing

graces to assist you in preparing your soul for heaven and bringing others comfort and grace. Dearest apostles, you are surrounded by heaven. You are surrounded by grace which supports you, even when you feel you are unsupported. If you feel you cannot stand, allow yourself to fall back and rest in My arms. I will care for you and give you all that you need to continue. Your life is changing, it is true. This should not alarm you. You should expect your life to change as I draw you more and more fully into the plan that I have for your time of service to heaven. It is always the way that I bring you forward, never backward. There is always movement and change. If you were to reject service to Me, your life would still change. Change comes in life whether you are serving heaven or not serving heaven. You may wonder why I am telling you these things. I am helping you to resist the temptation to attach your commitment to Me to suffering. If you are suffering, it is because suffering is part of My plan for you. Each life will include suffering. Beloved apostles, you are trying so hard to serve heaven. Please believe that heaven is serving you, too. You are protected and loved. You need only remain on the course I have laid out for you and all will be well.

Notes from the Bride of Christ Retreat at My Father's House given by Fr. Martin:

Used to the glorious Latin Schola here at Holy Apostles, I was listening with dismay to my own voice and the other retreatants' voices and feeling bad about the contrast. Then I got this great image. Fr. Martin, and all parish priests, are the priests of the "anawim." (the people) And just as Jesus is touched by the love in the intention even if the art or music isn't good so should I be. The analogy came to me: suppose my cat Felix were able to arrange a choir of cats to meow greetings to me, would I not be touched?

Suppose I am the Imma not so much of the Bride of Christ community but of many others such as the seminarians and Fr. Paul's summer group?

Jesus seemed to tell me during the retreat to renew the sense of being a pilgrim bride, as in going to the seminary, Canada, LA this summer.

Without humility we can't be open to the Holy Spirit. I thought, for me the block is constant striving for my own agenda.

Feb. 2, 2010

A strange conversation where a seminarian talked about one mechanism to "succeed" at the seminary is to get someone smarter than you and manipulate them in their brokenness so that you can get them to be your slave!

Charismatic Prayer Group at St. John's Middletown: I loved seeing the hearts of all of them. I got a prophecy about us needing one another so much and we need to admit that. I saw that it was good that I witnessed openness and neediness to some people recently who rejected me for doing so. I felt humilitated, but at the prayer meeting I thought they need to see that with more love of God someone is not so afraid to be open and vulnerable.

April 1, 2010

Jesus

My dear apostles, I am with you. I am present in every challenge you experience. I see your struggle and I provide everything you need to serve Me in each day. If you have given Me your day, then the day belongs to Me. Your self-will has been offered to heaven and heaven exchanges it for My will. How do you experience this? On most days your experience of serving Me is a mystery to you. How could it be otherwise when you are seeing with eyes that have not yet been exposed to the divine vision? Day after day, you offer your will to Me and day after day, I use your offering to gently push Myself through you to others. Do you feel successful? Or do you feel, at times, that you are unsuccessful? Poor little apostles, I understand your questions and I understand your doubts. I assure you, in My human experience, I did not feel successful at every moment. My experience was often much to the contrary. I often experienced the temptation to believe that I was failing the Father. I sometimes, in moments of human temptation, wondered if, in fact, love was enough. Could love succeed in turning hearts to goodness? Could love succeed in persuading God's children to accept the Father's beautiful plan for humanity? Yes, please believe that I suffered temptation. And now, you suffer temptation. Together, our temptations suffered for the Father, bring soothing graces to others. You, My beautiful apostle, serve despite temptations to abandon Me. Where others leave, you endure. You endure for Me, as I endured for you. From My perspective, all is well, despite your suffering. My plan is perfect and if you are serving Me, listening to My voice, there are no problems. If you are not serving Me and you are not listening to My voice, then there are many problems for you and there will continue to be many problems for you. 'Ah', you say, 'Jesus, I am listening to you and still I have these problems'. We must differentiate small problems from big problems. Small problems are the sufferings you bear for the sake of the divine will. Big problems are the problems you face when you abandon My will and insert your own will. Are you praying? Are you in steady communication with Me? Do you ask Me what I want you to do in situations where you are unsure? Do you spend time in silence, considering heaven and heaven's plan for you in the day? Answer yes to these questions and I assure you, your problems will be manageable. Do not believe I ignore your sighs or turn away from your fears. I am with you. I will never abandon you. My plan will be realised through your perseverance and through the perseverance of many apostles like you. I am so pleased when you pray for each other because this is how you experience, in advance, My gratitude. You see My gratitude in the graces received by others through your intercession. Rejoice. I am responding to your pain and answering your prayers. Truly, I am with you.

April 9, 2010

I talked to Fr. Brad about talking too much. What I surfaced is that I try to get symbolic victory through detraction. He said that I must train my mind to experience all the pain of the weakness of not being able to change family, dissenters, etc. Go back to the father wound. Offer the pain as an act of love for their sins.

When people reject you for being yourself you should be glad because they would have driven you crazy.

Find a time for quiet prayer where the chapel is empty – pray in order to die to the ego part of my delight in what I am doing. Not the delight but the ego part.

April 22, 2010

from a letter from my sister:

Did I tell you I remembered a snippet of a dream I had about one or two weeks ago, in which I saw mother - and she was beautiful! An elongated, gentle body in some kind of coat, sort of half reclining, and her face young, sensitive, inwardly glowing, at repose. I gasped as I woke up, for I don't think of her that way - I look at just with a few photos around when she was older ..

April 28, 2010

Steve, my daughter Carla's husband and my web master, put Charlie's music on my web. I played it for my class. A seminarian said : I saw a vision of Charlie playing the cello. He lifted up his head and said tell my mother Happy Birthday and I love her. My daughter Carla and my youngest grand-daughter, Martina, were praying for a sign.

May 1, 2010

Jesus

My dear apostles, how often you are challenged personally when you attempt to speak the Good News. This brings with it a temptation to connect the authenticity of the Good News to your personal holiness. Alas, you find that you fall short, of course, because you serve within the limitations of your flawed humanity. Does this decrease the force of the Good News you are called to share? Does this diminish the authenticity of the Good News? No. Your flawed humanity is rather testimony to the extent of the Good News. Yes, the scope of the Good News is such that each of My little apostles becomes a true herald, human flaws notwithstanding. You are each uniquely qualified to bring this Good News to a wounded world. You see, dearest apostle, it is through accepting your own pain and offering yourself for healing that you become My greatest example. You, in your willingness to accept healing and in your willingness to grow, show others what I am offering to the world in this time of Renewal. Beautiful humanity, how painful is My desire to heal you, to console you, to bring you to the Father where you will find eternal dignity and confidence. I ache with the desire that you accept My love. There are people who are waiting to experience Me, but it is through your acceptance of Me, with complete abandonment, that I will be brought to them. Do I burden you with My work? Do you find My friendship a heavy cross to carry? Let Me assure you, it is only in this cross that you will find your joy.

June 24, 2010

Dear Abba Martin,

You must have felt it also. As I was going to sleep I reviewed the day of prayer we led together at St. Andrew's (Fr. Martin's new parish) for Pentecost and it seemed to me that once we started it was totally anointed with everything fitting together, not only

your prophetic call concepts of what your mission was but my participating in a spiritually motherly and teaching role.

I think what it might be telling us is that my Imma role is teaching in a motherly way by the side of the Abba, rather than being a juridical formal mother of the Bride of Christ.??????

PAX, Imma Ronda

June 7, 2010

It is my Mommy's birthday and I am thinking maybe she is joking with me from Purgatory or Heaven in the form of reminding me that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph said not to worry about my old age because since I gave all to the Church, the Church will carry me.

(From June to August I lived at St. Catherine's Church in Reseda where Fr. Paul Griesgraber, a very old friend, has a house for discerners who live there while doing ministry in the parish. He wanted me to live as a guest at this house and give classes on the Catholic philosophy of love.)

I love Fr. Paul's Mass. Such a beautiful combination of deep reverence and charismatic additions. His hands when he prayed over me after Mass felt like the hands of Jesus.

Fr. Paul says that we cannot give up our addictions but if we give them to Jesus he can crucify them and then we will be free as in Isaiah 66:7 where the woman gives birth easily without labor pains.

July 12, 2010

(Dear readers of this journal, I think you will like this article I wrote for a Catholic magazine. Now in 2013, I can't remember if they published it or not!)

PUTTING YOUR MOUTH WHERE YOUR MONEY ISN'T!

How to turn left-overs into delicious pseudo-French potage for your family or community.

On one of those nights when you wake up and tune in K-Hell on the radio of your brain, I starting thinking about how when I have to add lower dentures to my uppers I just could be left with a diet of Ensure! My guardian angel raced to my aid with the memory of once reading that before dentures were popular old folks in Europe lived on those scrumptious potato soups such as I had enjoyed on trips in France.

I called an old friend, originally from Belgium, and asked her for a recipe for potage. She send me not only the recipe but a vintage 1890 Amish metal grinder. You boil potatoes and grind them up with saute scallions and, voila, a lovely soft soup.

I soon noticed that scallions are a little pricey and it occurred to me that there was no reason I had to obey my friend's recipe since I am just as much a gourmand as a gourmet. Why not put in with the potatoes any left-overs hanging around, such as scraps of chicken left on the bone, rejected peas and carrots and then add herbs and spices. Each one would have a different flavor and… I won't be throwing away that famous garbage that social justice people say could feed the whole world!

Well, grinding up left-overs in that old-fashioned metal grinder takes a long time. Eventually I realized that if I first cooked the whole mess for a half hour and then blended it, I could make it still finer, without the type of lumps that would repel my diners, by a last go through the grinder.

I jokingly boasted to my guests about my garbage soup. That resulted in lots of soup left-over for me – a whole week's worth! So now I tell them about my French potage: the first course. About 50% of them actually like it. And of those, about 5% become pseudo-French chefs like me.

Putting my mouth where my money isn't enables me to have more left-over cash to donate to favorite causes such as the Missionaries of Charity and pro-life.

Let me know if you try it and like it…."

July 26, 2010 I had group at St. Catherine's, Reseda, pray for me for not trying to force God to fix my earthly future. After a day I started feeling more peaceful after many weeks of churning over a variety of possibilities.

August 3, 2010

12 Catholics who live in a mobile home park, where my dear friend Evie from my time in Sedona, came to listen to my talk. They looked so stiff - I thought it would be hard to reach them, but they loved it and this new thing is happening...people are throwing money at me because they think I am holy!!!!!!!!!! One saw an aura around my head. Later in the evening class at St. Catherine's here a young man saw light all around me!!!!! And another person gave me a little check for thanks for my little course...And this group in the evenings want to do sequels with other books of mine and me on Skype - they actually used the word "disciples."

I am too numb to figure it out.

Hilarious! I woke up refreshed with the strong feeling that there are follower types out there who need to think they are dealing with "special" people and therefore blind themselves to the faults they see so that they can feel good.

September 22, 2010

I decided not to be a widow servant (i.e. a full time member of the Bride of Christ community) but, instead, to just pray and help. I asked Jesus, Mary and Joseph: why did I have to go through this:

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: You had to find out yourself that it is not because some priests are dissenters that you cannot find a niche but that even when you find a magisterial priest. We have made you to be a prophetic voice and that the philosopher part of you makes it impossible for you to settle into compromises of any sort.

We want you to speak the truth with love, but that means speaking it, not just living as a victim soul of others' shortcomings. That is what Fr. Luke Zimmer meant when he said you couldn't be in community because of something in your personality that was contrary intrinsically.

So now take all that Fr. M. can give you but be detached and follow up Our word to you: moment by moment with us.

FROM JOURNAL WRITER TO BLOGGER! 2011

(After the Journal from 2009 ff. called Spiritual Mother, I decided to stop writing journals. However, a dear friend suggested that I write blogs. Blogs?!? I find the word blog much lacking in aesthetical qualities. I like writing long things, not paragraphs, or so I thought. Then other friends of mine suggested I write blogs for Watershed – a wonderful web-site mostly specializing in sacred music (see www.ccwatershed.org) The graphics were put in by James Ridley, now publisher of goodbooksmedia. Google that name to find other books of mine he published.) By the way, if you find that you prefer my freer style journal entries to these blogs, know that there will be more free style later in this compendium!

I decided to try. After just 2 attempts, I fell in love with this new media approach and decided that it was the perfect outlet for exhibitionist ego-maniacs such as myself. I wrote about 100 or so and then decided to extend the outreach of these blogs by making them into a sort of journal for 2011 to be a kind of sequel to my older journals on this free e-book part of my web.

Of course, those of you who have waded through all the pages so far of 6 Feet in Eternity will find repetitions sometimes in these blogs of ideas or experiences you already read about earlier. Some of these obvious ones I have weeded out, but others I have kept, especially about Catholic anger management, because we need to think about these concepts often and we are inclined to forget. However, just freely skip over any line of thought you have "interiorized" and don't want more of!

17 February 2011

Topic: Contemplative Photography

(Note: This is an old concept you will find in several of my books, but pared down into a few paragraphs)

Compare a portrait photograph with a caricature. The portrait photographer looks at the customer and figures out what is the most attractive way to present that face. The caricaturist, by contrast, looks for the most unattractive feature and exaggerates it.

Now, here is the analogy. When you contemplate the people you know well do you think of their best features or do you exaggerate their worst features? If you are like me, when I am feeling kindly disposed to a friend or family members, I think of moments where this person(s) was displaying virtues or delightful quirks. But when I am angry at someone, I contemplate their worst deeds, sometimes going back for decades!

Don't you think that, in the words of Dietrich Von Hildebrand, God wants you to join the stream of His love for everyone by looking for the unique preciousness of his or her personality rather than catching the Devil's picture?

Realistically, with the exception of Our Lady, we all have positive and negative traits. We need not ignore the bad traits, especially if we need to deal with them, but we don't need to fixate on them either. When the caricature comes to mind, let us ask God to make us into portrait photographers.

18 February 2011

A Poem for the Saint John Cantius Society

Dear readers,

Here at Holy Apostles College and Seminary where I teach we have the wonderful John Cantius Society seminarians training a choir for daily Mass. Here is a little "poem" I wrote, as a tribute to them, about listening to their Latin Chant one early morning:

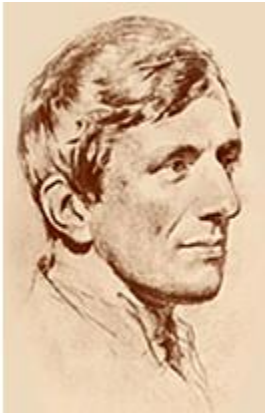
Sheltered in the chamber of our Church
Your voices echoing centuries of faith, hope, and love,
I feel saved and safe.

Thank you, dear brethren.

You might want to read more about the John Cantius Society on their web and about Holy Apostles – a late vocation seminary. We have men of all ages and former occupations and nationalities from Cuban to Vietnamese to Lebanese, and many other backgrounds. When I was a little girl the United Nations started to such joy and hope. Now I like to say that the Church is the true U.N.

19 February 2011

Beautiful Music is from Heaven



One of my favorite quotations from Newman is that "music is so beautiful, it cannot have come from us but has escaped from heaven."

My husband, an eventual convert to the Catholic Church, was brought up on the Lower East Side to orthodox Jewish parents. Uneducated and poor, they did not understand classical music. My husband fell in love with it as a child, but since the rest of the family "didn't get it" he could only listen to it by hiding in the clothing closet with a little radio on low volume. When he became a Catholic, his favorite form of prayer at home was to lift his soul to God by listening to sacred music and other classics each evening, on huge speakers.

Another quotation about the beauty of music that I love is from the famous English novelist, Rebecca West. A concert pianist gives up her career to raise her children, but teaches them to play the piano, violin, and cello. When the first child becomes an adult and is leaving the home, she earnestly admonishes her:

"Never, never, never think that life is not as extraordinary as music says it is."

Yes!

21 February 2011

No discounts on getting to heaven?



One of the greatest mentors I have ever had was a fascinating Jewish convert lay contemplative, Charles Rich. He lived in a Jesuit residence for most of the 20th century, praying all day and counseling priests and lay people.

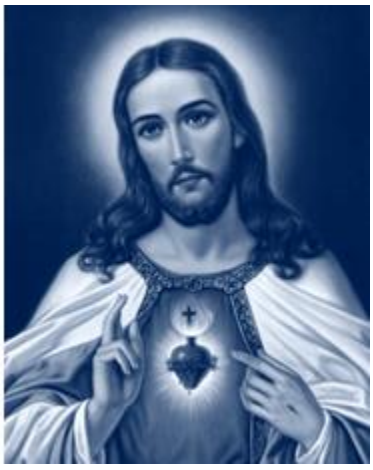
Here is one of his delightful stories: A man notices a beautiful suit in a store window. But it is $100. He saves his money and finally walks into the store to buy the suit. It is as wonderful as he thought. But then he thinks, if I buy a suit, I ought to also have a new shirt, and a new tie. But I can't afford them. So, he winds up getting a cheaper suit that isn't very good so that he can also get the shirt and the tie.

Here is the comparison. We realize that being a saint in the sense of only doing God's will and getting to heaven is the only thing that really counts. But, then, we think – I would also like to have the comforts of a good life, a little success, etc. etc. And so we don't go for heaven really but, instead, compromise. Why go to purgatory if we could get to heaven?

You can find a link to Charles Rich's biography by me and numerous of his pithy sayings on my web — go to rondachervin.com and look for Friends of Charles Rich.

21 February 2011

"You will find him in my Sacred Heart"



Today is the 20th anniversary of the death of my son, Charles. We had twin girls, then 3 miscarriages, then Charlie, and then 3 more miscarriages. Charlie was the son of my husband's old age. He was a delightful child, good, deep, and highly creative – a cellist and composer. He had what Jungians call an eternal child syndrome. He had such a loving happy youth that he refused to become an adult. At 19 he looked for the most beautiful spot in the world to leap into the Pacific Ocean at Big Sur to his death.

It was the most horrifying moment in our lives. It still is a dagger in my heart even though I believe that God saved him. As you may know the catechism teaches that most suicides are out of their minds so we need not assume they are in hell, but pray for their progress toward a better place. A word I got in my heart was to look for him in the Sacred Heart.

Advice I have to give is never think those who threaten suicide are just faking to get attention – get them professional help immediately.

When I saw his dead body I grabbed the mercy chaplet and have never stopped praying it. I realized that we all need mercy, not merit badges.

You might want to hear his beautiful music to Tolkien's Lord of Rings and other music he wrote by googling Music of Charles Chervin. Before he died, he also wrote a plaintive piece called Requiem for a Lost Childhood, which you can also hear at the same place. There was a concert by the musicians from his music school a few months afterwards. I ran around saying, please steal his melodies so that he can live. Anyone who listens and likes the music, please steal it!

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23 February 2011

"Anything worth doing, is worth doing badly" G.K. Chesterton

It was the year 1965. I was desperately trying to make the adjustment from full time philosophy graduate student to full-time mother of twins. I asked my great intellectual mentor, Dietrich Von Hildebrand, how I could deal better with not concepts but diapers. "What's a diaper?" he asked. Of course he knew what a diaper was in German but had never heard the word in English.



Help came with happening upon the above line from G.K. Chesterton: "Anything worth doing is worth doing badly." Bingo! Of course, raising babies is so important that it's good to do it even if I can't earn an A, a B, or even a C at it.

A related favorite a quotation is that the perfect is the enemy of the good. I looked all over to find the author of this adage. No, it was not in Scripture, or in Shakespeare, but from General Sherman! In case you're sure exactly what it means since, after all, Jesus says "Be ye perfect," it is designed to help perfectionists do something good rather than nothing at all since you may reason that if you can't do something perfectly, why even do it?

An application in my case is that in my generation in Catholic schools most English teachers insisted on perfect grammar and spelling. This led some talented writers to produce nothing after they stopped writing compositions for school because, "if it wasn't perfect, why write it?" But, I, an atheist going to public schools as a child, before my conversion, was taught by progressive teachers who stressed self-expression. I have been expressing myself ever since. I leave the perfecting to the editors at the publishing houses. I presume that God helps me every time since people say they get a lot out of reading my stuff.

Now even though these adages don't work at all for creating music or performing it, for more ordinary activities it could work. Consider doing such ordinary worthwhile things badly and not letting the perfect get in the way of the good. Try it, you'll like it!

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24 February 2011



I am teaching St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross at Holy Apostles College and Seminary this semester. They both endlessly admonished against chatter. Since I am a chatter-box – and this for 73 years – I was alarmed. What? I can never, never, be united to God unless I get rid of this habit!

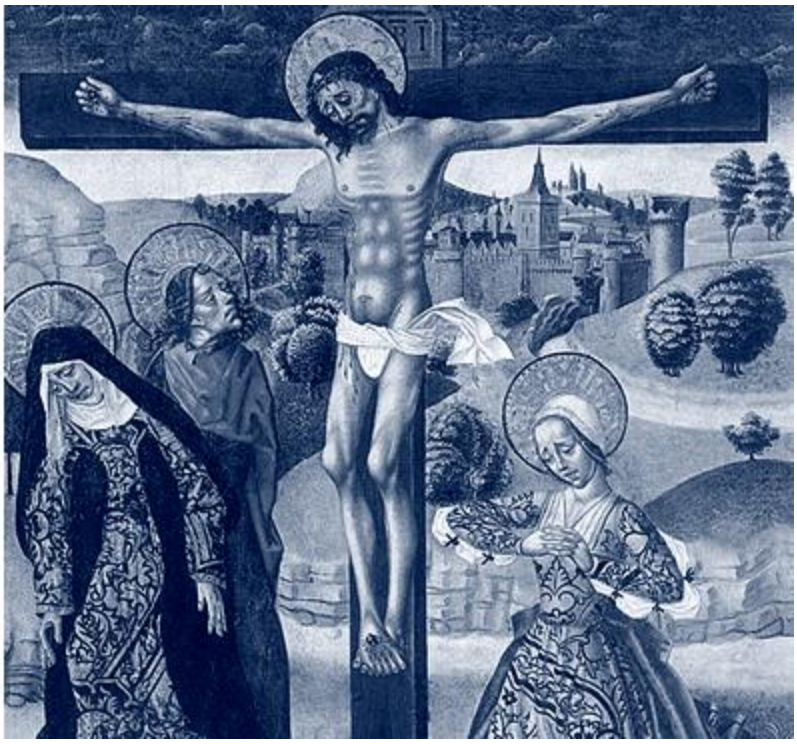
I asked a wise mentor and he said this, "Don't try to talk less. Try, instead, to love silence more!" And what the Holy Spirit told me was to watch my outer and also interior conversations so as to be more silent.

Today is a beautiful day to start over again on this attempt to follow the Holy Spirit and beg for the grace to love silence more. It happens that yesterday was full of stress of all kinds and that stress is following me today. My tendency under stress is to vent it through chatter with one person after another. Typing this blog in silence instead of calling up one more audience for my woes is a step toward greater silence.

So, this morning my prayer is this: Our Lady of Solitude, help me to give all the problems that cause stress to you. Let me now rest my head on your lap and not lift my head until I feel more peaceful."

25 February 2011

Hurling Denunciations from the Throne of Truth



I sometimes ask myself: “If I lived at the time of Jesus would I have been a zealot or a Christian?” Probably a zealot before the Resurrection and a Christian afterwards. After all, the zealots were haters of the real injustices of the Romans and, by contrast, Jesus must have seemed weakly passive in this respect.

Dietrich Von Hildebrand wrote a great analysis of the Pharisee in his classic Transformation in Christ. A key concept is that in pride we love to hurl denunciations from the throne of truth. In our own personal lives this takes the form of “This person is unforgivable. Here are the 20 examples of his/her unforgivableness. Now, all of you need to hate him or her, also.” And then we add, “I could forgive him/her if that person begged for forgiveness and that, in a totally sincere manner.”

Whenever I see the Passion Christ when Jesus forgives his torturers I say to myself: “If He could forgive them, and they certainly weren’t begging for forgiveness, I can forgive everyone who hurt me.” Legend has it that not only the centurion but even Pilate got the grace to repent. Since forgiveness from the heart can take many years, it’s better to start soon.

Well, when we say every day many times “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” do we mean it or is it just lip-service?

26 February 2011

"Peace is the Tranquillity of Order." St. Augustine



In time of conflict and stress I sometimes wake up in the morning with a feeling of hopelessness. I mutter the prayers of the rosary and a tiny little sense of peace begins to quietly trickle through the knots of the turmoil caused by outer and inner disorder.

Pope Paul VI proclaimed that there can be no peace without justice. Of course, everything disordered in the world, in the Church, and in our own souls causes peacelessness. John Paul II augmented his predecessor's words to proclaim that there is no justice without transparency. The vicious circle is cover-up of injustice, and the resulting peaceless fears.

How do we get out of the vicious circle? Our Savior – "the Prince of Peace" – tells us that the way out is up and then from the overflow of His love to begin the process of slowly unraveling the disordered knots.

Since we cannot control others, we have to start with our own disorders. Sometimes just removing dust that covers up the wood of my desk brings a little bit of peace. You might pray, after reading these large chunks of wisdom: "Our Lady of Knots"* what tiny thing can I do today that will bring greater transparency, greater justice…hence a little more tranquility to my soul."

*You can find Our Lady of Knots on the web. The image shows her unravelling knotted yarn. There are prayers to go with the image.

27 February 2011

Fresh Beauty



My son-in-law, and English poet, put together a new website for me with beautiful graphics. I will tell you more about this web outreach to "seekers" when the web goes up. (You can find it on www.spiritualityrunningtogod.com) When I saw the nature photos on the draft of the web tears came into my mind. I was reminded of how I forgive everything about any of my family members if they create something beautiful in the realm of music or art or poetry.

I have a little teaching on types of work in the Church. I divide us into motherly/fatherly, prophetic works, creative works and contemplative contributions. Of course we have bits of all four, but generally there is one we are especially called to. Briefly, motherly/fatherly types will do anything to fill any need from ushering to ironing altar clothes to pro-life telephone ministry, and catechetics. Prophetic people are more interested in removing evils by working with such groups as operation rescue, writing

letters to the editor, campaigns. In the parish church prophetic types like to make things better through the parish council or bugging the priest. Contemplative types you will find before daily Mass praying the rosary, at adoration, just sitting in the church when it is empty, loving to just be with the Lord. I make it a point to try to affirm the gifts and help of all these types of builders of our mini-kingdoms of God.

Often least appreciated are the creative types such as composers, decorators, artists, writers. We love the result but have little idea of how much goes into these works, so we may gaily request the choir director who has volunteered umpteen hours a week if he or she wouldn't like to also bake cookies for the kiddies for after Mass, or spend Saturday morning sorting items from the rummage sale.

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28 February 2011

Ridicule - a sin?



I just finished writing a book with the Ballards (Lutheran ministers turned Catholic) called What the Saints Say About Heaven (Since this blog it has been published by Tan/St. Benedict's and there is a show about it on Women of Grace on EWTN)…one of my co-authors included an old examination of conscience as an appendix. To my amazement it listed under sins ridicule of others, sarcasm, and even enjoying hearing others criticized!

This occasioned a general confession of 73 years of these sins! (In case you are a younger Catholic and don't know, a "general confession" doesn't mean you detail 73 years of instances of a sin. That might bore the confessor. You just say "I want to confess 73 years of doing this thing." It sure lightens the load of guilt!

While waiting on line for confession I thought of how Kierkegaard wrote that instead of gossiping about the sins of others we should weep for them. Now, by gossip, we don't mean necessary conversations involving the faults of others for the purpose of helping them or dealing with them. What is meant is indulging in the details of the flaws of others to make oneself feel superior and to almost gloat. At least that's the way I do it.

At the last minute I asked in the confession: “probably making sarcastic self-deprecatory remarks about myself is also not so good?” My confessor suggested that this comes under lack of love of self which is preliminary to love of neighbor as oneself.

This reminded me of one of my best thoughts about marriage – that we sometimes go from idolizing the spouse, to despising him or her as a fallen idol, whereas it is better to see the other not as an idol at all but as a funny little struggling creature, and ourselves that way also!

So ridicule and sarcasm are forms of pride. We proudly demean others. With ourselves we first proudly see ourselves as little idols and then feel horrified when we become fallen idols. If we were humble we would lower our heads in shame but say, as my holy godfather used to advise, “here I am, Lord, your poor little creature who fell again. Have mercy on me.”

They say we should not only pray the mercy chaplet but have a whole mercy spirituality. (Rereading this blog in 2013 the priests of the Mercy Shrine in Stockbridge, Mass. have been developing just such a spirituality. I especially benefit from the writings of Fr. Michael Gaitley of that community.)

Daring to be Vulnerable

1 March 2011

I have an adorable cat, Felix, who is a mouser. My sleep was interrupted by Felix bringing in a mouse, then losing the mouse, then trying to dislodge the mouse from an open bin with heavy pots blocking the cat’s entry to the bin. Lots of fight and flight. I

opened the door to the freezing wind and took out the pots, hoping the mouse would dash to safety. No luck because the mouse had the piece of a ball of yarn wound around his neck like a lasso. The cat tore off the yarn but the mouse escaped into the top of the closet. Presently, the mouse is totally hidden and the cat won't go out because he smells the mouse.



Sleeplessly I was trying to create a parable about the only somewhat amusing incident. I thought of "fight and flight." I once wrote a piece about the crucifixion in a book now on my web (www.rondachervin.com) under free e-books called *Mary, Teach us How to Live* (rondachervin.com) The idea was that instead of fright or flight, Jesus chose total vulnerability.

Later, at Mass, I was bemoaning how I can't deal with computers. The present misery was my adobe flash getting lost when my computer crashed last week so I couldn't test the audios on my new web site. After the usual fantasy about fleeing to some beautiful desert monastery to be a hermitess, I just vulnerably begged God to help me. This led to an unexpected fix by a genial seminarian.

So, instead of fleeing to the desert, I will proudly announce to you my new web. This is a spirituality web designed to reach new-agers and weak Christians. It will have lots of Catholic spirituality in it, but not in the title. If you have people you want to reach of this description go to the new web I did with friends called www.spiritualityrunningtogod.com — Sorry I am not computer literate enough to get a capital on God in this context but the new-agers won't mind!

Visit Dr. Ronda's new website: spiritualityrunningtogod.com

2 March 2011

A New Way to Decide What to Give up for Lent



Many years ago I got an inspiration. Instead of deciding myself what to give up for Lent, why not ask the family. I was surprised. Since my main sins involve anger, I was sure they would pick that. Instead they all agreed: Mom, you are such a puddleglum – a character in C.S. Lewis who is always pessimistic. Whatever anyone suggests to do, you come up with the worst case prognosis! It's downright depressing!

I was surprised, especially that they all agreed. I noticed that they were right and tried to be more upbeat. So, when Lent came around I started suggesting to my students "Ask those close to you, your daily victims, what they wish you would change as a Lenten sacrifice." Of course, I don't know how successful that was, since it would be prying to ask them whether their families and friends were happy with the improvement.

Here's another more subtle one to prime your pump on this spiritual exercise. My marriage was kind of rocky. Once I suddenly asked my husband, "So, what do you hate about me most?" He thought for a while and came up with this ringer: "Well, you're a teacher. So you are used to grading students. Whatever I do or we do together, you, so to speak, give it a grade afterward, as in 'that was a great evening or, that evening was awful.' It makes me feel like a little kid in school being judged for everything!"

So, do you dare ask your close ones what they wish you would change for Lent?

3 March 2011

"Beauty is Truth" —Keats



More than 50 years ago I, a militant atheist, stood in front of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, in awe of its beauty. The words of Keat's famous poem came to me "Beauty is truth; truth beauty, that is all ye need to know on earth…" This was one of the highlights in my conversion to the Catholic faith. (If you are interested in a quick rendition of my whole conversion story go to www.rondachervin.com click on books and, then, free e-books and leaflets to the leaflet "Saved.")

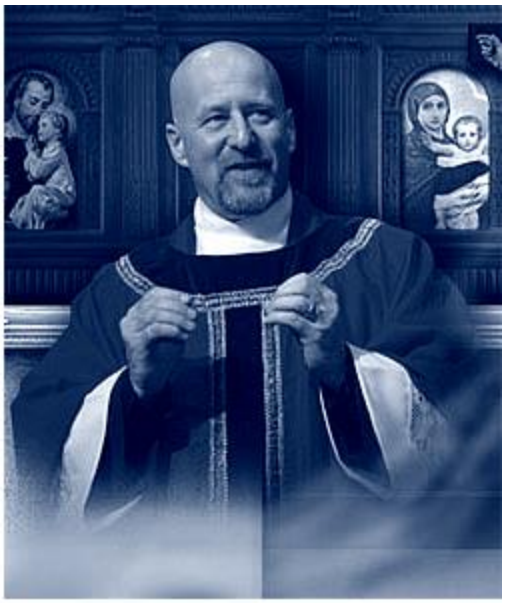
This morning the line came to mind in relation to the way beauty check-mates heavy sadness. This long, snowy, dark winter in Connecticut after years of living in Los Angeles, Texas, Arkansas, and North Carolina, really got to me. Now, with Spring almost here, the joy in just seeing the sun is almost ecstatic.

Of course listening to beautiful music is also a check-mate for depressed spirits.

When you feel down, how about reaching out for a beauty-fix in the form of music, art, or seeking out something beautiful in nature?

5 March 2011

Security: The World's Way vs. God's Way



“Don’t try to fit in. Instead, shine forth!” The Holy Spirit seemed to tell me this once when I was feeling very insecure because I don’t fit in easily anywhere.

Once I figured out that my twin sister and I were probably the most “alienated” kids of all in our childhood in the upper West Side of New York. We were atheist anti-Communist Jews. Surrounding us were Catholic gang kids (West Side Story), Orthodox religious Jews in full old country regalia, Communist Jews, and Zionists. Of course, when I became a Catholic, I conformed as much as I could to the circle surrounding Von Hildebrand who brought me into the Church, but this same background made me still culturally quite different.

My dear friend, Francette Meaney, once remarked that I had an unusually great need to belong. However, like many creative types, I don’t fit in easily in any group. I plunge wildly ahead with my own personal agenda, and I am greatly appreciated, but that is earned, and not the same easy feeling people have when they are in a large group of same background people.

Lately, however, I have noticed that lots and lots of people feel they don’t fit in. One friend with a thick Southern accent feels awkward up here in Connecticut. My son-in-law from England doesn’t fit in too well in a small town in North Carolina. I would bet that each of you readers feels insecure because of not fitting in with respect to some aspect of your background or personality.

Fr. Dwight Longenecker, a maverick convert priest, speaker, and writer, now a pastor in Greenville, S.C., whose blog you might greatly enjoy, suggested a remedy for this feeling of insecurity in these words: if you are a free spirit, you can’t get security from other people. You have to become secure, instead, in God. What way do you pray when you need more security?

6 March 2011

Balance

I am fascinated by buzz-words. Of a sudden you keep hearing some new expression such as “don’t micro-manage me!” At first I find it repulsive. Then, gradually, I begin to see that the new buzz-word became popular because what it refers to has become endemic.



Such was the buzz-word “you have to have more balance” that became popular in the 1970’s. I was brought up by a father who adored music but was forced to study piano instead of the kettle drums he dreamed of playing instead. To compensate he favored recordings of Ravel’s Bolero or Stravinksy’s Rite of Spring over harmonious piano concertos. Since, as children, we had music in the background every evening of our lives, I think such rhythms got me into the idea that drama and intensity were the key to joy. I didn’t get much of the type of balance I might have picked up from listening to, say, Bach, who my father thought was stodgy.

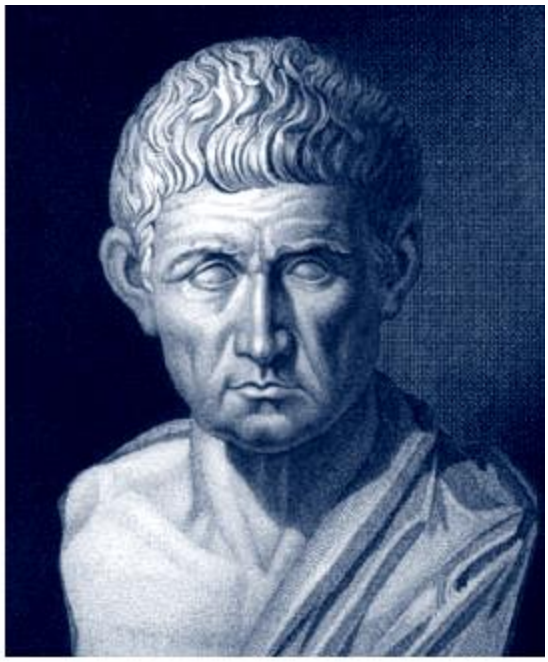
When I was a raising children, I hated housework. I dreamed of the day when I could, without interruption, only pray, teach and write. I thought “the grass is greener” for single professors who could concentrate only on their work. I was astounded that when I became a widow with no children around I actually missed such mundane tasks as dishwashing or having TV in the background of my other tasks.

I recalled a psychological study of types I learned about in the 70’s. The idea was to relate the 4 elements: air, earth, fire and water to your own personality. Being airy (spacey and overly seeking transcendence) and fiery (too intense) I could get BALANCE by having some earthy or watery elements in my day. Not an outdoor sort, earthiness probably came with work in the house – down in the dirt; and more water from swimming or even rinsing dishes. I think there’s something in it.

Is your life well-balanced? If not, you could ask the Holy Spirit to nudge you toward what you need.

7 March 2011

Overcoming Disillusionment



Teaching at a seminary involves a specific poignancy when a hero priest is revealed as having fallen into big sins. Several of these have hit the non-Catholic and Catholic news of late. Heavy-hearted, I was pondering one of these news flashes at the same time as someone gave me pause to wonder about a priest I thought was a beloved hero and now am told could be someone with clay feet on grounds other than scandal.

It reminded me of a psycho-therapist years ago remarking to me about myself that "naivete is a pretty weak defense mechanism!" At the time I was 28 and she was about 50. Let me open up that cryptic statement a bit for you. If at one time you thought so, do you still think now, at whatever age you are over 14 that:

If a country is a democracy it can save the world even without virtue in the majority of the populace. (In spite of warnings that go back to Aristotle!)

If I go to daily Mass and believe in the teachings of the Church I can never commit a mortal sin. (In spite of St. Teresa of Avila writing that even after the spiritual marriage someone could fall into mortal sin!)

That people with beautiful natural gifts and great love of the beauty of the liturgy could never betray anyone, especially not me. (In spite of the fact that some composers of exquisite Church music were atheists or Masons!)

That those I love among family and friends could never reveal my secrets to others. (In spite of knowing this takes place in most other families and friendship circles!)

Everyone who reads this blog believes in forgiveness of such sins public or private. The thrust of this little piece is more to address a related issue: disillusionment. Since disillusionment breeds cynicism (the idea that everything that seems good is really evil underneath) it is important to come against letting the natural feeling of let down in the face of unexpected evils lead us not into cynicism but, instead, into sadness, grief, and prayer for the perpetrators and for ourselves when we are the unexpectedly evil ones.

May having to see the fall of heroes lead us to work out our own salvation "with fear and trembling."

8 March 2011

Taming the Lion Within



In my book, Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace, I explain a concept of Dr. Abraham Low, founder of Recovery, International — self-help groups for emotions out of control. The concept is Symbolic Victory.

Here is an example of the BAD strategy of symbolic victory. I was treated unjustly by a person or a group. I lack the power to win a victory over my opponents. This makes me feel impotent and raging. I hate feeling weak with no recourse. So, I try for a "symbolic" victory. How? When I talk to my allies over and over again about the hateful actions, policies, etc. of my opponents, I am in the superior position. I am the superior good guy. The unjust opponent is the slimy rat who is deserving of contempt, ostracism, etc. etc.

Did I achieve a real victory? No. I am still suffering from the effects of the "bad" guys actions. No compromises, reconciliations have taken place. Nothing has changed. Yet I feel momentarily compensated. I am right and he/she is wrong and I have shouted this from the roof tops.

Now, anger management does not mean that I passively, weakly, supinely, obsequiously, cringe before my opponent and beg him/her to take the foot off my neck. Not at all. What we learn in anger management is to become a tamed lion, carefully trying to see what I might be able to do now or in the future. If I am in Christian anger management I might look into free mediation even if there would be no hope of monetary recompense. If there is no mediation that would work in my circumstances, I might pray to God for wisdom as to what God wants me to learn from the experience, such as, help me God, never to treat anyone the way I was treated. Or, help me God to avoid people of a similar type to my victimizer even if there might seem to be other advantages to relating to such types. Or, "I offer all this pain for the final conversion of everyone I love and even my enemies."

"Sounds good, but I'm too angry to do it," you might say. If so try Recovery, International for groups near you or phone groups, or go to rondachervin.com and order my book.

9 March 2011

Salvation in the Worst of Times: Ash Wednesday



Just before going to bed, I clicked on the headlines on my computer only to read about more bad in the Church in the United States. Heavy of heart, I prayed through the night. I thought, perhaps a dark blank page would be the only blog I could write.

I awoke instead with the old adage running through my mind "Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." I remembered that in the worst times in my life such as the death of my son, the death of my husband, my own worst sins, what helped most was exactly what we are given as the source of our hope: Jesus, The Word made Flesh, in the Mass, Mary, our Mother, Absolution in Confession.

A daily communicant for more than 50 years, still those phrases are so comforting: the words of the liturgy…Kyrie Eleison…I confess to Almighty God, and you, my brothers and sisters…Lord, I am not worthy…but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

My godfather, Balduin Schwarz, disciple of Von Hildebrand, and my teacher of philosophy of time, used to say – look how metaphysical the words of the rosary are! The past is gone, the future is not here. The moments we need prayer for are the "Now" and "the Hour of our Death." Someone saint said that since we beg every day that Mary pray for us at the hour of our death, why wouldn't we expect her to be with us at that hour!

When the darkness gets darker, let us run to our only sure salvation.

10 March 2011

The Spirit of Gentle Counsel



At a prayer meeting here in Connecticut, our leader did a beautiful meditation about opening to God for a new gift. After kissing a big crucifix that went around the circle, we were to see if the Holy Spirit might be telling us about such a gift. Of course such exercises don't pretend to be infallibly the word from on-high, but when something comes up that fits I take it seriously.

I had been praying for more of the gift of counsel. Like many professors, I am long on teaching concepts and shorter on knowing what to say one on one to people in trouble. The word I seemed to get during this exercise was "I want to give you the gift of gentle counsel."

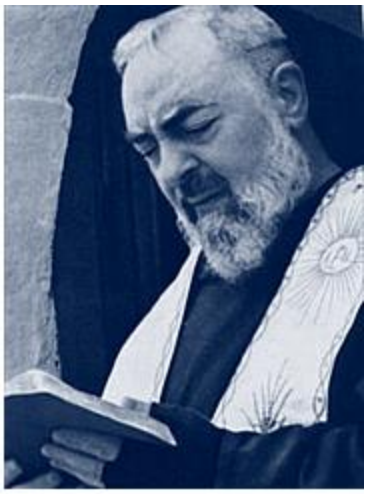
I filed it in the back of my mind but last night it came alive. I visited a mental help group to see what techniques I might learn from the touted holy priest director of the group. A small group of members sat around a table. Mostly we looked pretty woe-begone on arrival. The elderly priest leader, however, had a radiant smile as he greeted each of his old friends. He asked each one the simplest questions, such as, "what did you do yesterday?" His responses focused on what was good in what they had done with an encouraging nudge such as, "can you plan to do that more often this week?"

I realized that simply caring about the daily life of another enough to listen in a gentle spirit was a form of love. It is one I rarely indulge in as I plan my agenda of trying to force my insights down other people's throats!

Dear Holy Spirit, do give me the gift of gentle counsel!

12 March 2011

Depression, Anger and Anxiety - All Related



I got into dealing with anger this way: at 58 I was teaching at Steubenville. A grad student told me about this great group he wanted me to advertise: Recovery, Inc. (not 12 Step) for anger, anxiety and depression. I read the description and saw it as an answer to my prayers to do better with anger. I would say I had an average of 5 fits a day whenever frustrated in any wish to goal. Only after years of group work combined with prayer was my anger enough diminished that I could see the underlying anxiety and the depression (not clinical but more sad feelings) related to the other two.

How so? Well, anger can be a way to overcome anxiety in this way. I feel anxious that I won't succeed in some endeavor all the way from finding my way to a new place before GPS, to fear about my husband's asthma attacks. But anxiety is very painful. Finding someone or something to blame is less painful. So, blaming the complicated traffic patterns of suburbs of cities feels better than just feeling stupid because I have no sense of direction. Or blaming my husband for smoking with resultant late onset asthma would be less painful than accepting the possibility that he will die of an asthma attack.

So, where does depression come in? Psychotherapists claim that some non-clinical depression comes from suppressed anger. So, once I stopped venting all my anger 5 times a day, I would feel low and sad more often. Some therapists have described this as addiction to the adrenalin rush of anger! To avoid the unpleasantness of depressed feelings, we foment incidents of conflict and anger.

What a vicious cycle! What is the remedy? For those who know Him the only remedy is getting much, much, closer to Jesus so that He can make us feel peace when we are otherwise anxious and give us joyful hope instead of sad depression. Next time you feel angry, ask yourself, what the anxiety is beneath the anger. Next time you feel depressed ask yourself if you are suppressing anger. Instead of just running to a distraction, take the whole knot of emotions to Jesus, the Divine Physician, and beg Him to help you.

March, 2011

Humor is Your Best Friend



One of the "tools" in the Recovery, International group for anger, fear and depression I keep telling you about is "humor is your best friend." Light recommended humor is very different from the type of sarcasm I am trying to get away from. As I work on getting away from the bad kind to the good kind I have a wonderful role model in a new friend of mine, also a widow, Marti Armstrong. She drives from Poughkeepsie, NY where she lives in the

house she had as a wife and mother. When she comes to Holy Apostles in Connecticut she stays on an air mattress in the little cell I live in at the Seminary.

Although very serious about spirituality and tragedies of life, she is absolutely bouyantly resilient about the same daily frustrations I get hysterical over. As in, if we get lost following her GPS directions, I tense up and think we will never get there. She laughs merrily and admonishes her virtual electronic mentor on the GPS with words such as, “How can I trust you…silly voice?” Or, crossing a busy street, she will mutter ebulliently, “not a good day to get run over, Marti!”

When she leaves I usually sink back into my way of seeing every frustration as a symbol of how awful life is but, then, suddenly I start copying her better way and talking to myself coyly as in “well, silly little cat, can’t find what you need again…going senile…ha, ha, ha.”

An comic-actress friend of mine of the past, Mary Mitchell, used to give workshops called “When God laughed.” She insisted that Jesus must have roared with laughter when he drew the tax money out of the mouth of the fish. She challenged us with the advice that at the end of every day we should try to turn every “tragedy” into comedy. I thought this a little idiotic until I saw it with my own eyes in a case as tragic as death! This extremely humorous professor was dying slowly of a rare blood disease. Everyone wondered how his seemingly weak wife was going to take his final demise. But on the road to the cemetery, there she was joking with each of us because at the exact moment the hospital called her with the bad news, the toilet seat in their house cracked in half, a comic version of the temple veils were rent in two when Jesus died.

God, please keep me from taking every trivial frustration so seriously. Lighten me up, so I may be less heavy on those around me.

14 March 2011

"Addiction" and Pain



The word “addiction” has expanded from drug problems all the way to “shopaholism,” and computer game “addictions.” My own favorites are co-dependency and workaholism. At first these words seem artificial, but by now we have in the dictionary a generic description of addiction as being any kind of compulsive out of control behavior patterns.

A key factor in observing the “addictions” of others is the phenomenon of denial. How can a hugely overweight person, for instance, be exhorting others to be “detached” in order to be more holy? But it soon becomes a vicious circle since the one who sits in judgment of the obsessions of others is her/himself compulsively exercising contempt instead of hopeful, forgiving, love. (Now, reading this in 2013, I must tell you that the overweight person I had in mind came out of denial, went into an all-encompassing treatment plan, and lost 120 pounds in 6 months!)

What helps me in harsh judgments of others and myself is getting closer to the pain that underlies frantic attempts to escape into dead-end behavior. For instance, when I look for work in a frantic way at times where I should be relaxing in enjoyment of family and friends, am I trying to escape from the pain of the inevitable crosses of life? I need to think of the open arms of the crucified Jesus inviting others and myself to make even the smallest attempts to run to Him instead of to our favorite “addiction.” It is so moving to me when someone I think of as “in denial” has a grace-breakthrough to begin the process of liberation from some addiction – one finger at a time releasing its grip on the desired “goody.”

I have been reading the contemporary novels of Brian J. Gail. In “Motherless” a key moment is where Jesus says to the priest-hero “If you show me your thirst for Me, I can show you My thirst for them.” If I turn my thirst for my “addictions” into groaning prayers for help, He can show me also the thirst for Him underlying the addictions of others.

14 March 2011

The Heart: A Spousal Legacy



Couples reasonably happily married often dread the thought that one might die and leave the other one alone. You can take comfort from the fact that it's only because of all the natural good and grace in your marriage that you're not, instead, having fantasies each day that the other one will leave this world and leave you much happier!

Two of my closest friends have a marriage that is 24/7 close and loving. They are in their late 50's and have no children. When they have to be separated for work or separate errands they kiss each other goodbye and say over and over again "take care, honey." It is moving to see. I can feel the fear in their hearts that God might allow one to go first.

Praying for them one day I got this word which sounds like it's from the Holy Spirit: "when a spouse dies the heart of the departing one goes into the heart of the beloved still on earth." It seemed to me like a corollary to "they shall be two in one flesh."

Even in rockier marriages such as mine, I found that when my husband died 18 years ago, a funny thing happened. I started wanting to eat foods he loved and I didn't, such as lobster. I wanted to remember that way how happy he was eating this delicacy. He had a tremendous Zorba the Greek type love of life, whereas I am always longing for heaven. After his death his heart came into mine in the form of enjoying the good things of daily life more. I could imagine him smiling seeing me have more fun.

Holy Spirit, over and over you tell me that even though we have to suffer terrible crosses in this life, we could be so much happier if we worried less about the future and enjoyed the gifts of the "now" much, much more.

15 March 2011

Custom-Made Temptations



We listened to the words of the liturgy of the First Sunday of Lent about the 40 Days and Satan's wiles in trying to tempt the God-man and we may think — "having power over the whole world doesn't even tempt me!"

Usually during Lent, however, we get an unexpected temptation custom-made to our personal fantasies. In my case, one of my daughters told me about her family possibly moving to a home even nearer to the Pacific Ocean than her present place. The ocean is my favorite for natural beauty. I love the way it's apparent infinity images God's infinity and lifts me out of my closed in petty worries. Since it is 80 degrees in California and about to snow once again in Connecticut where I am teaching at Holy Apostles Seminary, I started thinking, "Maybe I am meant to really retire. Suppose God wants to gift me at the end of my life with sublime joy instead or more crosses? Shouldn't I be open?"

In the midst of this reverie I thought I heard in my interior the voice of Mary laughing, "so you'd rather be a beach-comber than the spiritual mother of future priests?"

What is your "custom-made temptation?" And how do the heavenly "voices" check mate it?

Shifting Paradigms

16 March 2011

I was giving a talk at a parish in a small city in Connecticut. The town is about 13 square miles and has 13 Catholic Churches in it! Though the talk was highly advertised in all those Churches only the people from the parish I was talking in actually came. The pastor remarked that typically parishioners only go to events in their own Church.

I was reminded of a funny joke about aging: First you don't want to leave your country; next you don't want to leave your state; then you don't want to leave our city; then you don't want to leave your block, then you don't want to leave your house, and finally you don't want to leave your bed.

How different this is from the jet set mentality where people go for weekends to Paris and some couples see each other only on holidays since each works in a state 1,000 miles distant from where the other one works!

In medieval times there was a phenomena called "circle cities." The aging devout moved into huts surrounding the Churches or monasteries. This way they could go to daily Mass in their "celestial living room." I love that paradigm. A priest I know has been planning a monastery/refuge for all vocations in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts. I wrote a novel with him under a

PSEUDONYM, FOR LOOK FOR IT UNDER THE TITLE describing what this dream would be like. You can get it from goodbooksmedia – click on BOOK SALON it is called Last Flight to the New Jerusalem. Of course it could also be built in a place near you? If you build it I might come!



17 March 2011

Healing of the humiliating vices of envy and competitiveness.



I do a lot of teaching on Masculine/Feminine Stereotypical Traits. I deal with positive and negative ones for each sex. Positive would be wonderful traits such as the nurturing of women and the drive of men, among others. Negative would include such awful traits as the envy of women of each other and the competitiveness of men with each other.

Example: check out how a roomful of averagely attractive women react if a flamboyantly sexy woman walks in the door. if we avoid such attire, we will likely still be envious and even full of hate for such a woman. Watch how many a short, heavy-set man reacts when a tall handsome muscular jock enters his milieu. It's sometimes called the Napoleon complex – that is how short men feeling envy of taller men have a need to be domineering to compensate.

A humiliating feature of envy and competitiveness is that you tacitly have to admit that you feel inferior in order to indulge in such traits.

There is a beautiful holy remedy encapsulated in the phrase of St. Thomas Aquinas: “you can only love yourself loving.” Say it slowly and you’ll get it. When we move out in love to anyone we feel love in our hearts and this makes us happy to be ourselves.

God help me to admire your handiwork in the bodies of those more gifted than me in these ways, but to truly believe that love is the best gift and one available equally to all of us.

19 March 2011

"I have Called you by Name." (Isaiah 43:1)



One of my all time favorite Scriptures is “I have called you by name, you are mine.” This passage got linked up in a surprising way with the much more enigmatic one in Revelations (2:17) about finding a new name on a white stone.

I was visiting the Sisters of the Cross in Mexico. This is an order founded by the great grandmother saint, Conchita, who will, one day, we hope, be a doctor of the Church. She wrote more than 100 books and founded more than 4 communities in the first half of the 20th century. If you don’t know her, check her out under her longer name Concepcion Cabrera de Armida.

Anyhow, I watched a relay of nuns coming into the chapel for Adoration. Once at the Adoration prie-dieu they never moved an inch so rapt were they in contemplative prayer. I went into envious grief. “Dear Jesus, I moaned, look at those saints. You must be so disgusted with me, this awful, fidgety, loud-mouthed, swinish woman who pretends to be spiritual and can’t sit still for 10 minutes even.” (Of course, all my directors have been after me, not for being jumpy, but for self-flagellation!)

Jesus spoke in my heart in this consoling manner. “In the Church your name is not silence and serenity but, in the image of your Jewish ancestors, your name is YEARNING!”

I was so consoled that I decided that I was called by name into the Church as Ronda, but that my new name on the white stone was “yearning.”

As a result, at spirituality workshops, I like to tell this anecdote to the participants, and then ask them to pray until they can "hear" what is their own new name on the white stone. When they think they know, they put it up on the blackboard for others to see.

Want to try?

March 20, 2011

Fool-Proof Charity



My husband was brought up on the Lower East Side of NYC. He recounts how he learned as a kid about fake charities. His brother got "a job" passing around a can with a slot in it for helping impoverished Jewish immigrants. The gimmick was that the teen soliciting donations got half the money in the can! As a result he was totally sceptical about giving donations to anything until he went to the first talk of Mother Teresa of Calcutta in Los Angeles. After that he said, "Okay, Ronda, we can tithe Mother Teresa. I know she's the real thing. But if she dies, that's it." She outlived my husband which gave me the chance to live simply and austerely to give more to the poor and to right to life causes.

After a while I started exhorting others with this image: "Suppose you were on your way into Wal-Mart. You saw a woman on the sidewalk who was starving with no milk in her breasts for her baby. Would you buy 3 new T-shirts or would you buy 2 and use the money for the 3rd to buy food for the starving woman?"

Okay, you don't see this starving woman, but the Missionaries of Charity do, and can you believe that MIssionaries of Charity in India who have to vow to live without even toilet paper would be using your donation for "administrative overhead"?

Go to Missionaries of Charity on the web and you can donate to their Bronx NY headquarters – I tell them to give it to the hungriest people in the world where they minister.

Okay, I know “the right hand shouldn’t know what the left is doing” on charitable works, but considering that what Americans throw into the garbage could feed the whole world’s starving, I think it’s worth losing gold stars “boasting in the Lord” by telling people not to buy luxuries when others are starving.

20 March 2011

In the Image of our Creativity - God's Desire to Molding Us.



My family was and is overflowing with creativity. My father wrote many books, the cutest title being “Who’s Who in the Zoo!” Check out Ralph De Sola sometime. He wrote the definitive Abbreviations dictionaries, but insisted, quixotic style, on including in each edition a section on euphemisms. Since he was an atheist until almost the last month of his life, he relied on me for Catholic euphemisms such as “I’m not comfortable with what you just said” being a euphemism for “I hate what you say.” My mother was an editor who also wrote plays. My husband wrote plays and books (check out Children of the Breath, a novel about what Jesus and Satan talked about during the rest of the 40 Days in the Desert – Martin Chervin sold by Enroutebooksandmedia.com). My son composed chamber music (see my web for Music of Charles Chervin). One daughter, Carla Conley, writes prize winning poetry and another Diana Jump is an incredible artist and also writes uproarious stories of family trips. A grandson is publishing novels – check out Nicholas Conley, and another grandson is starting to compose piano music. All of the writers are better at this skill than I am, but they are less well known because they lacked or lack something I have in abundance – over-weening ambition and constant prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Anyhow – once I was feeling bad about my orphan books – these are unpublished manuscripts, among my best. I finally put these all up free on rondachervin.com. In the midst of grieving these little read “children,” I heard this inner message from the Holy Trinity: “Ronda, you know how much you love to create your books and talks and classes? We have a longing to create a new saint: you! Won’t you give us a little more time “in your busy schedule” to open yourself to us in quiet prayer so that we can better “melt you, mold you, fill you, and use you?” (old charismatic song).

Since so many of you Watershed readers are also creative, you might want to ponder this analogy with your name in the message!

22 March 2011

Showing Emotions



"At Mass I get to see your souls; but tonight I got to see your hearts," I said to some of the seminarians who came to a charismatic prayer meeting at Holy Apostles where I teach.

It sounds falsely dualistic, but from an experiential standpoint it's not. At Holy Apostles we pride ourselves on the formal beauty of our Masses. Since the seminarians wear clerics, this adds to the feeling of reverence, as the soul soars to meet Christ descending, as it were, into the Eucharistic Host. I love this atmosphere, but with 95 seminarians it's hard to get to know most of them heart to heart. At the small prayer meeting, they shared from the heart. I loved seeing an unusually analytic seminarian lift up his hands and, with face glowing with gratitude, tell us that the Lord wanted us to not only give Him our wills but also to give him our worst miseries.

I teach Von Hildebrand's classic, The Heart, recently re-published. He explains how the anti-affectivity tendency in the Church can lead to what he calls atrophy of the heart. Out of fear of out-of-control, sometimes sinful emotions, we become dutiful robots almost unable to express such wonderful emotions as joy, grief, and even love.

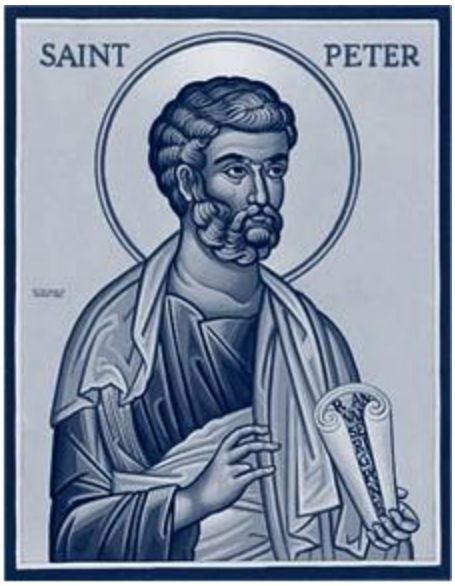
In response, people will say that they feel inner joy and love at Mass, too deep to be expressed. I retort, what do you think of people who say that even though they are talking to each other during Mass they feel "inner" reverence?

It is reported that in Augustine's time the windows of the Church sometimes cracked from the impact of the praise.

Perhaps, some of us need to hide our emotions more, and others have to express the good ones more?

22 March 2011

How God Brings Good Even Out of Our Faults



God could have created 500 immaculately conceived leaders for each generation to rule flawlessly like Plato's philosopher kings. We don't know why He didn't do that, but we do know that God used improbable people to lead his flock generation after generation in the Old and New Testament times. Why pick a stammerer, Moses, as the greatest leader of the Chosen People or as King David, an adulterer? Why Peter, the denier, as the first Pope?

Many sermons have been given emphasizing the humor in this strange strategy of God. How can we apply these lessons to ourselves? The question came to me in prayer this morning when I was noticing my manic tendency even at 73 years old to pile up project upon project (I call it project-itis). It seemed to me that the Holy Spirit was telling me that given His personnel shortage if He wants to launch a venture, He often has to use high energy slightly unbalanced types to do it. Your serene and laid-back fun-loving type is harder to motivate. That doesn't mean that God doesn't want to help me pace myself better with more time for quiet prayer. He does. But , perhaps, since He knows I will resist, He bring good out of this bad but using my projects amply.



25 March 2011

Don't Box Mary In

I became a Catholic when I was 21 under the mentorship of the Von Hildebrand circle of friends. They were much more devoted to the Liturgy of the Hours than to devotional prayer. So, even though they loved Mary, I didn't learn the rosary through them.

Here's how it happened. A friend of mine witnessed that when she made a pledge to pray the rosary every day of her life for the soul of her husband, he suddenly announced he wanted to be a Catholic. Thinking how much I wanted my husband to become a Catholic, I made the same pledge. I regretted the decision the next moment thinking how the rosary was "boring," but I rattled it off before going to sleep loyally just the same. Although it took him more than a decade to convert because he loved the old Latin Mass and hated Vatican II, he did become a Catholic. By then I was much fonder of the rosary, but still didn't really know Mary as a person that well.

One day a lady from the Blue Army of Fatima asked me if I wanted the pilgrim statue for Christmas. This was before my husband's conversion. I said, we probably couldn't do her justice. The woman sighed and said that nobody wanted Mary for Christmas! "Oh, in that case, of course, I'll take her." It was a busy day the women brought what looked like a tiny coffin to my house. I wanted to get back to my work immediately, but they insisted we pray the consecration together. Just a small booklet of seemingly a half-hours worth of prayers! So, you see, I was absolutely not in a mood to hallucinate the real presence of Mary.

When we got to the part about asking her to replace my heart with hers, I mumbled the prayer dutifully. Immediately, I was flooded with contemplative graces I had only read about in books. A mantle of peace draped my frenetic little soul. It lasted for 2 years, this with 3 kids and a full-time teaching job.

How could I never have thought that Mary was not just a refuge of sinners and repository of graces for petition prayers, but also the prime contemplative since the start of creation, so that inviting her heart into mine would be a revolution!

On this feast of the Annunciation, remind yourself of the graces of Mary to you and don't box her in – ask for even more.



27 March 2011

Loneliness vs. Too Close for Comfort



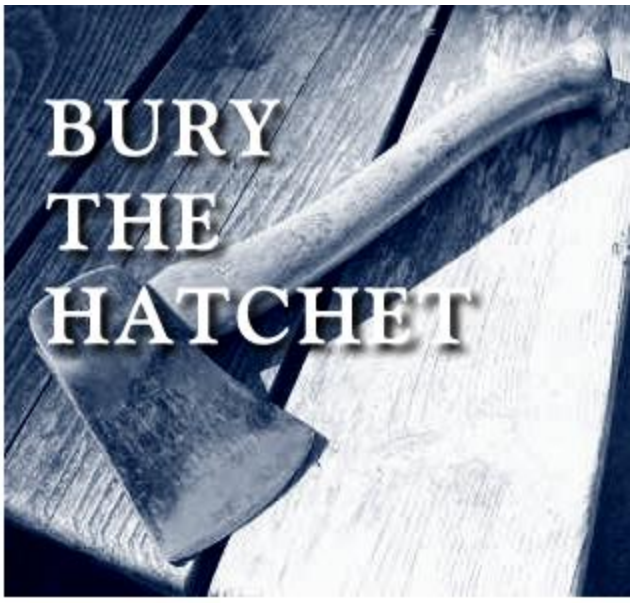
I live on the grounds of the seminary where I teach, occupying a little cell-like dorm room. I barter room and board for teaching. It is a great life for a devout widow – closeness to so many wonderful seminarians and no house work or cooking! But between classes and Masses and Liturgy of the Hours and meals, I feel lonely. Especially lonely for my adult children and grandchildren who are far away. I consider that these feelings of loneliness put me in solidarity with seminarians and priests who have plenty of people around them and many friends, too, but still lead a solitary life compared to living with family. Yes, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and all the saints are our spiritual family, but still….

But then, when I am with my family for long visits, and when I remember when we were all together before my son and husband died, I identify with the title of that sit-com "too close for comfort." Yes, such cozy, familiarity, but still also such tangled webs of conflict.

How I long for heaven…can you imagine what it will be like with the greatest closeness to everyone we love and none of the quarrels! In his wonderful short book "Jaws of Death, Gate of Heaven," Dietrich Von Hildebrand explains that fear of the unknown keeps us from simply longing for heaven night and day. Still, I think it would give us much more joy throughout the day if we cast our souls up to God and prayed more often to come to our heavenly home whenever God so wills.

28 March 2011

How God's Providence Can Test Friendships



I am a super-friendly person. It seems to me that God gave me the grace to readily see the intrinsic preciousness of others, unless they happen to fit into a stereotype I am allergic to such as normal and conventional! Smile!

The problem is that most people don't "live" in the depth of their souls where this unique preciousness dwells. Most of us combine beautiful traits and defects ranging from annoying to unbearable.

So, it is imprudent, to say the least, to decide that someone is going to be one's best friend after a short acquaintance. But how long is long? In God's providence, we usually see hints of problems to come, but out of loneliness or generosity, we choose to ignore them. A hilarious example from our engagement period is when we were on a trip to Paris and my husband to be wanted to spend 7 hours a day window-shopping and I wanted to hole up in my hotel room reading Thomas Aquinas! Does it require a rocket scientist to guess that this divergence of interests would follow us into the marriage?

I developed this strategy. I don't count on a friendship to last until we have been through a major conflict successfully. We need to have seen each other's worst (according to our own hierarchy of values) and still think that his or her virtues outweigh that worst.

Still, I sometimes make mistakes. But often, the mistake is in a positive direction. Often I think a friendship has proven itself to be impossible, and just as I am about the write that person off, he or she does something so unexpected and lovely, I have to bury the hatchet.

Thank God for our tried and true friendships of many years, and thank God for those that resurrect even in the death throes!

29 March 2011

The Four Temperaments



Going all the way back to the ancient Greeks is the theory that we are divided into predominant and opposing temperaments. The Greeks thought these were physically caused, but contemporary psychologists, if interested in this, think of them more as simply emotional tendencies.

You might be choleric (angry, energetic) or more phlegmatic (laid-back)

You might be sanguine (hopeful) or more melancholic (pessimistic)

Each one has pluses and minuses. Choleric people are full of energy so we usually accomplish a lot. On the negative side, though, we are easily frustrated, angry, and driven. Spiritual psychologists recommend quiet peaceful prayer time for good planning and less anger.

Phlegmatic people are usually fairly peaceful but not always willing to go that extra mile to get things done. You can thank God for not being rushed but also pray that the Holy Spirit would fill you with energy for doing what is right and good, moment by moment.

Sanguine people are hopeful and this helps them not to give up easily. Thank God for giving you hope. On the other hand, you can pray for realism so that you don't chase really impossible dreams.

Melancholics are known for being serious and foreseeing problems. On the other hand, we need to pray for hope lest we sink the ship.

Of course some people hate all typologies in favor of seeing what is individual in self and others. But if the shoe fits…..!

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30 March 2011

Life is more like a Story than a Syllogism.

A dear friend of mine, long deceased, Robert Hupka, used to say:" I hate to wait!" Kierkegaard wrote, with greater eloquence, that all sins are forms of impatience. How so? Well, we might tell lies to get what we want quicker; or substitute the immediate satisfactions of lust rather than wait for true love.



Another angle to impatience involves a subtle form of pride. If life were a syllogism you could go immediately from the truth that, say, it is good to eat only healthy foods, to I will cease to eat unhealthy foods today and never indulge in unhealthy foods ever again! It would be that quick from maxim to practice.

But, no, life is more like a story. In the story we get an insight and then we try to infuse it into daily life, but it's a slow, uphill, wearisome battle to actually become full of an admired virtue. Our pride revolts. "If I can't overcome my flaw immediately, why even bother?" Humility, by contrast, tries, and fails, repents and tries again.

Is it because the goal is not to succeed in some abstract self-redemptive project of improvement, but to bond with Jesus as He bears our crosses with us chapter by chapter of our lives. Since the goal is union with God in heaven, what good to succeed by one's own powers? To be god-like without God was the goal of, guess who? Satan.

Surrender?

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31 March 2011

Diverse Ways of Bringing up Kids

Here are 2 opposite ways I saw other mothers bring up kids. Both worked.



One friend, Debbie Grumbine, founder of Shield of Roses pro-life apostolate had 12 kids. She had her home totally organized with duties, rewards and punishments outlined on pages taped to the walls of the family room. She could bring all these kids to a pro-life pot-luck and not watch them because they were so well trained!

Another friend with 11 kids. She sat in a tiny room near the kitchen all day with kids swarming in and out. With a big spoon they ladled out whatever was on the stove whenever they were hungry. The latest baby lived in the draw of a bureau except at night when he or she was taken to the family bed.

Both sets of kids turned out great. I like to say that being militaristic or totally laid back both work and, probably, in the long run, they work better than my way which was to let them be free but then yell and scream because things were chaotic. My kids quickly picked up that even though I love order, I wasn't willing to discipline them. I was a softy underneath the scowls. The tough love movement came when the youngest was already a teen. Too late. However, they turned out to be total love-bugs and also creative geniuses, and more so than their parents. Praise the Lord!

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1 April 2011

"Put out into the Deep Waters and Lower your Nets for the Catch." (Luke 5:4)



I have been teaching philosophy and spirituality for some 40 years. A lot of what I say I have said many times over. In some ways this is good because it represents years of experience in how to convey a particular concept, but sometimes it doesn't feel good. This is usually because I need to go deeper.

At a prayer meeting the leader was teaching us a method of lectio divina using the Scripture "put out into deep waters and lower your nets for the catch." While pondering the application of this famous passage to my teaching in the present that I should let the Holy Spirit tap deeper areas of me, directed to deeper areas of my students or audiences (at talks).

Jesus tells his disciples not to be afraid of the deep waters. For me, the fear is of the femininely vulnerable in me and in others, male or female; that as they reject the feminine in themselves they will have to reject me also.

But when I take the risk of letting the Holy Spirit lead me into the deeper waters, my students and audiences are moved. The truth can get in better because they have become more emotionally open. (Male teachers and speakers do this when they go further than conveying truths by adding witness stories of how they got there. In this way the heart joins the head.)

Try it. The fish could be more tasty!

3 April 2011

Hilarious "Franciscan" Story



I moved to Connecticut 2 years ago to work at a parish named after St. Francis, with a priest who seemed to combine everything I love: magisterial, charismatic, Marion, heart for the poor, and simplicity of life. I lived a block from the Church and spent the day at the rectory working.

A contradiction began to bother me. There was lots of talk of the small parish being in debt, but we ate off gold rimmed plates and fancy gold cutlery. On the Feast of St. Francis, I thought I got a great "prophetic word," for the priest.

"Father, St. Francis has given me the answer to the parish debt! He "says" we should sell all the gold in the pantry to pay off the debt. Each fork could bring in hundreds of dollars!"

I thought the priest would be mad, but instead he laughed 'til the tears came into his eyes. "Ronda, I bought that junk for $25 at Wal-Mart. It's all fake!"

What a lesson in distrusting "fantastic" messages straight from heaven!

An Extraordinary Concert



3 April 2011 At our Late Vocation Seminary where I teach, we have concerts to celebrate the first year of our lovely new chapel. Imagine at this time of shortage of priests, over seminary overflowed to such an extent we had to build a new chapel for them!

The soloist was a world class violinist, Charles Rex. Maybe some of you know him. He played a concerto of Beethoven I didn't know but most of you Watershedders probably know — #7 in C Minor. He did it with such perfection that we all felt as if we had entered heaven. I, who always spout that maxim that "the perfect is the enemy of the good" to excuse my lack of willingness to edit my work, had to realize that the really perfect is much, much, much better than the merely good!'

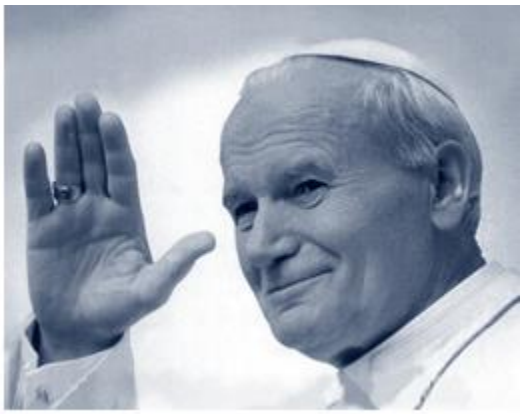
While I am on music I am remembering how my late son, Charlie, when asked why he wanted to study cello, hard for him because he had poor eye hand coordination, when he could have majored in English which was a snap, he replied “because music is more beautiful!”

And, I thought of my sister, the dancer, who has a finer ear for music than I do, once amazed me. We were rushing somewhere and I yelled, “turn off the phonograph, we gotta get out of here.” She replied, “well, we still have 5 minutes, why not five minutes more of beauty?”

Oh, dear God, thank you for the gift of sublime music, such a foretaste of heaven!”

4 April 2011

Poetry of John Paul II



Even though I am not very good at understanding any poetry more complex than, say, Tagore’s, when a book came out of John Paul II’s poetry shortly after his ascent to the Papacy, I grabbed it. Well, truth to tell, he was a rather avant garde poet, not the kind easily understood by anyone, however, one line reached me permanently.

As you probably know, he did many different things from playwright, actor, rock quarry work, philosopher, and finally Bishop and then Pope. This poem comes from balancing rocks during that quarry time:

“When I have borne an equal weight of horror and hope,
no one will accuse me of simplicity.”

I take it that he means by simplicity here, naivete. And probably a young man of his consummate purity of soul and body would have been considered to be a naive simpleton.

In my own experience as a philosophy professor and a speaker, I did find that when the horrible tragedies of life came upon me, as well as horror at things I was capable of, that my words took on a different tone – no longer beautiful sayings of Catholic truth, but hard won survival witnesses of hope coming only from grace.

As we come closer to John Paul II’s canonization, let us never forget the price he paid for his truths.

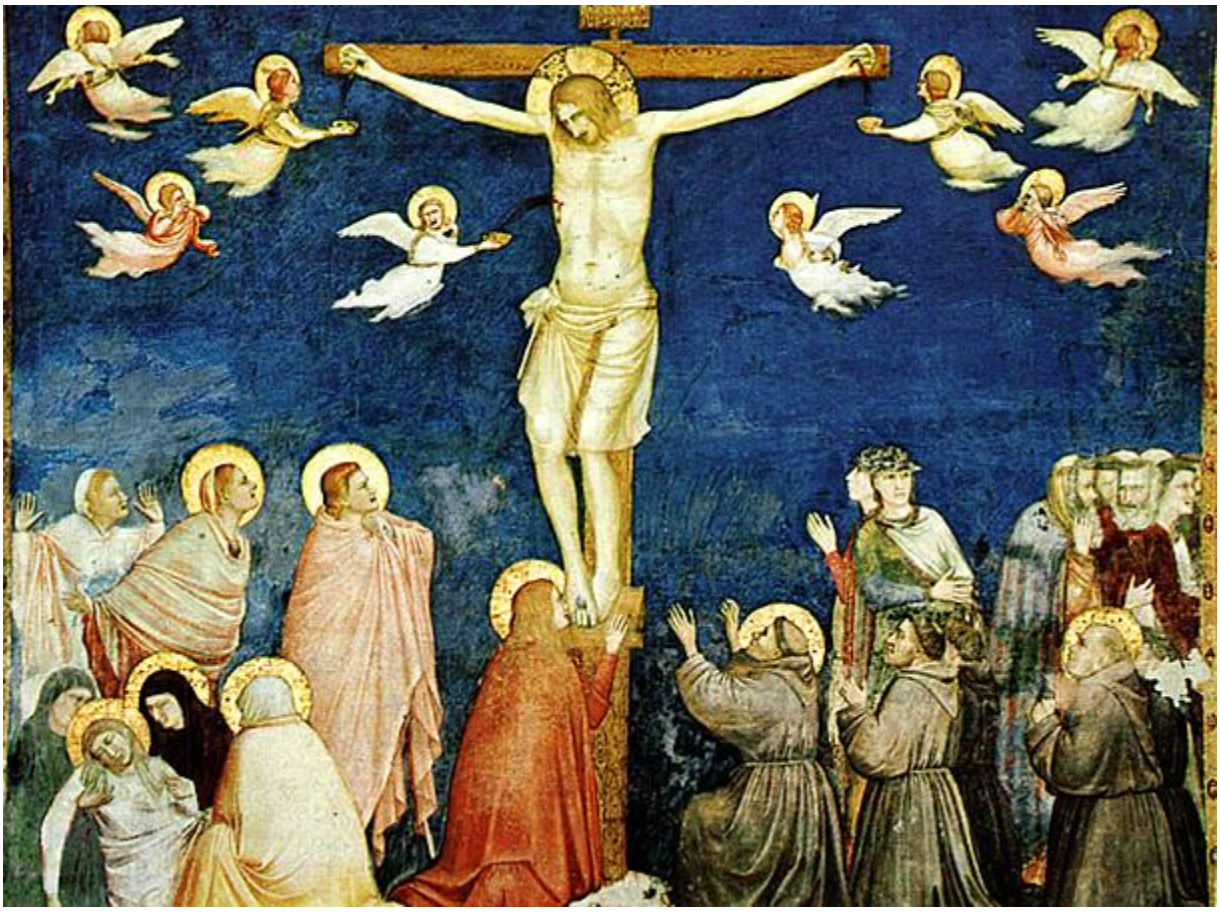
5 April 2011

How Jesus is present when we Suffer

Tonight I did my radio blog with Bob and Evelyn Olson, lay evangelists. We are talking together about themes in my upcoming book: The Way of Love. You can hear these conversations posted on spiritualityrunningtogod.com under the title *The Open Door*.

Our topic was meeting Jesus in extreme sufferings. Both of the Olson's told about healing prayers during which Jesus told them in their hearts how He was there when they suffered childhood sexual abuse. I told about a woman I knew who had been raped at knife point on a kitchen table by her father when still a toddler. This was confirmed by an older sister. Decades afterwards on a retreat she got comfort from meditating long hours on the moment when Jesus was stripped of His clothing.

Horrible memories are not to be filling us with dread and bitterness. Instead we must run to Jesus and let Him find us analogies in His life. For example, He was not rejected by a wife, but He certainly knew rejection, including the rejection we sometimes give Him by fleeing into addictions vs. running to Him.



7 April 2011

A Yes to Prayer after a Long, Long Time



When something very good happens and one of my daughters sees that I am already worrying about something else, she calls out “Take the Joy!”

After my husband died 18 years ago, I have tried 16 different communal ventures. Now I am on to a new one that looks like the best. I found a wonderful widow, a pastoral counselor, who wants to co-found with me a specific kind of Dedicated Widow Community. The apostolate will be to intercede for seminarians, be spiritual “mothers” to them, and volunteer at the seminary.

Lots of people pray for vocations and for priests, but not so many for seminarians. Most of them have to go through a 6 year process before ordination. Many of them leave pleasant homes and/or good jobs, to live in a room about 15×15 and enter into a routine, glorious in some ways, but very hard in others. They miss being around families, women and children. It is good for them to have some friendly women professors, staff, Sisters, around them. I think of us as cheerleaders.

Pray for them and pray for our tiny group of widows trying to become consecrated at a late age!

7 April 2011

Seminarians

I am working on the way of life for the Dedicated Widows of the Holy Eucharist that I am in the process of co-founding. We have to write a section on the Eucharist.



My take, as a daily communicant, is that Jesus, the Bridegroom, is leaping down from heaven, to come right inside me. And, perhaps, even more dramatically – if the seminarians don't persevere, we will starve.

Already some parishes in the US have a priest once a month and Communion Services the rest of the month. Some parishes no longer have daily Mass. Fr. Tony Anderson, SOLT, is pastor of 90,000 Mexicans.

Priests are an endangered species. Pray for vocations. Within the next month you will be hearing from me about a book I edited of Late Vocation stories. (It was published by goodbooksmedia,)It will be called: "Last Call: 12 Men who Dared Answer." These stories range from former night club managers to international bankers, to a Peruvian considered late vocation at 21 because in his time they took in boys of 7!

The hound of heaven isn't dead yet!

8 April 2011

Disappointment in Friendships doesn't need to be Total Loss



Sometimes we think that a particular admired person will be a great friend forever. Then something happens that hurts or disillusions us. I am not writing about severe tragic betrayals, but more about personality conflict. We have to give up that dream of life-long closeness. When we think of him or her it is with sadness and even distaste.

But then a new situation arises where we find ourselves collaborating with that lost friend. Suddenly, we see again the other at his/her best, and the original bond is strengthened, not necessary forever, but for this God-given common task or ministry.

This happened to me today with several people who had disappointed me and whom I disappointed. Out of love for a new very hurting person we all gathered around and grace flowed toward the one we were praying with who had no idea of all the past problems between us. Besides the grace to our new mutual friend, there was a flow of appreciative love in the whole circle.

What will it be like in heaven when all is really forgiven?

9 April 2011

Of Gods and Men - about the French Martyr Cisterian monks in Algeria

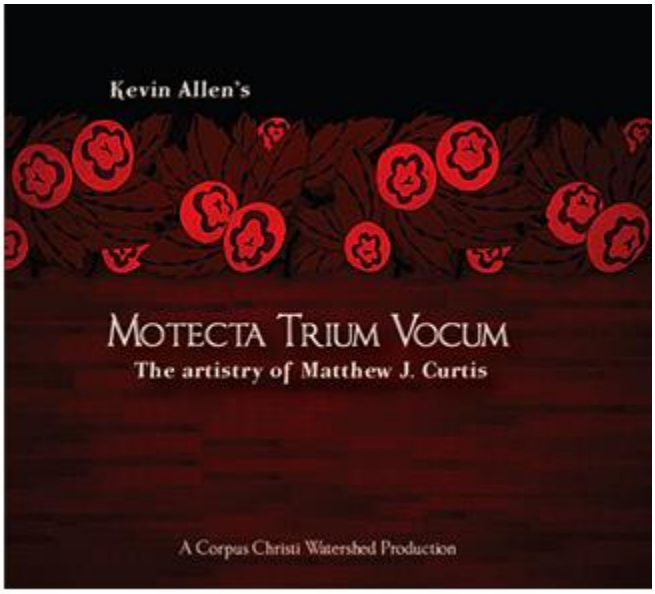


Go see this remarkable French movie that won such prizes. There's an old phrase that France is the eldest daughter of the Church – and the remnants of the old French spirituality are amply manifested in this film about these monks who decided to stay with their Algerian villagers when threatened by terrorists.

In a wonderful way it shows the contrast between the fear of the monks that is redeemed in Christ and the fear in the terrorists, so unredeemed and the consummate forgiveness of the monks for their enemies.

11 April 2011

Kevin Allen's Motets



A busy Sunday. It turned out to be one with deadlines on 2 writing projects coming at once. Actually not true. A long time ago I recognized that workaholic types like me tend to create artificial deadlines. In other words, in our own heads we decide that such and such project must be done by this date even though there is no such necessity. Then we work a mile a minute to succeed in reaching the deadline, meanwhile, of course, also cudgeling co-workers to keep up with the pace! Forgive me any co-workers who are reading this.

In any case, after this hectic day with 2 artificial deadlines I decided to squeeze in a prayer time and to waft me out of projectitis I pulled out Kevin Allen's *Motecta Trium Vocum*. AAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHH! Blissful escape from my frenzied brain into the rhythms of the angels. (You can find these on www.ccwatershed.org – the host of these blogs)

I had another motive. I have not seen my friends at Watershed for many, many years. Now we are arranging a get together of Watershed people in early July. And I hope also to see Watershedders I have not yet met, such as Kevin Allen.

May God bless us all, and moderate our creative talents so that we may not be workaholics but….grace-aholics?

11 April 2011

Abby Johnson's Unplanned



When everyone on your side starts praising a book, do you ever kind of resist and think, maybe if everyone loves it, I won't love it? Most of the time, when I get around to reading the book I love it. This is certainly the case with Unplanned. As most of you know, it is the story of a woman who ran an abortion mill and turned around and joined our side. I understand she has recently even become a Catholic.

I have been teaching an ethics book on abortion called Understanding Abortion: From Mixed Feelings to Rational Thought by Stephen Schwarz and Kiki Latimer. The idea was to write a pro-life book that really explained why pro-choicers think the way they do. It is a book you can give to family and friends who are sitting on the fence. Look for it to come out in the Fall. It is terrific.

Nothing could better illustrate the points in Mixed Feelings than this book by Abby Johnson. Even though she was a Christian attending pro-life Churches she was still convinced that the services of Planned Parenthood in the area of contraception would make abortion rare! She managed to hide from herself her guilt about her own two abortions.

Working in the office counseling woman, It was only after 8 years that she saw an actual abortion and realized that this innocent baby was real and had the right to life.

The most hopeful and touching thing about Abby's story is how the love shown by the Coalition for Life members praying outside her clinic contributed to her decision to come over to the right side.

Read it, you'll be as moved to hope as I was.

13 April 2011

C.S. Lewis and his "Revision" of the Problem of Pain



C.S. Lewis' book the Problem of Pain is probably the best philosophical and theological answer of the 20th century to the question of how a God of love can allow terrible pain. Just the same, when he went through his worst agony over the death of his wife, Joy, described in A Grief Observed, he was honest enough to admit that his answers in the Problem of Pain didn't help him at all! He still started thinking, "Maybe there is no God? or God is a sadist!" What finally brought him through was giving up trying to figure it out and just letting God reasssure him on an experiential level.

Just now I have 3 close friends going through unbearable agony for different reasons – one is in circumstances where he cannot protect a child from an abusive father. The other is watching a beloved wife suffering physical and emotional pain no amount of medicine can remove.

All my feeble efforts to give fix-it advice failed. What I am saying to them instead now is my last ditch remedy: I lie on the floor in a cruciform position and tell God, "I'm not getting up until you reassure me that it is going to be all right somehow in some way soon."

When I do that, usually the situation that I find unbearable doesn't change, but I feel God's personal love for me enough to make it bearable after all.

Rudolf Otto, a Protestant theologian of the 20th century in his famous book *The Idea of the Holy* points out in his commentary on the Book of Job that the answers God gives Job are not that different from what the false friends said! What brings Job around is that is the experience of God's Holy Presence.

Signs of the New Springtime in the Church

15 April 2011



Sometimes Church news is so grim we think we are in the Dark Ages. But soon to be Blessed John Paul the Great predicted a new springtime for the Church.

I thought of this tonight hearing good news from Michael Cumbie. Michael is a late vocation seminarian at Holy Apostles where I teach. He has a fascinating background. He was a Southern Baptist, then a Pentecostal preacher, then an Episcopalian priest. He converted to the Catholic faith and hopes to become a Roman Catholic priest.

Michael is helping support his family and his seminary studies by doing Missions. Here is how he described a recent mission. It was to a small Catholic Church that had left behind lots of doctrine and practice. Now under a magisterial priest, Cumbie was invited to stir the people up to renewed fervor. The congregation was so delighted with Cumbie's conversion that they became wide open to what he said on subsequent nights about the glory of the perennial Church with its traditions and art and music. After 4 nights of this they were ready to renew their Church.

The new springtime of the Church!!!!! Check out Cumbie's web-site where you can order terrific videos and audios of his spectacular conversion.

Sincerity Check-mates Cynicism

16 April 2011

Someone said that if you look around you it makes you depressed. If you look inward you get distracted. To be hopeful you have to look up. Of course we realize God is everywhere and not a sky deity, but the analogy of "up", meaning transcendence, works.

I experienced this today in a beautiful fashion. I am a co-host on a little TV access show with interviews of Catholic leaders. Today, Fr. Martin Jones, newly appointed minister for hispanic evangelization in the Norwich, Connecticut diocese, and I interviewed an elderly hispanic woman who is a parish leader. Aurora was telling stories of the piety of her parents. She spoke of how on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe her family would ride from their ranch in New Mexico in a carriage drawn by horses 18 miles to the Church. She said the priest never started the Mass until they arrived. As she spoke, first in Spanish, and then in English, her eyes were cast upward with an expression of luminous sincerity.

The sincerity of her faith seemed like such a check-mate to a kind of mildly cynical sophistication we can fall into out of a kind of intellectualization of the faith.

On the verge of falling asleep tonight it was Aurora's upward glance that remained in my mind as the most significant reality to share with you.

Pride in Children and Grandchildren



16 April 2011 Most of us should and do love our children and grandchildren whether we are proud of them or not, but then sometimes come those delicious moments of happy and not to be blamed pride. In Yiddish such parents and grandparents are said to "kvell" which is a word just for that kind of joy.

My oldest grandson (21 years old) passed through Connecticut and visited me over night. Probably because of half Jewish ancestry from my side, he happens to look almost exactly like Jim Carveziel in the Passion! So much is this the case that in High School everyone called him "Jesus" as a nickname. It is not just the features, it is a look of eager compassion in his face that I love.

Now, he likes to wear grundgies, and I was afraid that at our formal seminary they might not be able to see the man for the clothes, but they did! And I kvelled thinking "Heh, without me, he wouldn't exist." I remember the first time I heard about the biological fact that because of the body/soul togetherness we believe to be God's plan, it is not like he creates first a soul and them dumps it anywhere, but the soul and body are created simultaneously in such a way that the baby that my husband and I would procreate a month after would not be the same unique self as the one we procreated exactly on that date. Awesome, eh?

Best of all was a deeply Christian thing my non-practicing grandson told me about. He is a fiction writer who works as a cashier to support himself. I kvell a lot about his writings. Recently he decided to take a crash course to become a nursing aid. After months of practice, mostly on Alzheimer patients, he said this: "It's probably the worst job in the world in terms of the awful pace and the sometimes disgusting jobs, but I love it because the patients need my help so much."

Pray for dear ones fallen away from the Faith: that they come back to the sacraments. And try practicing kvelling openly with your kids, grandkiddies, or relatives and younger friends.

How much can we Expect from Others?

17 April 2011 A favorite line from a novel whose name and author slips my mind was enunciated by a bachelor to answer the question of why he had never married: "With women, everything is either not enough or too much!" I laughed and laughed when I read this. It explained a lot to me about my general state of dissatisfaction fluctuating with feeling overwhelmed.

In heaven nothing will be not enough or too much. On earth, maybe that is a universal plight. Because we are made for God who is infinite perfection, we can't help wishing for paradise now. That is good in that it keeps us trying to improve things, relationships, creative work, the Church. On the other hand, the restlessness of our hearts has to be balanced by gratitude for everything wonderful, especially gratitude for what others are trying to do for us. How wretched it is to see, for instance, a spouse, trying and trying to please the beloved and meeting only with captious criticism! But then, also, how wretched it is when someone can easily meet the need of another but is simply too selfish to even try!

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass again us."



Unusually Terrific Sermon I Heard Today

18 April 2011



A deacon almost priest seminarian today gave such a great sermon I have to share it with you. He started with saying how if you were in Jerusalem this week and didn't know this story had a glorious ending, wouldn't you think that the life of Jesus was totally out of control? His disciple is stealing the money; the Jewish leaders are plotting to kill Him…doesn't He seem helpless and hopeless? But he really was in control.

And how about our lives? Some of us at the seminary, he went on to say, feel out of control. Finals, papers, even maybe a crisis about your vocation? Do we really believe that Jesus in in control?

The sermon reminded me of a chapter in a book of mine that is out of print but now a free e-book called *Mary, Teach us how to Live*. This book goes through the 15 Mysteries of the Rosary relating themes to everyday life. For the Sorrowful Mysteries the theme I chose was "Fight, Flight, or….stand under the Cross and suffer." Many times when we are overwhelmed by conflicts or just exhausted from the basic struggle of daily life, we can feel tempted to fight in vengeful ways or to flee. Sometimes those choices are good. But sometimes we can't win and we can't flee because of our commitments. Then we have to imitate Our Lady and just stand under our own crosses and suffer until God chooses to bring us something better.

Going into Holy Week what is the cross you need to stand under?

You can find my Mary book at rondachervin.com — click on free e-books for *Mary, Teach us how to Live!*

Sacred Time and Space

20 April 2011

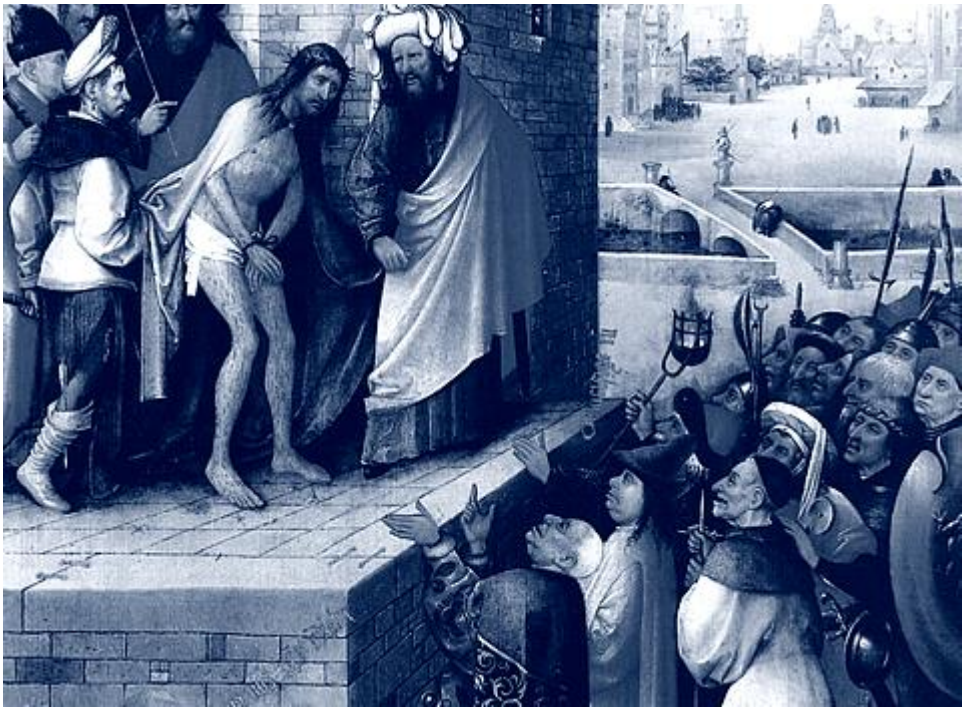
Brought up as a total atheist, I had no sense whatsoever of tradition, ritual or ceremony. When I became a Catholic at 21, ushered in through such lovers of traditional liturgy as the Von Hildebrand's, I lived with daily Mass and liturgy of the hours more out of blind faith than understanding.

The key to understanding came with a course given by my godfather, Balduin Schwarz, on philosophy of religion. We read a book by Mircea Eliade on the nature of the sacred as expressed in all religions. The concept was that it is part of the experience of

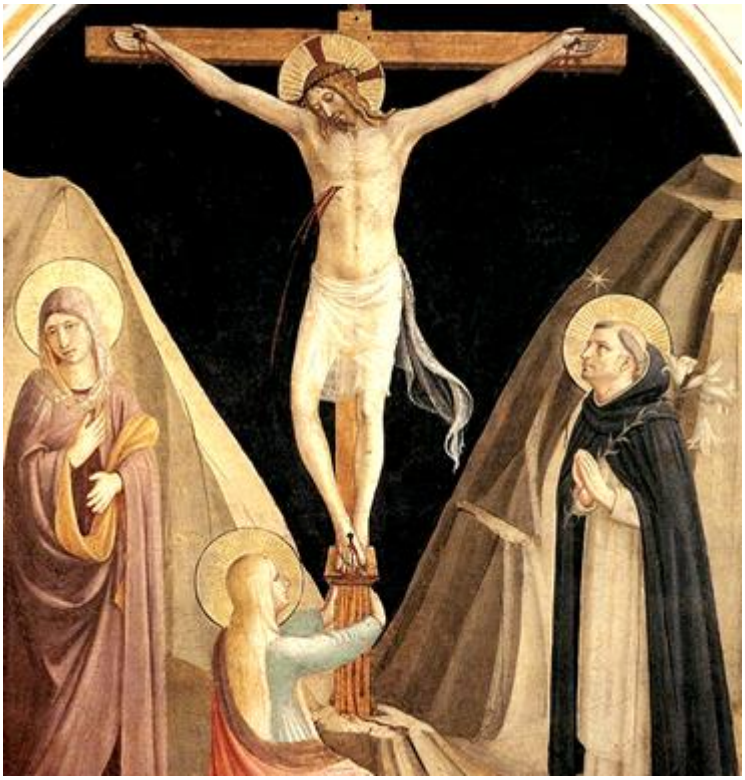
the divine to set aside sacred spaces and sacred times. In terms of Catholic worship I learned that in the incarnation, Christ, the God-man, enters our "conveyor belt" of human time. Because He was divine as well as human, when, through the priest, His death on the cross is re-presented we truly enter into the eternal where all time is unified. That sacred time participates in eternity and when we enter it we are caught up into His Real Presence in a way different from the way He is present to us when we pray at any time of day or year in any space other than the sacred space of the Church.

Presently, graced to live at a seminary where high liturgy is valued above all, I am caught up even more in the solemnity of that sacred time and space each day, but to the maximum as we come to the Triduum.

If I get sufficiently caught up you won't hear from me on this blog until Easter Monday.



The Passion Revisited

21 April 2011 

It was very different seeing the Passion for the 4th time at the seminary on a huge screen instead of in a home with many distractions. The context of these reflections is a previous conversation where I was insisting that I didn't have to adopt the kind of spirituality where you "pretend" not to want consolations in order to be in union with God. My holier friends insisted, instead, that if you want consolations then you don't really want only God's will. I wound up just saying that if Jesus wanted me to be more like them in this respect, I would pray for Him to show me.

Watching The Passion led to these new graces:

As I watched the violent scenes of the scourging, I felt a deep desire to suffer for Him more. I wanted to suffer more for my sins and those of others, and at the same time to rejoice even more with Him because He is in heaven and He will bring me there one day.

That is the paradox for me, not so much to want only God's "will," in some abstract sense but to want only Jesus, both the Jesus on the Cross and the Jesus who is in heaven.

I thought I want to say the Jesus prayer and the Hail Mary all day long – in my heart as I go through my day.

It is not so much that I want only His will, but just that I want Him, His heart in my heart making it into love.

I felt I wanted to count up the sufferings of each day, small and large and rejoice that I am worthy to suffer for Him, my Bridegroom. To offer these sufferings for my family, seminarians, and all those friends and others who ask for my prayers.

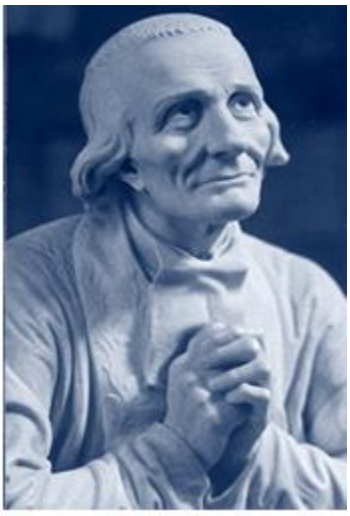
Some think The Passion is too gratuitously violent. I think only such realism can break through the defenses of people like me.

I said to a seminarian sitting next to me during the Eucharist scenes “If you are willing to suffer ANYTHING WHATSOEVER for Him, you can be a priest.” (Many seminarians start thinking the sacrifice of 6 or so years of seminary is unbearable.)

As usual, the horrible scenes reminded me of how we say a proof of the Resurrection is that if these men who knew what a crucifixion was really like, were willing to risk death by following Jesus as Christians, they must have seen the Resurrection.

Of course, this exalted mood will pass, but please pray that it leaves an impress on my frantic little soul.

A Christian Way to Respond to Annoyance



22 April 2011 I don’t know if you have the same thing, but when I am upset about something and, therefore, in a bad mood to begin with, every single sin or defect I observe became a reason for a highly critical interior analysis of same.

Today, Good Friday, the Lord seemed to tell me: “whenever you see something virtuous or beautiful rejoice in this way My kingdom is here, but when you see something sinful or defective first endure it, and then IMMEDIATELY do penance in reparation for it.”

I thought that by penance he didn’t mean flagellation or any other dramatic thing, though there is a long tradition of that among the saints, but, for weakling me, something tiny such as instead of waiting to do some chore until manana, to do it immediately. Or clear off the dishes on the table instead of waiting for someone else to do it.

Try it! You won’t like it, but it will distract you from useless fulmination.

Dedicated Widows of the Holy Eucharist

25 April 2011



After my husband died in 1993 I thought I would become an instant saint. But, as he feared, I became, instead a dingbat floating around on the ceiling without the ballast of his heavy domineering hand! Recently I counted up 16 different ways of life I tried. A wonderful charismatic Catholic therapist told me not to look upon these as failures but to make a list and next to each one think of how I helped others at that time and how others helped me. So now I try to think of them as stepping stones instead of failures.

Anyhow many of these rotated around trying to find a way of life for ardent Catholic widows who don't want to get stuck some day in a Catholic retirement home where after daily Mass the main activity is watching big screen game shows. I will not make you laugh by describing reasons why seemingly perfect solutions didn't work both because of my defects and theirs, but instead tell you about my latest venture which fits with one mentor's advice "dream not the impossible dream, but the possible dream."

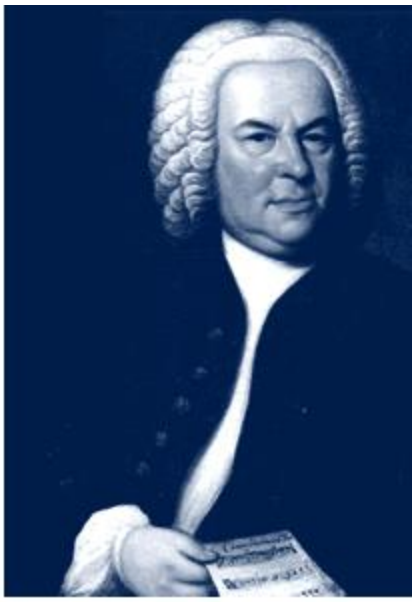
Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family will be a group of widows who promise not to re-marry with Jesus as our Second Bridegroom, to dedicate ourselves to Christ and the Church but in the specific form of living close to seminaries and volunteering in service for whatever needs we can help with, as well as participating in the Mass and Liturgy of the Hours with them as more or less "spiritual mothers." In effect, bartering 3 delicious meals a day for fostering vocations! Yum! Yum! I am already doing this, but now I have 3 more interested who may come all the way from Colorado and Maryland. No money is involved. We live simply but keep our own funds for visits to family, etc.

If anyone reads this who is either a widow or a potential widow, or a single who could live with a widow paradigm rule, check out the Statutes on rondachervin.com click on Widow Options.

If you fit into none of these categories, say a prayer for us to Mary, Exalted Widow (that is her name in a Spanish novena).

Memories

26 April 2011



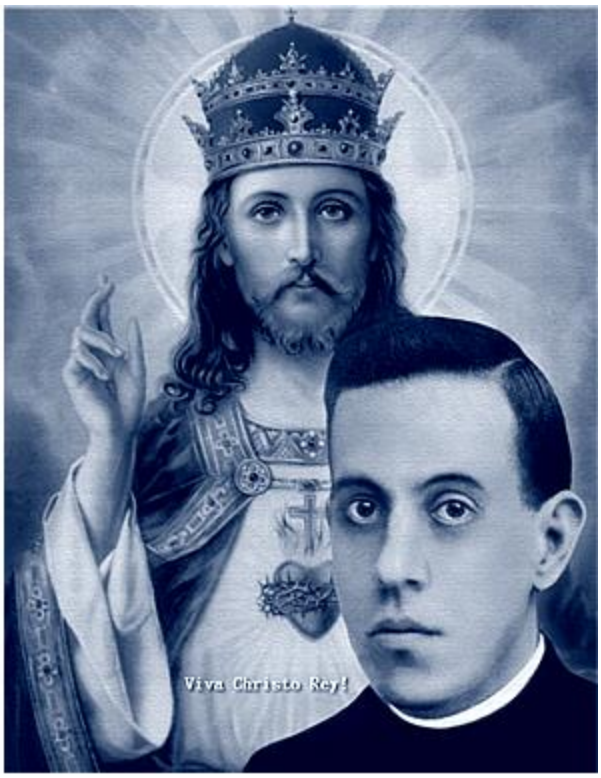
When I was 60 I wrote a book called Meeting Christ in the Joys and Sufferings of Aging. I thought it would be hard to find joys but asking around I came up with lots. Senior discounts rated high. One of them I never thought of was that because we are less busy, even though busier than we thought we'd be, we have more time for musing. Something in the present, triggers some delicious memory of the past, and now we have time to savor it.

Reading Jeff Ostrowski's blog about piano vs. organ triggered this fantastic memory. I was around 12 years old strolling along Riverside Drive in NYC when, even though I was brought up atheist, I suddenly got this impulse to walk into Riverside Church. I had never been inside a Church. It was during the week. No one was inside this grand edifice but cascading down from the choir loft was Bach's Toccata and Fugue! I was transfixed not only by the beauty but by the power of it. I think it was the very first time God reached out to me through beauty, and perhaps paved the way for another graced moment when a college boyfriend, a non-practicing Episcopalian, played Bach's Wachet Auf on a tiny tape recorder. Mind you, I didn't have the faintest idea who Jesus even was, but the music carried Him to me.

After you read this, take a little trip "down memory lane" to when the BEAUTY of Christ came into you for the first time.

You can find my book now at enroutebooksandmedia.

Hispanic Masses



28 April 2011 On Tuesday evenings we have a special table for learning to speak Spanish by chatting. It is attended by the Spanish teacher, anglos learning Spanish, and sometimes a few native speakers. I go because I plan to do door to door evangelization soon. It would be good to brush up on my weak Spanish skills first.

Tonight, maybe because it was Easter and also the last week of classes, many hispanic seminarians came to the table. They hail from Columbia, Peru, Mexico, Puerto Rico, etc. They began singing hispanic songs most of them knew but few of us anglos knew.

These men, who usually look serious, and some even morose, were filled with joy to be singing in their own language, not as part of some program at the school, but spontaneously! I thought, that is why I think it is so important that we have hispanic Masses in this country. Of course, every immigrant should learn English. The next generation usually only wants to speak English. But for those brought up to pray in Spanish, out of love, we should want them to have this joy.

I usually put this point in a “nastier” way: since we anglos are contracepting and aborting ourselves out of existence, we better learn Spanish! Adios, amigos!

Healing the Emotions

April, 2011



A very popular book in the 70's was entitled *The Wounded Healer*. It was written by Henri Nouwen, a priest psychotherapist. The book was about how most of us suffer different emotional wounds in childhood but, then, through prayer and counseling or spiritual direction, we need to become not Wounded Wounders but Wounded Healers.

Let me give you a simple example. A little boy of five is jumping around the house playing noisily with his brother. Whenever they make noise, if his alcoholic father is around, he runs into the room where they are playing and whacks them yelling "I deserve a little peace and quiet in my own home."

In effect the father is being what we used to call "a kill-joy." He could have calmly insisted the boys to go out in the yard or down to the basement to play, but instead he lashes out in anger. This could give the little boy the feeling that his father only wants him around if he is quiet, "seen and not heard."

The father thinks that he is a very loving father because he works hard to "bring home the bacon," but when the son grows up he may truthfully say that he can't remember his father ever smiling at him or saying "I love you."

Now let's take our example a little further. Because he hated being yelled at and hit by his father, the boy, when he becomes a father, may never hit or yell at his kids, but he becomes a wounded wounder just the same.

How so? He may respond to annoyance and frustration by means of sarcasm as in "heh, kids, you think everyone's deaf so you have to yell when you play." Let's say that he is sarcastic not only to his kids but also to his wife and to his employees.

Let's step back now. As Christians we are taught that the highest value is love. We are all called to holiness, which I define as having nothing but love in our hearts. Clearly, being chronically angry in the form of yelling, hitting others, or sarcasm, is not loving.

Besides not being loving to others, it is also harmful to ourselves, because anger is the opposite of peace.

In the course of this presentation and the optional workshop after this on healing of masculine and feminine, I am going to offer opportunities for healing of toxic emotions that are obstacles to experiencing love and peace in our hearts.

Some of us think of being emotional as in itself negative. We think of sometimes out-of-control negative emotions such as fear, anger and sadness. We wish we had less of them and we wish we didn't have to be the victims of those emotions when others experience them in an out of control manner.

Others of us think of emotions are largely positive. We think of emotional persons as free, not repressed, and "real." We compare them to others we think of as "locked up," cold, Stoical, distant and distancing.

The great Catholic philosopher, Dietrich Von Hildebrand in his book *The Heart*, distinguishes between different types of emotions. Emotions such as feeling miserable because too hot or cold due to the weather, or tired because of a sleepless night, are not within our control .

Other emotions such as anxiety attacks, rage, and melancholy can involve over-reactions. In themselves, it is not irrational to feel fear if there is an serial killer in your neighborhood, to feel angry about grave injustices, or to feel grief if a beloved person dies. But it is irrational to be so frightened of the serial killer that you hide you your house for years or to be so angry about the actions of a spouse that you kill him or her, or to be so grieved that you never get close to anyone again after the death of a loved one.

A lot of these negative emotions come from childhood. Anxiety can come from being neglected as a kid as in often left home alone when too young to cope. Anger can come from deprivation of basic needs in childhood such as being passed over because a parent preferred a sibling, or, worst case, being abused sexually or being battered, or being verbally demeaned. Melancholy can result from many deaths in the family. Counsellors know how to bring a person back to these painful experiences, offering healing insight and love, to break patterns coming from such wounds. Your own parish may have such counselors available without cost. My experience is that small daily frustrations trigger the over-reaction. For example, if a meal is delayed, I can feel irrational anxiety. A therapist taught me that this was probably due to being bottle-fed by a nurse as a child rather than with mother's milk or mother's close embrace.

Some emotions, however, are always rational and good. Von Hildebrand gives such examples as love, peace, and joy when these are responses to such realities as returning God's love, having peace because of faith in the proved virtues of others, being joyful to see a member of the family after a long absence.

To return to the Wounded Healer image – when we speak of healing of the emotions what we hope for is that we may move from being dominated by negative out of control emotions into the positive rational emotions of love, peace and joy. When we are feeling such emotions our relationships to others become healing to them. We become soothing, comforting, delightful to others instead of being Wounded Wounders of them. A poster says, "no one heals himself by wounding another."

Two main remedies for out of control emotions are psychological insight and deep prayer.

The insights that helped me the most had to do with chronic anger starting in childhood. Until I studied and participated in the system of Abraham Low, founder of Recovery, International (not 12 Step), I used to have 5 public fits a day. This is a free self-help group started in the 1940's and now all over the world.

Here is the way Abraham Low would describe the angry father's sarcasm. This man is a perfectionist. He thinks that life could be beautiful if only everyone else fell in line with his directives. But, according to Low, only realists are happy. Realists "expect frustrations every five minutes" and peacefully work around them. They expect the average instead of the perfect. Instead of wishing his kids were obedience robots, this father, knowing that kids are noisy, fixes up a room or a basement just for the kids to play in.

Here's how I describe my own chronic anger, greatly diminished because of going to Recovery, International for many years. I think of myself as the heroine of a drama called life. I want everyone else to be either secondary characters or walk-ons who do and say what will enhance my ideal day. Since they refuse to accept these roles, I try to coerce them into doing so by yelling at them. That rarely works. So I feel weak, impotent, and miserable. To overcome those awful feelings, I try to get a "symbolic victory" by talking with my friends about how awful my family is. "Symbolic victory" is a term Low devised to explain why people like to be angry even though it makes them miserable and doesn't work. We hate to feel weak. When we can't get a real victory, we try to feel strong and victorious by putting others down, lower than us, through anger or sarcasm.

To express this idea, I entitled my Catholic book on anger: *Taming the Lion Within: Five Steps from Anger to Peace.* Now, often, if not always, when I feel angry, I ask myself whether it is because I want to be the heroine of my day and feel frustrated, and why I feel weak. I try to accept that others won't go along with my plan and that it's okay to be weak because that is REAL. I am weak in many respects.

Then, bolstered by my weekly Recovery, International meetings, I combine these insights with my spirituality centered in daily Mass, and prayer.

How does prayer help? Let's look at the father's sarcasm in terms of healing prayer. On the way home from work, the father says a rosary in thanksgiving for his family and asking Mother Mary to intercede for him about what he can realistically expect to find when he walks through the door of his house: that is, the average behavior of his kids and wife. Once a week he goes to an Adoration chapel at his parish. He lays on God everything in his life that bothers him. He sits quietly and begins to bask in God's love. He hears in His heart Jesus telling him how grateful He, God, is for the many sacrifices made out of love for spouse and kids. When his sarcastic anger gets the best of him, instead of justifying his anger on the basis that "I'm angry because everyone else is obnoxious, so they are the problem, not me, he brings that out of control anger to Confession. When the problems become major crosses, the father identifies himself with Jesus on the Crucifix. He begs Jesus to bear those crosses with him, lest he fall into anger, anxiety, of despair.

The worst pain I ever experienced was when my son committed suicide 19 years ago. Over time healing came with a combination of insight and the healing love of Jesus.

When I asked how could a God of Love let my son do this, I thought of C.S. Lewis' book the *Problem of Pain*. Basically his answer is that if God wanted free human beings vs. robots or dolls, he had to allow us to do things that cause others unbearable agony. If I could have stopped by son by coercing him, he would not have been free. Just the same, when C.S. Lewis went through his worst agony over the death of his wife, Joy, described in *A Grief Observed*, he was honest enough to admit that his answers in the *Problem of Pain* didn't help him at all! He still started thinking, "Maybe there is no God or God is a sadist!" What finally brought him through was giving up trying to figure it out and just letting God reasssure him on an experiential level.

So, when these philosophical answers don't suffice, I lie on the floor in a cruciform position and tell God, "I'm not getting up until you reassure me that it is going to be all right somehow in some way soon."

When I do that, usually the situation that I find unbearable doesn't change, but I feel God's personal love for me enough to make it bearable after all. After my son's death, when I was feeling such agony, these words from Jesus came into my heart and reassured me: "You son had his foretastes of heaven in the joys he had. You will find him in my Sacred Heart."

Rudolf Otto, a Protestant theologian of the 20th century in his famous book The Idea of the Holy points out in his commentary on the Book of Job that the answers God gives Job are not that different from what the false friends said! What brings Job around is the experience of God's Holy Presence.

In conclusion, to become Wounded Healers instead of Wounded Wounders, we need to seek insight into our negative emotions, through reading, spiritual director, and/or professional counseling, and we also need to pray in a deep way to give God a chance to heal us.

Between sessions I will be happy to pray over you for healing of your negative emotions or for your worst sufferings. Now I would like to read from a healing service. It is mostly from Fr. De Grandis, but slightly modified by me. You can more of this on his web.

Blessed John Paul II the Great's Letter to Artists

15 May 2011



During the beatification, everyone here at the seminary was exchanging stories of what they loved best about our new saint. For me, one of the most exciting things about John Paul II was that he had such different works: rock quarry during the war, actor, playwright, philosopher, theologian, bishop, Pope, and even skier! One of our seminarians who was born in Poland said that when JPII was still only Archbishop, he was in shorts taking a group of young people on a hike and on the mostly empty train, his car was full of people who had rushed from their cars on the train, to greet this so popular bishop!

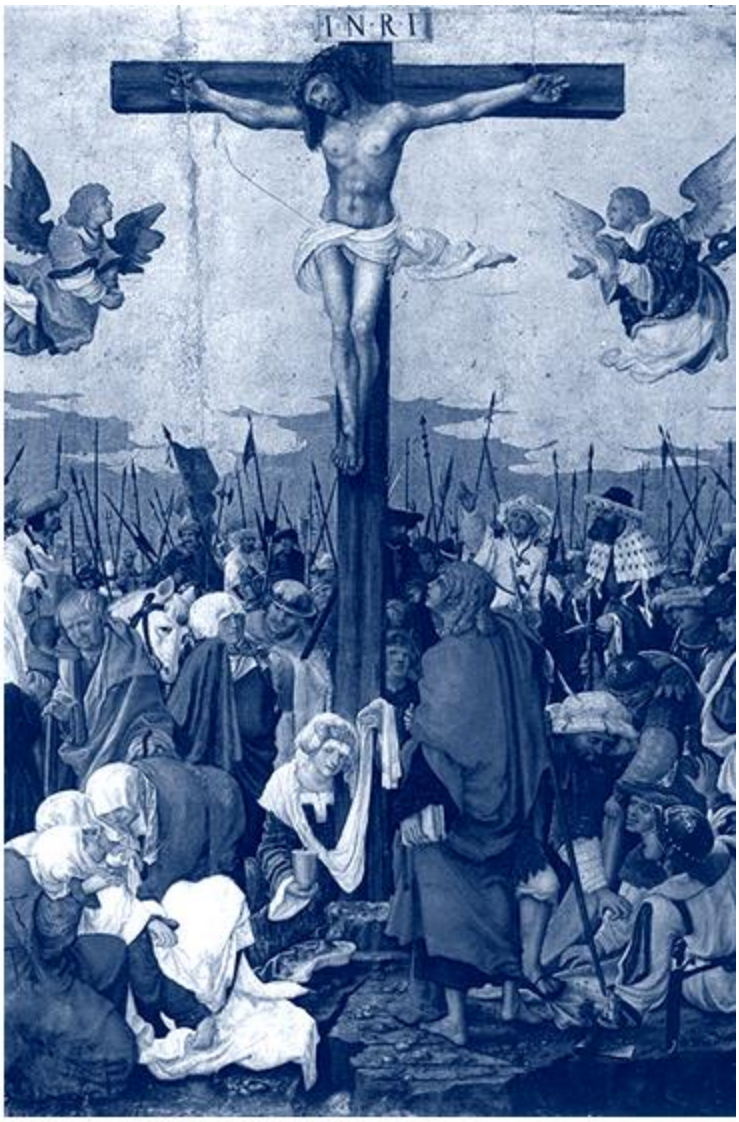
I teach his wonderful Letter to Artists. Here is the opening in case some Watershed readers never read this letter.

"None can sense more deeply than you artists, ingenious creators of beauty that you are, something of the pathos with which God at the dawn of creation looked upon the work of his hands. A glimmer of that feeling has shone so often in your eyes when—like the artists of every age—captivated by the hidden power of sounds and words, colors and shapes, you have admired the work of your inspiration, sensing in it some echo of the mystery of creation with which God, the sole creator of all things, has wished in some way to associate you."

Read the whole thing by google search.

Healing of Rejection

15 May 2011



I am working on a talk for a series in Los Angeles this summer on Meeting Jesus in the Crises of Life. One is on rejection. The focus is on a particular but common type of rejection that comes with over-estimating what others can do and be for us. This is different than the rejection that Jesus experienced with the Jewish leaders where he in no way over-estimated them.

I use two little scenarios. One is about a divorced woman who falls in love with her boss, a married man. The other involves a father who wants his son to be the baseball star he couldn't be. I take these characters through stages of fantasy, anxiety, rejection, surrender, forgiveness, to the right kind of love.

One of my chief insights, from lots of sorrowful experiences, is that when we approach others with thirst rather than tenderness they almost have to reject us. In our thirst for whatever their virtues and talents seem to promise, we demand of them more than they can possibly deliver. We make them into little gods and goddesses. Then, they fail us and we feel rejected.

When we bring our pain to Jesus, He can gradually bring His love into our wounds. Then, after forgiveness, we can reach out to others more tenderly instead of with a desperate thirst which usually leads to rejection.

If you are interested in more about this read my book Healing of Rejection, published by Enroute Books and Media.

Home and Homelessness

15 May 2011

A marvellous quotation from a saint whose name I have, alas, senior moment, forgotten goes like this:



"Happy are they who have a home. Happier they for whom every place is home. Happiest they whose only home is heaven."

I think of this spiritual adage whenever I have to leave a beloved place to go on, and even when my stay in one place is interrupted, for the summer for example.

You might lift up a prayer of gratitude for your present home, if you have one. And then a prayer of gratitude for each place that has temporarily been a home for you.

And, then…how glorious to anticipate our final home in heaven – really there's for the asking provided we repent of all the sins that have made those in our "homes" on earth less than heavenly!

Lebensraum

16 May 2011



Lebensraum is an intriguing reality crystallized in this word which literally translates as Living Room, but not in the sense of a living room. Rather it means the "room" a person takes in social situations. It is a derogatory expression referring to those who walk into a room and take over. The vehemence of such a one's personality crowds others into the margins of the "room." I "strut my stuff" oblivious to the need others might have to express themselves.

Mea culpa! Excuse? Well, if I don't talk, we have to sit around in silence. I forget that I might break the silence by asking questions of others so that they can share and shine!

If you know me, or plan to see me in the future, be sure to kick me under the table if I start to do this. Whisper "lebensraum," and you will shut me up fast.

Letter to be read at a funeral

17 May 2011

One of my daughters, a poet, wrote this letter to her mother-in-law for the funeral of her father-in-law, Richard, who was a military caterer in England. This daughter of mine is slowly inching her way back to the Church. I thought you aesthetes would love some of these lines:

I saw a picture of Richard when he was young: a gloomy Heathcliff sitting on a beach, handsome as the devil. When I met him, illness had worn him down to a charming elf instead of a lonely devil: well, time and illness can do that and sometimes it is a kindness and sometimes it isn't. No one can know at what cost another person has earned their face…

I knew he knew he was dying when we last met. I do not think either of us knew how long or how painful it would be. I tried to pray but I don't know how to pray. There was a channel of pain traveling all the way from England to North Carolina and I sent what little I possess of faith and hope along it, feeling it was useless.

The day before he died, Richard visited me, stood behind my shoulder in the kitchen and commented on a meal I was making, wanted to try some. It was a whimsical moment full of warmth and it felt real. I have no right to speak of faith, but maybe this IS what it is made of: a few sunny moments strung up like rosary beads, a leap of faith, a skip of hope and finally a giant hop off the crucifixes that are prepared for us at the end of our lives. Believe in these moments because what else can you do?

Dr. Ronda Chervin has many free e-books and audios on her website www.rondachervin.com

Ridicule of Therapists

18 May 2011 Over dinner here at the seminary someone used the word "shrinks" to describe psychotherapists. I cringed and then remarked provocatively, "I happen to have benefited greatly from psychotherapy throughout my long life, so I don't like to hear that ridiculing word: shrink."



The group at the table were startled. None of them had ever thought of the matter this way. As our conversation developed I developed the theory that because of the stigma of needing therapy or even the less stigmatized "counseling" some who go or have gone express their sometimes unconscious feelings of shame by making fun of their benefactors.

Presumably the ridiculing word, shrink, came out of the theory that the problem of many clients comes from being "swell-headed" and, therefore, needing their heads to be shrunk. An example would be someone who thinks everyone is watching and judging them in neutral situations. It could take a lot of pride to think that most people are even noticing oneself so much that they would be making judgments.

To end these reflections on a more serious note, I realize that some Catholics have been misled by counselors and therapists who were either half-baked or anti-religious. But, for all of these sad outcomes, I have known many more troubled people who have

been brought from dark misery to greater tranquility through good professionals. I have gotten much help from Catholic therapists, but also from an atheist and, even, a Jewish New Ager.

The last one, coming from a similar New York Jewish background to mine, had this explanation of an anxiety I could not understand by myself. I was telling him about how nervous I feel in Catholic work situations because I never know what the bosses really think. Here was his insightful and somewhat funny answer. “Ronda, because Jews lived in Europe mostly in ghettos close in together in apartments, they talked about everything all the time. Irish Catholics, however, came from a country where everything had to be hidden from the English. They talked behind the bushes. If your administrators are mostly Irish Catholics, that is in their bones. So, you’re right to fear that you have no idea what they are really thinking. Maybe you have to trust in God instead of in them?????”

Priestly Ordination at Hartford, Connecticut

18 May 2011



I have mentioned before that I have trouble with ceremonies, especially longer ones, but Ordinations are different. The first one I saw was in 1960. I was on a tour in Switzerland and going to daily Mass as usual came upon an ordination. Being a convert made it even more stunning.

After teaching at the seminary in Los Angeles, it was different. I actually knew these men. Some of these heroes I had helped pray through their worst moments of doubt about their vocations. The first time it was my late vocation seminarians being ordained I stood in the parking lot tears in my eyes pledging that because these wonderful holy men had gotten through the gauntlet of seminary I would never complain again in my whole life. Well, of course, I didn’t live up to my pledge but, to my joy, coming back to Los Angeles years later, I found those heroes were now the priestly pillars of the archdiocese. They kept their pledge.

Now, when I go to an ordination of seminarians from Holy Apostles, where I teach, I always murmur the same words as I see the throngs of lay people taking their seats and the long procession of bishops, priests, about to be ordained, and seminarians coming up the aisle to the loud organ music and choir. The words I murmur as, 'AND THE GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PREVAIL.’

The seminarian who invited me was a medical researcher born in South Africa, a huge black man, who migrated to the US and then to our seminary, primarily, for late vocations. The choir learned a song in African for part of the ceremony. There were also 2 songs in Spanish for the hispanic ordinands. Most of the music, however, was traditional chant, some in Latin.

The traditional ceremonial of such extraordinary supernatural meaning, reminded me, however, of something else I love: surprise. I recalled a Mass in Corpus Christi, Texas, for the ordination of Society of Our Lady of the Trinity priests. The vocations director, Fr. Tony Anderson, a thin man in his 40's, was in the customary line up of all the priests who greet each newly ordained with a hug of peace. One of those just ordained was a large, large, man about 6'4" weighing no one could imagine how much. When Fr. Tony was in High School he was a wrestling champ. But, of course, this was the last thing on anyone's mind until suddenly at the hug of peace we saw the huge newly ordained priest lifted up into the air into a horizontal position by our thin priest. It was too quick for anyone to clap, but I clapped in my heart because reverential tradition is magnificent but the freedom of the Spirit in surprise is also…delightful!

A Visit to a Convalescent Home

19 May 2011



Today I gave a talk based on my forthcoming co-authored book: *What the Saints Say About Heaven*. The talk was to the elderly in a Catholic convalescent home here in Connecticut. I did it with Fr. Martin Jones who celebrates Mass at this place once a week. The Home is in a lovely woodsy area with beautiful views and lovely decor.

Before lunch I noticed that in the rec room the elderly were watching what seemed like a sappy old musical. It turned out to be a old Lawrence Welk re-run.

I was muttering in my mind that if I were running the place I would have EWTN on instead. Since the old folks watching the show were neatly attired, most of the women with perms, I felt the usual alienation since, as a Dedicated Widow, I dress in denim jumpers with hair I cut from long to shoulder length with an old scissor. I remembered an old cartoon I saw in the 60's. It showed a party full of far-out looking hippies with one conventional couple dressed in suit and tie and pretty party dress. One bedraggled hippie is asking "where did they come from?" The other responds, "Oh, we got them from Rent a Square."

Later, however, watching the elderly being wheeled into the Mass by the kindly volunteer attendants, the Lord chided me. “Do you see that in old age, these Catholics get to become like lambs, whereas you, also very old, are still either a lion or a viper?”

“Well this lovely place is very expensive,” I thought. “People, like me, who love simplicity of life and give their money to the poor, of course, could never come here.” I asked the pastoral counselor who invited me what it cost to live there. “Oh,” she said, “well it costs a lot, but we’re Catholic. Anyone who can’t afford more than Medicare or Medicaid, we take in anyhow.”

So much for sarcastic judgments from the Rondaview! Thank God for confession!

Redeemed Schmoozing

19 May 2011



“I’m schmoozing you, silly,” said a friend to me. It sounded like a Yiddish expression, but I didn’t really know the meaning. I was told that it is like manipulating another through flattery to get you to agree to something you might not otherwise agree to.

Let me put this word together with an intriguing statement on forgiveness by a famous Asian guru, Hanh. He said if you are trying to make peace with someone who is offended by you for any reason, trying giving a little gift.

Generally, I am loathe to try such ploys, but recently I was in a situation where there was lots of misunderstanding and some bitterness. Eager to come to peace, I prayed and prayed to say the right things at a meeting. These were all true, but not what I would usually have said, because I would have preferred to nurture my side of the grievance.

I got the grace to say these good things and more and it resulted in renewed good feelings. I was stunned. It reminded me of a phrase a friend liked to trot out when asked for advice: “how about trying a new move?”

I am asking myself, how in the world can we be begging God to make us more loving if we dig our heels into our usual patterns that haven’t worked, instead of trying, to use another Yiddish-English expression, to “make nice.”

21 May 2011

Many thoughts



I am going to be away for a week with possible cold turkey from my computer so I want to put up a whole bunch of stuff tonight. Could be the last one for a few days if I really can't get on the e-mail somehow.

Did everyone else in the world but me know about Alpaca – a warm but light fabric from Ecuador and Peru for ponchos, shawls and cloaks? One of my daughters gave me a certificate for Amazon clothing. After 6 weeks because of customs arrived this glorious navy blue poncho. It is the solution to a 15 year problem of being cold in Church but hating to wear huge heavy garments which weigh me down. Alpaca looks heavy but is light. If you don't know it, and you have similar problems, find out.

Great quote from Pope Benedict: "A constant temptation of Christian and of the Church is to seek victory without the Cross." Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea culpa. Apply that to yourself as you can!

A word that came to me from, hopefully, the Holy Spirit, when you feel anxious, pray and watch to see how God gets you through."

These two I can't remember if I quoted before but they are so powerful you can certainly benefit from reading them again:

"If you talk more about the bad than the good it shows you prefer Satan's work to God's!" St. Ignatius Loyola

"If you are looking for justice you will find it in Hell; mercy is in heaven, and on earth is the Cross." Gertrud Von Le Fort

Look at Everyone with Mary's Merciful Eyes!

24 May 2011



Back in the 50's there was a TV ad for floor cleaner that showed a cowed housewife accosted by the judging eyes of a woman guest. The voice over was a man's voice saying: "Eyes are on your floors."

Not much for house-cleaning myself, when I occasionally have guests who are better housewives than myself, I remember that judgmental line and scurry around cleaning the floors.

Just to amuse you some old book about making life as a housewife easier suggested that if you clean only your kitchen counter and offer the guests a drink immediately no one will notice the rest of the mess!

Here is the spiritual analogy. When I went to confession about my harsh judgments about conventional retirement homes (you may remember this from a blog last week) – Fr. Martin Jones, my friend-priest, suggested as a penance that I try looking at everyone with Mary's merciful eyes. It's a great image. Can you imagine Mary looking at anyone with harsh judgment about small things of daily life?

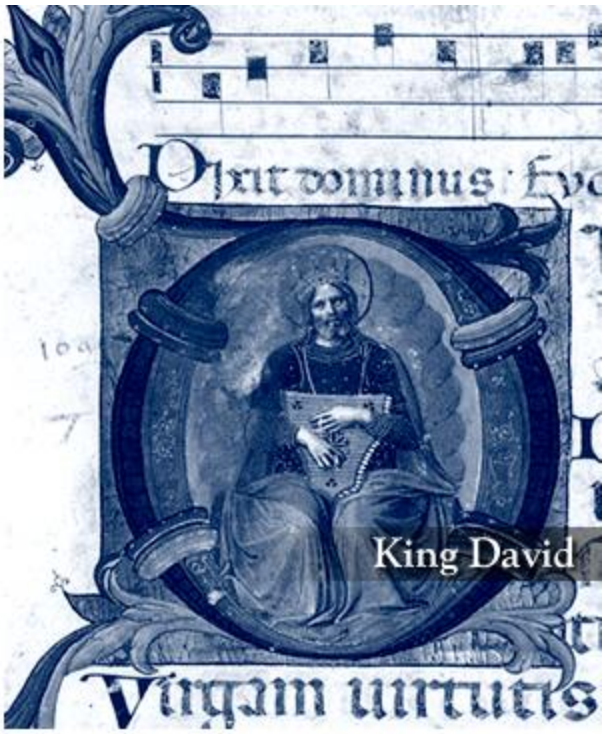
A related concept I heard a few days ago was this: the sins of others require our forgiveness, but the faults and defects should be overlooked. Not, of course, if you are in authority as a parent or boss, but in other situations.

If asked, do you think that those you encounter would vote you in as having the most merciful eyes they ever saw?

Do Leaders get along well with other Leaders?

25 May 2011

Recently someone said “You can’t have two leaders, it’s like two heads on one body.” I have been thinking about this because sometimes I don’t get along with someone I think I will do great with. I have all kinds of theories. But now I think in many cases it is because leaders both attract and repel each other.



We all know that, typically, in religious communities the founder is a flamboyant obvious leader, but then is, eventually, and often painfully, deposed to be replaced by a leader who is more quiet and prudent. A professor asked his class if they thought if two people were both saints that they would get along. They all said “yes.” But he said “no!” Why not? Because you can be full of heroic virtue but still have personality conflicts. If both are leader types, then neither one wants to give up his/her vision to simply bow before the vision of the other.

Sometimes we think we are not leaders because we don’t fit the stereotype of leaders we admire. At a workshop on leadership by a psychologist, she asked us to offer definitions of what a leader was. Socratic style, she finally led us to her definition which was surprising: “A leader is anyone who others will follow.” Duh!

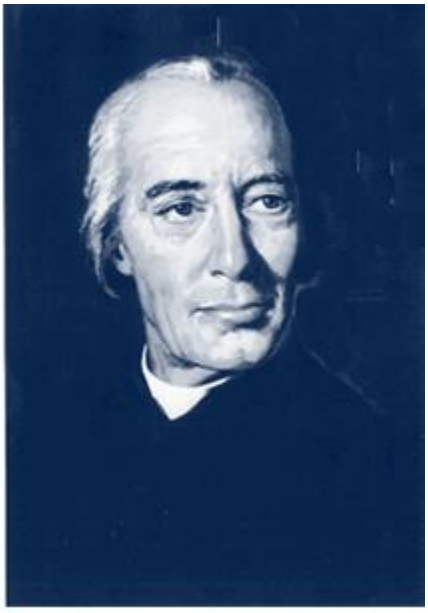
So what Christian remedy to I see for leaders who clash? Look at Scripture! Eventually Saul and David had to split even though David thought he just wanted to be Saul’s soldier. After making up on major issues, it still seemed good that Paul went off from Peter’s domain to “do his own thing.” By the time they were both being crucified they probably had more in common than different.

You might check this out in your own situations. Without one or the other being a formal leader, if both are leaders by individual call, chances are they may have friction in spite of lots of admiration. When I first came the seminary, finding myself surrounded by genius professors in related fields, I thought it would be nifty to persuade them to cooperate in my dream of panel style inter-disciplinary courses. No takers. I was disappointed until I noticed that in our large dining room, typically professors fan out rather than compete for “head” of the table of seminarians and lay students. I did team-teach a few courses with just one other professor and I, however, but there was tension over who got the last word!

My prayer should be “Jesus, not my way, your way. Thank you for wonderful people to admire. Let me let go, however, of dreams of team work that can’t work because of friction of leaders. Let me put loving forbearance above grandiose schemes.”

Fr. Gallitzin - missionary to the Alleghenies

25 May 2011



Well, my dear blog friends, I have now reached the point where I can't remember what I wrote in former blogs. I am hoping that when Jeff Ostrowski puts them up he will notice and send them back if I am becoming an old repetitious bore…sigh!

What I don't remember is if I told you that after my husband died in 1993 I tried 16 different ventures. As a result, when I come upon a new Catholic library, I start reading the lives of the saints I am not familiar with A-Z. But sometimes I glance at the nearby shelf that contains the lives of those others thought should be canonized but have not yet made it. These biographies detail everything the Congregation for Canonization would have to know in case the miracles piled up so that they would have to take notice. They are usually written by authors who knew the saint personally and if said writer was a good narrator they can be almost as wonderful as reading the lives of canonized saints, sometimes written by less gifted authors.

In this way I came upon one Fr. Gallitzin. The name always intrigued me. How did a Russian prince wind up as a key figure in American Catholic Church history? Oh, my, what an amazing figure, not only in terms of his holiness but of a psychological feature rather rare. Prince Gallitzin was the 18th century son of a German noblewoman married to a Russian prince who was a representative of the Czar living in Germany. The mother was a beautiful, adored society woman who became more and more devout to the point that when her children were old enough to be handed over to fancy tutors she decided instead to, in effect, home-school them making use of progressive ideas of educational experts.
This worked well with the daughter, but the little prince turned out to be less than scholarly of temperament. The holy mother wept and scolded, wept and scolded, and even wrote the little prince letters of admonition about why he was so lazy and absolutely without any drive to learn anything.

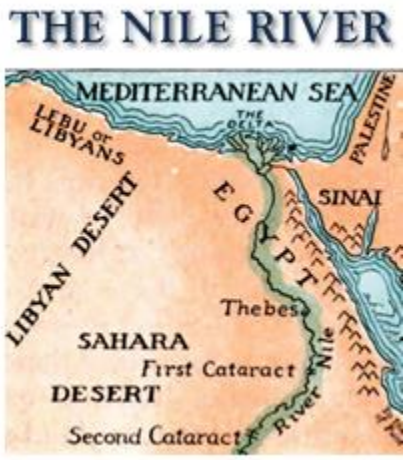
This went on until he was 19. Because of the French Revolution they couldn't send prince charming on the usual Wanderjahre to Parish. Instead they packed him off to visit an uncle-missionary-priest in the United States. To the total surprise of the parents and the prince, early on he had a miraculous conversion through the Jesuits and risked losing his entire inheritance to become a missionary to the poor in the wilds of Pennsylvania. At the seminary he became so studious when it was theology he had to learn instead of the other liberal arts, that he had to be ordered to go to sleep. He became a holy missionary beloved for giving

everything to the poor. Eventually the Russians, who never let anyone inherit their legacy who was Catholic no less a priest, gave all his money to other family members and Prince Father Gallitzin lived in real poverty with heroic virtue. It particularly wrung my heart hearing of him riding days and nights on horseback through snow and rain to far-off mission stations, and then having to eat hard meats and several day old biscuits with his dentures!

The bio I read was by a wonderful writer, an Austrian missionary priest, Fr. Lemcke. If you can't find that, look for another.

Why isn't insight and grace enough to overcome denial?

27 May 2011



The Rector of my seminary is making long term plans for the curriculum. After jotting down everything I said I liked to teach, he smiled and asked, and what is your real passion presently?

"Hmmm! I know! It's denial. I hate denial in myself and others. As a philosopher I tend to think that denial comes from lack of insight. Plato thought that knowledge led to virtue, but we know that we need grace. But some of us have insight into our worst traits and grace, and we still aren't much better at virtue. Why?"

"Okay, why not work up a course called 'Denial: Insight and Grace,' my genial rector asked. So, now I am picking everyone's brain on what are the elements besides insight and grace that have to enter the picture to produce virtue?

Here are some candidates:

Unless we are willing to suffer in whatever way would be necessary when we want to choose our vice, fault, defect, or flaw, we won't change. Example: I talk too much. Unless I am willing to accept the suffering of biting my tongue when what I want to say is neither edifying or charitable but just frisky anecdotal one-up-manship (one-up-womanship?) then I will not be able to talk less.

Another suggested candidate is to recognize that the devil wants us to do the evil, wrong, or inappropriate thing. So we need spiritual warfare prayers to move from denial to insight, to actually receiving the grace God is offering us and the devil is trying to deflect. Example: When I am dying to say this sarcastic, juicy, uncharitable thing, I could pray this way instead – "Guardian angel, protect me against the devil's wiles right now."

Your challenge! Can you flood my comments section with good ideas from your own experience of victory over denial?

Evils admitted to be real have to be fought

28 May 2011



On my summer travels I trust that my family and friends will always have plenty of books for me to select from. At the home of one of the our group of Dedicated Widows of the Holy Eucharist, I came upon a novel written in the 80's by a writer named Giggon. It was about a former English teacher, a good man, a liberal, and a bit naive, whose wife and child are murdered by a serial killer. This is so devastating that he leaves his university, and the Church, and roams about, and winds up working as a security guard. The plot thickens when the janitor engages our hero in long conversations during the night hours claiming that he, the janitor, is also a serial killer.

Since the English teacher hates violence, since the police have no proof that this guy really is a killer vs. maybe just a man with a sadistic imagination, his problem is to decide whether he should himself kill the serial killer before he strikes again.
He winds up almost killing the killer and then, risking his own life, as a human shield, for the child victim of the killer.

The line that impressed me the most was where the serial killer, admittedly under the possession of Satan, tells the hero that all his life, this pacifist, has been trying to deny that the worst evils are real and happening all over, because "If you would admit that so much evil is real, you would have to come against it, instead of being a spectator."

The killer relates this to the whole media syndrome where people watch on TV all these horrors with no sense that they have to do anything.

Of course, even if we were the most militant of pro-lifers, which many of us are, we couldn't get rid of all evil through action, but let us at least pray every time we see or read about evil, and be truly willing, to die to save the innocent, if the opportunity arises, should we know it is God's will for us, in this moment.

The Good Things about People with Opposite Traits

29 May 2011



I am visiting the house of one of my dear Dedicated Widows. She is divesting the house to become more like me, all of whose possessions fit in one little cell at the seminary. What is hitting me between the eyes is how people like her and like everyone else in my family, who love to have wonderful colorful things of all types around them, actually enjoy life a lot more than I do. The absence of the annoyance of clutter is good, but absence of annoyance is not joy, as I found out when my husband died. Smile.

How do we get balance on this? Is the only choice between clutter and sterile order? Here is what I think. To have the simplicity of life recommended by our Church we need to periodically go through our whole households and give away everything that doesn't actually give us joy. What gives us joy can be a gift of God. But, I never met anyone who actually got joy out of looking at stacks of old newspapers or bills paid ten years ago! Why would anyone save this stuff? My theory is that it is because it is more enjoyable to pursue other activities than to sort through old stuff! I recommend always thinking of the joy of the person walking into the thrift shop and finding a whole set of dishes (your 3rd set) for $5. Ask family and friends when they visit to look over your whole house and take anything they want – telling them beforehand that if it is something that still gives you joy you will be an Indian giver. Of course having a yearly thorough garage sale will also produce perhaps needed income. Even in a recession $100 for old stuff that we don't need is $100 more than we had before.

From the other side, even though I adore simplicity of life, I don't need to beat myself up over $1 more on an item in a restaurant that I prefer to the one that is $1 cheaper. This is just Scrooge-ville! I need to totally relax my old bones in my widow friend's swimming pool without once thinking of the starving in India. God wants me to relax. There will still be starving in India even if I gave even more of my large percentage of pension and s.s. to them. But also, God wants me to swim, because being a crabby witch because I never relax is NOT His will!

Are you having fun yet reading this???

Finding The Right People To Talk To

31 May 2011



I am fascinated by buzz words. “To Vent” is an oldie, indeed. As usual, at first I found the expression distasteful compared to “talk” or “communicate.” But it has it’s utility because it indirectly admonishes us not to live in the stuffy world of our own ideas, which sometimes, become a vicious circle.

What is the difference between venting and gossip? Sometimes they are synonymous, but not always. Gossip has several meanings, of course. Some people consider any relating of stories about others to be bad gossip. Others think that talking about people is simply a necessary form of communication. One psychologist said that in business it is the only way to find out what is happening. The bad kind of gossip, that the devil loves, should really better be called detraction – that is where what you say is true but it is divulging what others have a right to have private about themselves. Such gossip is designed to put others down and gloat over their shortcomings. The devil loves to encourage that kind of gossip.

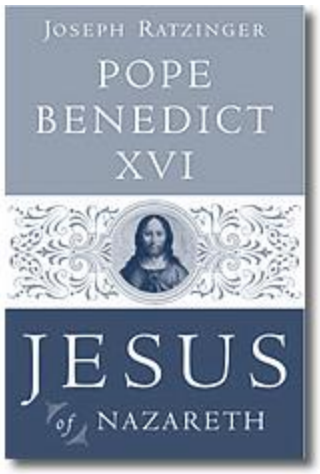
Since I tend toward bad and good gossip, I am usually thinking I would do much better to be silent most of the time. During the summer the kitchen closes at the seminary. I have much more time to be silent if I wish. But then I come upon the not- enough – “venting”- problem. I talk to myself all day and my thoughts are repetitive and often anxious and even dismal. Exactly what venting is one supposed to overcome?

So, how can we talk about ourselves and others in a Christian way? Of course, talking to Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the saints, in prayers is always good. Besides, we need to surround ourselves with friends who use conversation as means of either humor or good counsel. Then, even if we start venting out of chagrin, the tables are turned on us, and we wind up with good ideas about how to love ourselves and others better.

(Re-reading this in 2018, I realize God has sent me this spiritual director who is just like this – very peaceful with good ideas to help me when I get angry.)

Jesus of Nazareth by Pope Benedict

1 June 2011



I bet there are more people out there than admit it who when someone suggests you read a book by the Pope, whether past or present, you think "Well, of course, it will be beautiful, but probably it's the same thing all over again."

They always fool me! I picked up Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week, the Scripture study by Pope Benedict for Lenten reading. It is "lite" in the sense that it's not like reading Von Balthasar's heavier tomes. But it's deep, like reading the thoughts of the saints.

What I found is that we have unconscious uncertainties about certain passages we have heard over and over again. We have gotten clues through the years, but still not a definitive answer. For example, "my God, my God, why have You forsaken me." I recall years ago reading that it was Jesus' way of alerting the crowds that he was going to fulfill Psalm 22 with his sufferings and death. Benedict's style is so warm as well as deep that I had the feeling I was inside his heart as it beat with love for the heart of Jesus.

Here is a sample of such writing:

"Christ, at the Father's right hand, is not far away from us. At most we are far from him, but the path that joins us to one another is open. And this path is a not a matter of space travel of a cosmic-geographical nature: it is the "space travel" of the heart, from the dimension of self-enclosed isolation to the new dimension of world-embracing divine love."
—Pope Benedict, XVI.

Want to read the longer explanation of this? Buy or borrow the book.

Arrogance - Remedies

2 June 2011



The dictionary described arrogance as “offensive display of superiority or self-importance; overbearing pride.”

Of course, if you accuse yourself of arrogance in conversation or in confession, you probably are not arrogant! It goes along with the denial I have been writing about, for sure.

Psychologists would agree that those who display arrogance are almost always covering insecurity. Typical examples would be a man who feels insecure about his masculine image because he doesn’t fit the preferred height and muscles, may, unconsciously, deflect attention from his “defects” by a barrage of many syllable words. A woman who feels insecure about her intellectual abilities might enter a room full of savants dressed sexy for similar reasons.

Does that mean that it is arrogant to speak with pungent vocabulary or haughty to dress attractively? How might these traits be displayed in a way that isn’t arrogant? On the word question, a person with a genius for great words and phrases, would only need to define each of these while speaking to avoid seeming pompous and over-bearing. A lovely woman could dress well but modestly and glide into the kitchen to help with the eats instead of taking a chair in the middle of the living room and swinging her legs.

Jesus tells us to be like Him: “meek and humble of heart.” People who aren’t arrogant may seem superior but they compensate for it so well by affirming others and by laughing off praise of themselves, or attributing all their gifts to God, that anyone who bridles with envy in their presence is displaying their own fault of inferiority feelings.

Overcoming Denial with Insight, Grace and ?????

2 June 2011



Some of you may have read a previous blog about this topic. I am now at a new stage. What I feel called to do is to test out a method on myself, one friend, and any of you who want to try at any level. Here is the plan:

New Way

1. Pick out one negative trait you would like to improve on such as talking less, being less upset about trivial annoyances, smiling more at family, friends and people at work and Church. If you think you are perfect, ask those closest to you what little thing they wish you would do differently.

2. Collect general and personal insights about the negative and positive of this trait such as

a. talking too much vs. listening better;

b. upset about trivia vs. overlooking it or working around it;

c. grouchy or withdrawn vs. smiling and friendly.

3. Consider what is the pain from past and present that you compensate for through your negative trait. For example,

a. About talking too much the pain from the past could be feeling inferior when others dominated conversations in the past, so I want to be the speaker even when it is inappropriate. The present pain would be feeling that if I don't make the conversation interesting to me I will be slightly bored or feel that everything is meaningless unless discussions of important things take place.

b. On upset about trivial annoyances – a past pain would be feeling out of control as a child when parents or siblings did annoying and hurtful things to me. A present pain would be not being able to coerce others to act better concerning daily trivial matters.

c. On grouchy or withdrawn vs. smiling, friendly – the past pain would be parental role models of these negative traits. The present pain would be wanting to withdraw after a hard day or before the day gets harder – being grouchy or withdrawn usually keeps others away.

4. Make a promise such as this: God, I truly want to change, not just to please others, but to get closer to you by becoming a more loving person. I realize that Your grace cannot penetrate my denial mechanisms if I justify every negative trait by excuses. (In

my, Ronda's case, well, if I don't dominate the conversation no one will learn my God-given wisdom!) I accept the sufferings, small and large, that I will have endure in order let your grace operate more in my life with respect to this trait.

5. Write a personal prayer to Jesus to say whenever you are tempted to exercise the specific negative trait you are working on now such as:

a. Jesus, please pour your love into my heart so that feeling happy about myself I can listen to others instead of trying to dominate all conversations.

b. Father God, thank you for all the blessings of this day. Help me laugh at this trivial annoyance and get on with the rest of my day without over-reacting .

c. Holy Spirit, spouse of the Virgin Mary, show me how to be friendly so that everyone I meet today feel better because they met me, just as I believe people must have felt who met Mary in Nazareth.

6. (Optional but best) Choose a person who sees you often or whom you can call at a set time each day or evening to share victories of grace. One victory a day is a lot if you multiply by 365 days a year! This call should not be analytic, but rather prayerful as in:

"Heh, pal, guess what? Today I had lunch with friends and I let someone else dominate the conversation, by asking friendly questions instead of delivering long speeches myself. "

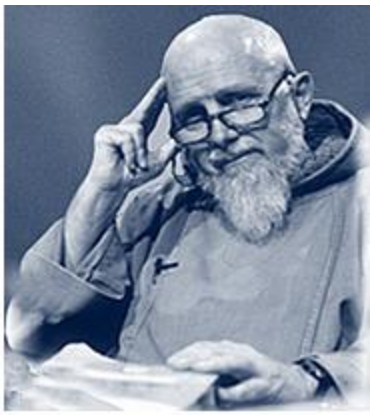
"Gee, Ronda, praise the Lord. Today I smiled at the kids as they went out the door to school instead of muttering – stay out of trouble kids."

"Have a blessed day tomorrow being not Grouchy Dad but Friendly Dad. I'll be praying for you."

It may seem tiny but could it be worse than being stuck with traits everyone finds difficult but puts up with because they have given up hope we will ever change, grace or not????? If you decide to do and feel like posting comments about your progress go ahead, or e-mail me at chervinronda@gmail.com

Judging with the Church but still maybe Harshly?

3 June 2011



I came upon one of the latest books by Fr. Benedict Groeschel, one of my all time favorite priests. I met him a few times at conferences where we were both speakers. My favorite memory is one at Franciscan University of Steubenville where he came to speak at a Defending the Faith Conference after recovering from his huge nearly fatal accident. When the audience saw him walking up the path in the speaker's line up to the podium they rose to their feet and applauded. Arriving at podium he remarked wryly "It's kind of funny. An old man walks in front of a bus and he is treated like a martyr!"

His new book is called "Travelers Along the Way" and is an account of his personal encounters with some saints and others he met only once or twice but who changed his life. One of the chapters is about a transgender person. The key point he makes is that even though we are obliged to think with the Church about such wrong acts, including also those in unblessed marriages or active homosexual relationships, we must never forget that Jesus looked at such sinners with love. We should always hope for their conversion.

Reading this, I challenged myself – when I hear or see someone committing sins is my primary emotion love or is it anger? Righteous anger is correct but when there is no love in it? A priest once said to me, "Ronda, I am glad it is not you, but Jesus, who will be judging me when I die."

Someone once said we are supposed to image all of God's attributes but one. Final judgments on the souls of others we must leave to Him alone. Jesus, cleanse my heart of all such judgments to look on others with the merciful love our hero, Fr. Benedict, recommends.

Dietrich Von Hildebrand's book, The Nature of Love

4 June 2011



Many of the readers of CCWatershed know Alice Von Hildebrand through her articles, books, and appearances on EWTN. I was the student of her husband, Dietrich, one of the foremost Catholic philosophers of all times. I am teaching his book, The Heart, this summer in Los Angeles. I am thinking you'all might like occasional blogs of his most significant ideas as I go along.

Many people think that to want the love of others is selfish and that real love is only the kind where you "give without expecting anything in return" as in working at the soup kitchen.

Here is the fascinating and inspiring way Von Hildebrand thinks about wanting love. Not to want the love of a spouse, a child, or of God, is actually less love rather than more love. Why? Because if we are truly moved with love for the unique preciousness of another person, human or divine, we must want to be united to him or her. We want to be united, not for the satisfaction of benefits for ourselves, but precisely because the goodness in the other draws us. When we love we want the goodness we see in the beloved to flow into us because we see and experience that goodness. This is why admiration is fine, but it is not the same as love. When we admire someone we can be happy to be far from them, but when we love them we precisely want their love to come into us either in romantic love, family love, or love for God.

Was it selfish of Mother Teresa of Calcutta to yearn for the love of Jesus she experienced in the first half of her life as a Sister but lacked the joy of in the latter part of her life?

That doesn't mean that we can demand that the love of another be expressed with a particular flavor, as in, "if you really loved me you couldn't possibly forget our wedding anniversary!" (In the rare times I ever give marital advice, I suggest that women who feel this way should certainly remind their husbands of the date in big bold writing on the bathroom mirror.)

So, with regard to prayer, we cannot tell God that He must show His love for us by granting a particular request, no matter how important. But it is cold and unloving to approach God with a stance like this: "I go to Sunday Mass and I say my morning offering and night prayer of contrition, so You should be pleased with me. I don't need to pray from the heart the way those "sentimental" other Catholics do." Why? Because if we truly love the real God we have to want to be close to Him, not just to do His will better, but also as a foretaste of heaven where there will be no tasks to perform, as such, only to bask in such forms of love as seeing ourselves and others loved by Him to the point of satiety!

You might want to check the web to order Dietrich Von Hildebrand, *The Heart,* from St. Augustine's Press or used from Barnes and Noble.

When a Blogger Can't Blog

17 June 2011

Between a 2 day retreat and a day at the airport and jet lag I missed a week of blogging. I began to think I had ceased existing! I blog, therefore I am???

This coincides with my trial of A New Way – see previous blogs on this. The idea is to see if between insight and grace I could cease talking too much in situations where it is not a matter of "teaching" but really using every social situation as a teaching platform. From praying to see what childhood experiences, etc. might be behind that tendency and then praying for healing of those, and then, the big step, trying to be willing to endure the suffering, small and large, it would entail to avoid the sinful or unhealthy pattern – I had quite a week.

The good part is that if you try NOT to go with your usual pattern, you have a different experience of life. Specifically, in my case, I could enjoy more of the beauty of nature at the retreat (this is the Edmundite Retreat Center off Mystic Connecticut on Ender's Island – a sublime site surrounded by the Long Island Sound). A high point was forcing ourselves to arise at 4:45 AM to pray morning prayer actually seeing the sun rise over the ocean. This beautiful half hour would have been quite different had I been busy formulating words to talk about it at the time. Describing it days later is different.

I also tracked how often I use conversation as a means to "work on" everyone, interjecting subtly and unsubtly into small talk about how they ought to change according to my lights! By the end of a week of observing this pattern I wondered why anyone has ever wanted to be my friend or even an acquaintance! I guess God has graced me with other qualities since I am very loved in spite of this syndrome.

I have one person pledged to work on one of her faults and check things out with me at 10 PM every evening for 5-10 minutes max. If you go back to the blog about A New Way, you can also enjoy this chance at an identity crisis!

Lord have mercy on us all.

Peace as a Fruit of Talking Less

17 June 2011 I have been working on talking less as a part of a self-help program I devised called New Way. Now, I have been a chatter-box for 70 years, so that is no mean trick or grace to improve. And I have also been praying for peace since my conversion 50 years ago with little success – i.e. I only feel peaceful if I get an infused grace for this. What I never thought of was that peace is incompatible with the type of talking too much I engage in usually.

How so? Well, since my conversation is often based on rehearsed lines I plan to use to try to control everyone around me – which, by the way, I am singularly unsuccessful at, this leads to peace-less tension as I plot, execute, and then become angry or sad when I fail. It sounds hilarious but I am betting that some reader of Watershed has a similar syndrome and will benefit from this analysis. Or, you can forward it to some friend or family member who drives you crazy with chatter!!!

So, now one week into talking less I am experiencing a delicious peace – a graced reward for my efforts, I believe.

Try it, you'll like it.

Senora Magdalena

17 June 2011

When I lived in Morganton, N.C., I used to see a tiny woman about 4'8" dressed in Guatamalan attire sitting for hours in the Church in prayer or asleep. Over time I learned her story.

She came to the US with her husband many decades ago and is now the grandmother of a clan numbering in the 70's. She speaks almost no English and little Spanish, but a dialect that few any more understand even in her family. Now a widow, she lives sometimes with one part of the family, other times another – usually with the one with the youngest baby to help. The house she lived in when I moved here is about 5 miles from the Church. There are various cars in the drive way but because the inhabitants are illegal, they only drive these at night to their 24 hour factory jobs.

A frequent communicant, cold winter, or hot blazing summer, Senora Magdalena spends 3 hours of the morning walking to the noon Mass. We daily Mass people with cars can't call her to pick her up because we don't know which of the many houses she is in and, in any case, she doesn't answer the phone. So, whenever we spy her along the streets we pick her up, and we drive her back after Mass to whichever house she wants to go to. To those places she brings food from our parish pantry. In sign language she directs us to these houses.

We have become very fond of her. I was doing a TV series for EWTN on widows and I thought it would be good to take a photo of her to be shone on the show, viewed by 50 million people potentially and the same amount ever time the show is repeated. These were my words when the photo was shown:

As dedicated widows, with Jesus as our Second Bridegroom, we go to daily Mass whenever it is not impossible. I wonder about retired people with cars who find it too difficult to go to daily Mass, when this woman in her 80's walks 3 miles in cold or torrid heat for the privilege of receiving the Body and Blood of her Savior?

Funny and Inspired sayings of my Grandchildren

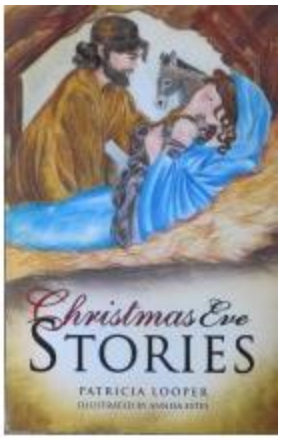
17 June 2011

The budding musician: When the priest was preaching at Pentecost that the laity should transform the world, I whispered to Max, pianist and composer of 15 years – "later I'll ask you how music fits with transforming the world." He replied on the way to the car "That's simple. Music comes from the Holy Spirit." Asked whether cacophony came from the Holy Spirit, he replied – "that's not really music."

The five year old: I casually mentioned something planned for the next day and asked what her father thought about doing that. "I don't think Papa likes to think about the future at all."

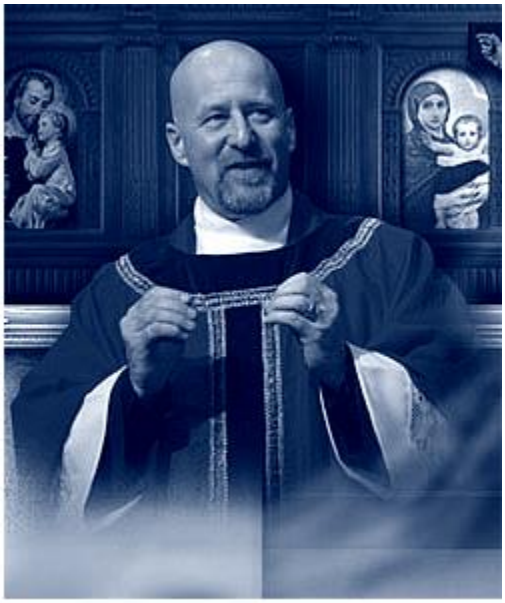
A delightful Christmas Book for the Whole Family.

17 June 2011 Pat Looper, a friend of mine and member of a Christian Writing Group I ran in North Carolina a few years back, has published a book of Christmas stories she worked on with us. It is both for adults and children with themes circling around secondary characters in the Biblical account and how the Nativity inspired their lives.Pat has many degrees in theology, so it is not a sentimental book you wouldn't like. The illustrations are done by an excellent artist.



Check out the description on Amazon. You can order it from them or cheaper through Pat Looper at her e-mail. Here is the information: Pat Looper: Christmas Eve Stories. Her e-mail is 4PBLPAT@bellsouth.net

Inner Healing Retreat at Our Lady of the Rosary in Greenville, SC



21 June 2011 Many days without writing blogs because I was the guest speaker at a wonderful parish. You may the Pastor, Fr. Dwight Longenecker. If not, check out his blog which was the inspiration for mine at gkupsidedown.blogspot.com/. At this parish there is a combination of absolute doctrinal orthodoxy and beautiful high liturgy with interest in psychological insights. The deacon and his wife are my dear friends and co-authors, Ruth and Richard Ballard. You will be hearing about our forthcoming book from Tan/St. Benedict's *What the Saints Say about Heaven:101 Holy Meditations.*

It was a wonderful weekend and I will be sharing with you different insights that came out of it. Since one of my talks was based on my NEW WAY method, I went to confession after the talk for harsh judgments of people in denial. Fr. Longenecker referred to the concept of Scott Peck of the People of the Lie. The idea is that many people in denial were brought up to care more about appearance than truth. This means covering up any defects of character with denial or excuses. Anything would be better than, say, admitting I am angry because I am envious of you, etc. etc. Fr. Longenecker suggested that people brought up like me to be honest and open even about negatives in my own character, need to be merciful to those for whom being open and honest could be extremely painful.

More in next blog.

Dependency and Virtue

27 June 2011 Of course all creatures are dependent on God and on others in a multitude of ways. Inter-dependency on other human persons is inevitable, necessary, and something to be extremely grateful for.

Recently I have been thinking of aspects of dependency for widows. I realize that reliance on friends for sporadic helps as in help on visits or on projects is a totally different thing than living-together situations as in long, long, visits, or in community, or in live-in work situations. This is much more like family with all the pluses and minuses where our virtues and our faults impact one another in a daily, wonderful, and usually also chronically negative way.

I was remembering a long visit, as a widow, with a close friend in an emergency situation. Qualities that only mildly bothered me for tiny visits, I would then want to try to help the person change. The seeming motive would be fraternal correction, but also, of course, it would be that they should change to suit my needs. Mea culpa for the last part!

This is one of the main reasons many widows and widowers don't want to live with their adult children. Qualities of the adult children and the in-law spouses that are merely amusing or mildly annoying on short visits, become much more taxing in a committed long term situation.

The big question for all the widows I know is the great desire to live in family because of love and that kind of closeness, measured against the desire, instead, to be free of those kind of conflicts, but with the huge minus of loneliness. After 20 years of widowhood, I don't think this question has any easy answers or final answers until we are so disabled in older, old age that we are happy to be anywhere that is not just awful and, I am told, in consolation, that at a certain age I might not notice anything at all – from semi-coma to the gates of heaven!

Freedom of Spirit

published 28 June 2011 by Dr. Ronda Chervin

I was waiting in front of a gate at the airport when I heard a violin. There was a shabby character paying country western music. I thought he was soliciting but his case was closed and there was no tin cup. After a while a few people began to sway and clap. Most paid no attention since they were glued to their iPhones.



Even though country western is not my favorite kind of music I loved this guys freedom of spirit. Between tunes he said he was bored and figured why not do his thing. I praised him greatly and dropped on him some adages about God and music such as "I bet your guardian angel is thrilled when you do this for us. Since 9/11 the airports are so tense."

It reminded me a little about these You-tubes about opera singers at the Mall peforming for free. So wonderful.

We need money to survive, of course, but anything we can do for free is such a sign of the kingdom.

Fear in our Church - the Sadness of It

29 June 2011

A thing that makes me so sad is to see parishioners walk into the Mass and not sure where to sit when they are a group of 3 and there are only two empty places showing this look of fear of sitting, say, up in front where there are more seats because they might make a mistake in their participation in the liturgy, etc.



The good side is reverence leading to not wanting to distract others from prayer by fussily stepping over their legs. We don't want the other extreme of people slouched in the pew chatting away. But I wish, wish, wish that we felt so loved in our parish Church that we couldn't imagine feeling fear just getting into empty seat!

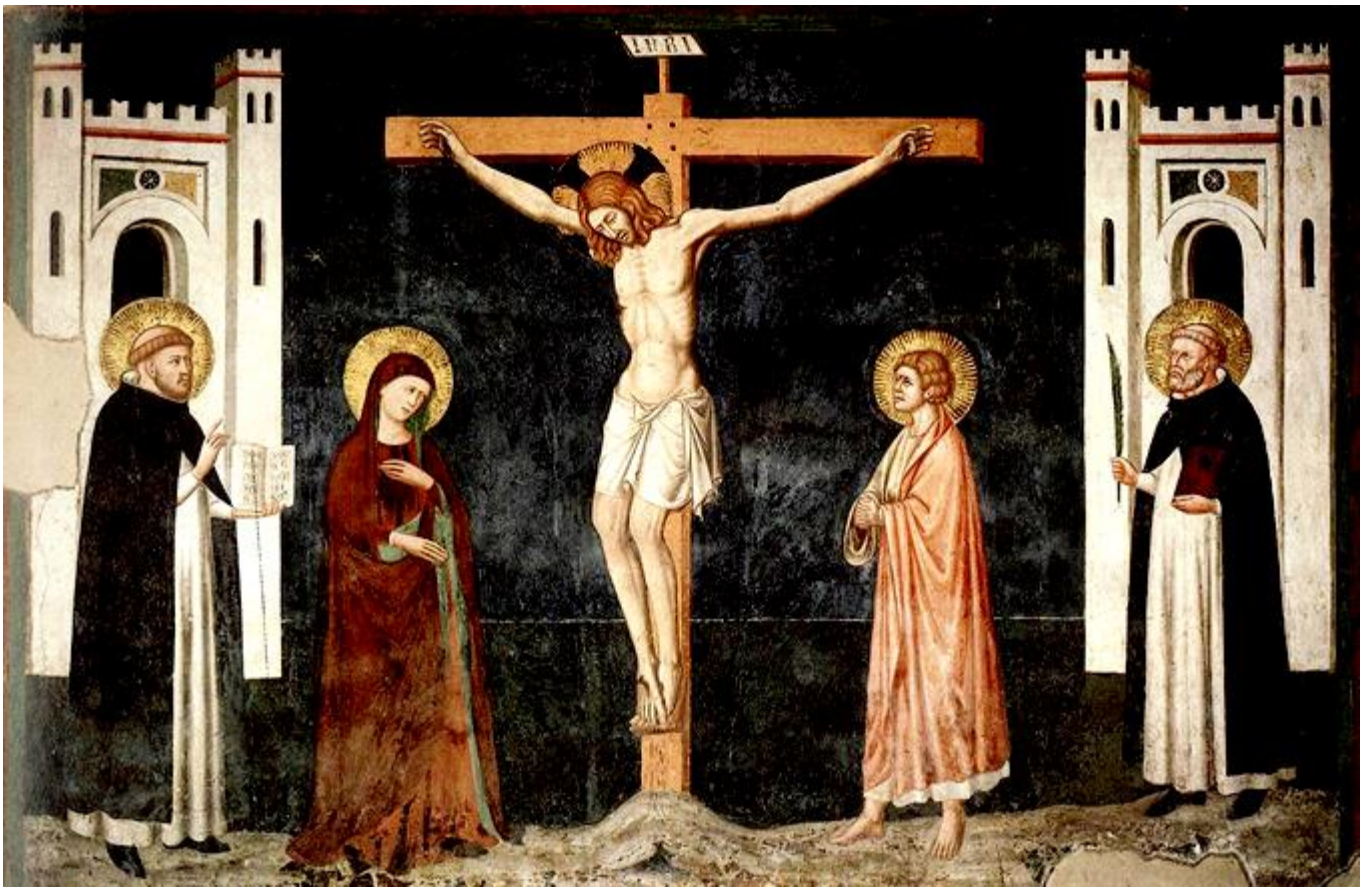
The True Meaning of Leadership

29 June 2011

The Saturday night before Pentecost this year I was at a parish with a large Guatamalan charismatic prayer group. The leaders were trained as lay preachers in Guatamala. They are magisterial and always tell the 250 strong group including many teens, that Mass and Confession are absolutely necessary and the prayer meeting is not a substitute. One of the leaders has a son of 19 in a wheel chair most of his life, totally disabled with a face that register only joy or numbness. He sometimes brings him to the prayer group. When this leader speaks passionately about trust in God he is so credible because of the way fathers this young man.

It is a terrific witness to me. I have found that any words of wisdom I try to offer in talks is always more credible because of surviving my son's suicide without losing faith or becoming bitter.

What is the cross you bear that gives you credibility?



When Upset, Ask Questions

30 June 2011



I am visiting my daughter, Diana, who does computer management training programs. I was telling her a long story about a conflict. My purpose was mainly to vent, but she decided to turn it into a teaching moment. She had me role play the person who I was planning to rant at while she pretended to be me. After I did it my angry way, she talked to me about the negative effects this could have and then had me have a conversation with the same person asking questions instead of delivering speeches.

I soon realized that this fits in with my "New Way" work on talking less. Instead of a fifteen minute diatribe about why I was upset, I was able to write an e-mail simply asking my victimizer what he thought about the conflictual scene.

For those of you who read *A New Way* which debuted on June 2nd as a blog, I will tell you it is going very well. In Seattle where I talked about it, the pastoral staff had to keep leaving the hall to make extra copies. Tracking my speech patterns and speaking less exteriorily and interiorily had yielded many insights. For example, in general, not in the above instance, when I plan to talk less I am less angry. How do? Because I am not rehearsing in my head vitriolic come-backs.

1 July 2011

Laughing vs. Crying about Senior Moments (The graphic is not a photo of me!)



For the longest time after I turned 60 I felt humiliated and frightened every time I had a senior moment. By 74 I feel a twinge of humiliation and fear but then resort to the Recovery, Intl. (not 12 Step but for anger, anxiety and depression) slogan: "humor is your best friend."

We seniors like to exchange our senior moments each day and laugh at each other and at ourselves. I am visiting my daughter, Diana, in suburban Redondo Beach, California. Today's ones of my senior moments, started with driving an

unfamiliar car to Mass and shopping. LA, considered to be a hundred suburbs linked by freeways, is challenging for a senior. It amuses me to drive a classy, if old, Mustang convertible. Not at all my style as a pseudo-St. Clare. But I rack up senior moments by the dozens just going 20 minutes away to a delightful Spanish style Church with a hispanic super-magisterial priest. I would not have dropped driving, except for Mass, if the GPS was around 4 years ago. But this Mustang doesn't have a GPS, so I clutch tightly Mapquest directions on my lap.

Where my daughter lives there are stop signs on every block. Sounds easy. Well not if your head is buzzing with projects. Which of these 3 cars on each corner arrived before I did? Duh! Meanwhile, since it is really my turn, I try to avoid noticing the faces of the drivers in the 3 other cars bewildered and angry that I am not moving. Next comes passing the right turn onto a big boulevard because 182 street comes right after 179th street, not like in NYC where I grew up where every street number follows the one before or ahead. Now I turn on 181st which turns out to be a dead end. I glance at the clock on the radio panel! Will I be late for Mass? What about that train that comes 2 times a day through a main thoroughfare and keep you waiting 20 whole minutes unless you happen to know how to veer off on side streets?

Big sigh! I made it to Church on time after all. Beautiful Mass, beautiful sermon. Lovely sight of all the ethnic varieties present. LA has 42 Catholic language groups. There is a huge Samoan looking man who stands rigidly in the first row in a trance-like state praying with eyes glued to the tabernacle. By my side is a beautiful hispanic woman decked with about 10 rings and a large gold crucifix. At my other side is an anglo woman of about my age dressed in a blue linen jumper with a Franciscan Tau cross. She, like many others, nods quickly at the peace gesture, hands folded, with a smile to show she is being traditional vs. unfriendly.

But then come more senior moments. Having heard my cell phone vibrate I crouch on the steps of the Church to talk to a friend about arrangements. A tiny woman rushes out of the adoration chapel to chide me that I am bothering the adorers with my loud voice. Why didn't I think of that? Then comes the ride home where I miss another left turn. I wind up where trying to make a left turn across a 4 lane road means trying to beat out traffic from both directions. After ten minutes I resign myself to making a right turn instead and after 2 blocks getting into a turn lane.

The entrance to my daughter's drive way involves scooting across with a left turn. The opposing right lane people have no visibility whatsoever as they are climbing a hill that ends one yard from her driveway. Good young drivers tell me not to worry because they will be driving slowly. "Maybe?" I think as I clutch the wheel and rev up to 50mph across the right lane and screech to a halt in front of my daughter's garage door worrying about how much room by son-in-laws big Dodge needs. He is gone now but when he comes back will he hate me if I have parked too close to his sacred space?

It is only 9 AM and I am strung out with adrenal coursing through my body half dead!

Without my 20 years of Recovery International for anger, anxiety and depression, I would have had to go to confession for vulgar words emitted loudly early in the morning.

Puullleeeze, when you spy senior drivers like me, don't curse us, pray for us to give up driving asap. But, would you want us to give up Mass just to make your day less stressful driving behind us?

First Blog from Visit to Corpus Christi at a Watershed Home



1 July 2011 It is many, many years since I was in the living room of the Ridley family, part of the founding team of Watershed. They are among my closest friends. I met them when teaching at Our Lady of Corpus Christi in the early 21st century. They illustrate my favorite Watershed combination: magisterial, deeply spiritual, free-spirited and creative. One of the children is my god-child, John Ridley.

After welcome hugs and a prayer of gratitude in their driveway came ebullient sharings followed by a long bedtime praying together of the luminous mysteries with the youngest, Philip, tucked under Claire's armpit and Anne and Margaret with colorful books of the mysteries. John, my godchild, was alternately serious and then with droll eyes examined this godmother he has heard of for years but not met since his baptism. Claire prays, even amongst the children, like a contemplative nun – absorbed and focused. This has always impressed me because I can't sit still for 5 minutes. Jim, the father starts on his knees.

The scene so delighted me that I got distracted and made mistakes when it was my turn to lead a decade.

Whereas any children I have ever seen praying the rosary can't wait for it to be over, these add favorite Latin hymns ending with some kiddie ones as "dessert."

I blurted out one of my favorite sentences of Dietrich Von Hildebrand: "The children are the love of the parents made visible."

10 July 2011

Meeting Watershed People Face to Face Live



It was years of watching Mother Angelica on EWTN before I met her in person. On the screen she seemed funny, smart, and deep. When I had the joy of being interviewed by her, first about my conversion, I couldn't believe how warm she was with her large compassionate eyes seeming to want to pour love into my frenetic little heart.

"TV is a cold medium" I was told. This means that somehow it doesn't pick up on warmth of character.

I am having the same experience this weekend meeting with Watershed people I only saw on the web, such as some of the composers and singers, including Jeff Ostrowski (I met him once briefly years ago but not so as to remember him well). On the web, several of these musicians seemed to me like a formidable, very formal, imposing characters, perhaps a little austere. One in particular. I doubted he would like me since I am very informal. Meeting him now face to face, Kevin, he is a vibrant warm person, overflowing with joy. No way on the web does Jeff's warm enfolding demeanor come out either.

An analogy – we read about Jesus in the Bible. We picture him through art and films, but what will it really be like when all that totally supernatural love of Jesus will be known face to face in heaven? "Eye has not seen…what God has prepared for those to love Him."

10 July 2011

An Evening Among Friends

Saturday evening I met in person Watershedders Cynthia and the now world famous darling baby (because her parents put photos and videos of her on Watershed all the time). Carmen. As well, at the gathering were my dear old friends Francette and Michael Meaney. For those of you who have seen Cynthia Ostrowski only on the Watershed web and think, as I did, that no one could possibly be that beautiful in real life, she is! But in a wonderful way that beautiful face in repose rather than posing, has a depth and pathos you can't see in the web pictures. I especially liked the way she looked with Carmen in her arms just listening to the others like an icon of motherhood.

Our gathering was at the convent of Sister Anne Sophie who many of you know from her incredible apostolate, the Society of the Body of Christ, with hundreds of lay people helping Sister reach out to the neediest cases in Corpus Christi. I provided editorial assistance for her first book *On the Front Line*. Check the web to get this extraordinary account of Sister Anne Sophie's out-reach to the sick and dying.

Claire Ridley worked for hours and hours on the spread. Michael Meaney, a philosophy professor, filled us all in on some of his most pungent ideas about spirituality. Francette, who founded a terrific pro-life center and boarding house for girls and women, to save their babies, always inspires me greatly by the type of total helping hands and hearts she and her people give to this segment of the world's neediest.

Since the last blog I watched the Fr. Pacwa interview with Kevin Allen, and learned even more of the significance of the Sacred Arts Music apostolate in our times.

11 July 2011

The Nagasaki Christian A-bomb Victims



Someone gave me a book called A Song for Nagasaki about Takashi Nagai and scientist, radiologist, convert and survivor of the Atomic Bomb. I was reading it kind of just for more historical understanding of the Japanese experience of WWII, but it is an incredible story of a truly holy Catholic husband, father, and hero.

Nagai was an atheistic playboy scientist whose conversion came through reading Pascal and the prayers of his future wife, a descendant of the families of Nagasaki who were martyred for their Catholic faith. His description of his life before his conversion is illuminating because I always had the stereotype of Japanese men as ridiculously Stoic. It was good to read about his passion for truth and his deep longing for the love of his saintly future wife. Also, I didn't realize that there were Japanese even in the army in the war with China before WWII who were questioning unjust wars.

If you get this book (Ignatius) you will see how he became a fervent Catholic and incredibly sacrificial doctor before and after the A-bomb. Here is a sample of his beautiful ideas as described by Fr. Lynn, author of his biography: "The navel is the reminder that our body and our life are gifts from another. Nature has placed this sign in the very center of our bodies, where we cannot fail to see it. It is a symbol of the love, goodness and heroic sacrifices of our mothers. Nagai saw mothers as images of God and grace."

In a most extraordinary way he led the remnant who survived the A-bombing of Nagasaki to think of this as a holocaust where they were sacrificed to bring about the totally unexpected unconditional surrender of the Emperor. The people wanted to die instead fighting to the point of total annihilation for their Emperor, but the Emperor conceded to save his country. Nagai thought that graces from Mary saved the remnant to, hopefully, bring about through the reality of the horror of war the abandonment the characteristic Japanese military pride in favor of peace.

11 July 2011

Later Life Meetings with Siblings



Mostly I see my sister at family reunions. There we act out our admiration and love for each other as well as our tensions before an audience. This year we thought we would both go to a place we love just together and see if we could do better.

I am thinking that some of my observations could fit the case with any visits of adult siblings.

One of the best parts is being with someone who intimately knew our parents who have, as the Irish sometimes say, "gotten away from us" to eternity. We think we both admired and loved the same things and disliked and even hated the same things, but usually it is different. This gives us a chance to re-evaluate. Oh, maybe old Mom or Dad did this and that for a reason my sibling knew about and I never knew about. This can be healing.

We could be alike in certain characteristics but exercise these in quite different ways. For example, one might be obedient to genuine authorities when it comes to large vistas and plans and ideas and the other generally rebellious about those. But the other might be very obedient about liturgical practices or refinements of manners where the other is sloppy and sometimes offensive! Without directly confronting one another could we observe and learn where we need to?

After 4 days it reminded me of marriage where even if each one gives 100% there are still inevitable annoyances and conflicts. But, also, like in a good marriage, it is worth it because of those great virtues of the other, known over so many decades!

How wonderful it will be to be "family" in heaven, by repentance and God's grace, to only experience the good! Lord, have mercy on us all!

12 July 2011

Redeemed Ecology a la Pope Benedict

There is a pattern revealed in Church history in the past few centuries if not further back. The culture comes up with something crazy seeming like women's lib and most Catholics totally reject it. But, then, a few decades afterwards the Church comes up with a redeemed Christian version such as Christian Feminism. When I first saw this term, in the writings of JPII, I thought some translator smuggled it in. No! It was genuine and now is an accepted Catholic philosophy of the feminine.



In a similar way, I just learned, the Church is redeeming ecology, often mocked as a label for tree-huggers who don't care about babies only about the whales, etc. etc. Read this from Benedict XVI:

"What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of new life-styles 'in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings, and investments.'" It is within this quest which is a desire for truth, goodness and beauty that ultimately leads to the foundational principle of an integral human development in relation to God.

Integral human development is closely linked to the obligations which flow from man's relationship with the natural environment. The environment must be seen as God's gift to all people, and the use we make of it entails a shared responsibility for all humanity, especially the poor and future generations.

An example he gives is that the forests that are stripped of trees for profit will not be there for future generations. I, for one, never thought of that.

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14 July 2011

Pessimism - Not a Virtue



If you have been following these blogs you know I am on a new adventure with grace called A New Way (see blog of June 2nd). I am doing very well with a partner for accountability. She is doing clutter and I am doing talking too much. Another friend wants to work with me on pessimism. Here are segments of my first e-mail with her just in case you have problems with pessimism or others have problems with your pessimism!

"Dear X, Here is my plan for my pessimism. Each day when I wake up I will think of one thing that is likely to go wrong this day. Then I will consider that there is at least a 50/50 chance it will go better than I think. I will report to you how it went when I didn't go in glumly pessimistic to that situation as well as any other observations the Holy Spirit sends me. You can try whatever way you think would help you.

Also let's identify the basic root of my pessimism that needs healing by Jesus. In my case I remember being a cheerful optimist as a child even after my father left us because I was closer to my mother and sister in any case. I started getting pessimistic in High School. I was skipped 2 years so I was younger and gauche among the other girls who were older and more attractive. I began to feel inferior. They were 170 IQ kids at that school. I was 137. I gradually raised my grades up from 85 to 94 % but until that 94% I was treated, I thought, by the other kids as a marginal dunce.

The relationships I had with boys and men in college before my conversion were mostly sinful. My first real rejection by a young man I adored was because even though he loved me, he wanted to marry a rich doctor's daughter who could advance his career one day as a doctor. He was pre-med. This shattered my romantic ideas about relationships with men.

I guess that's plenty to explain why I became pessimistic, eh?

Now, what would be my prayer for healing: Dear Jesus, You, not the world, should be our reason for hope. You brought me hope in you and in eternal life. Help me also to have hope that even if people and things are often disappointing that everything will be good in terms of your Providence because you bring good out of every evil.

So, going into this day. I am at an Institute teaching in LA that has mostly priest teachers and priest students. I am the new girl on the block. So my pessimistic thought, in spite of being such an extrovert super-friendly person myself, is that they will all reject me and I will have a miserable 7 weeks living here, except when I escape on the weekend to my loving daughter's place an hour away. Instead I am going to think: more than 50% of the time I do make friends in new places – not everyone becomes a friend, but some. Jesus, let me wait hopefully for one of these new people to like me. Okay, for starters the head of the program loves my work, which is why he hired me, and he is super-friendly!

So, I sent this off early this morning and already at breakfast there were two very friendly priests who I talked to and who seemed to like having me among them. A proof that my original pessimism was wrong. But, perhaps, if I had walked into the dining

room emanating anxiety, they wouldn't have been so friendly. I think when we are willing to try to change, the Holy Spirit loads us up with examples of how bad it can be the way we are, and how good when we open to change.

15 July 2011

Attitudes toward those of other Religions



At the institute I am teaching at this summer in LA there are many shelves of books collected over decades. When I come to a new place I pray to the Holy Spirit to find me something to read that is not part of my teaching. This time I took one called "The Faith Club: A Muslim, A Christian, A Jew – Three Women Search for Understanding." I figured with such a title it was probably written by women who had in common a less than traditional relationship to their religions, but that I might learn something from reading it anyhow, especially about Islam, about which I know very little.

The book relates the gist of conversations 3 women in the New York City area conducted in the course of trying to write a children's book about their three faiths rooted in the one God.

I am learning. For example, I never considered what it might feel like to be a truly moderate modern Muslim woman living in the US with a strong love of God and neighbor, and having to be identified the moment she mentions her faith as part of what most of us now think of as a terrorist religion! Besides feeling herself to be the brunt of that stereotype, she is having trouble finding a mosque to attend since the mosques are full of what she considers to be extremist fanatics. Could she, and others like her, be feeling the way we, pro-lifers, do when someone casually assumes that all those in front of abortion clinics are only interested in yelling that abortion is murder rather than in saving babies and helping the mothers?

Reading the words of the Jewish woman, very culturally Jewish, but like many modern Jews not even sure there is a personal God, pierced my heart. So many Catholics think we don't have to evangelize Jews because, from years of hearing passages from the O.T., they think Jews are like Isaiah or Esther. A rabbi teaching Jewish roots at the LA seminary told me that surveys show that only about 10 % of Jews in the US believe in a personal God! Others hope there is such a God, especially when they are facing the death of others or themselves, but really most of them live in great confusion about God even if they still attend services 2x a year – like Catholics nowadays who go only at Christmas and Easter to Church but still pray?

The ex-Catholic Episcopal woman, who I thought would be a totally watered down Christian comes out rather well because she really does believe that Jesus was God and that He is our redeemer and manages to have a good influence on the other two women.

Waking up after reading a few chapters of the book made me want to pray much more earnestly for all those represented by these three. Since I assume that most of those who frequent the Watershed web to are Catholics, I want to ask you how much you pray for those of other faiths except when those people are in your own family?

Here is what I am praying this morning: Dear Jesus, you prayed that all would be one. May our witness as members of the one, true, Church truly be a light for those who are seeking God, our Father, by different means, or in Christian churches who see much of the light but are still not united with us.

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16 July 2011

Wearing a Crucifix



When I was a little girl in NYC in the early 1950's every Catholic wore a gold or silver crucifix about 1 to 1 1/2 inches and many Catholic teen-agers had rosaries dripping out of their pockets. So, when I became a Catholic this was a sign of my new identity.

Right after Vatican II there was a big change. Within a few years Catholics started wearing silver or gold chains around their necks with no crucifix. Symbolic?

Those Catholics who were in the new charismatic groups, however, started wearing big wooden crosses without the corpus. Symbolic?

After a few years of the big wooden cross, I went back to the crucifix. As these got lost, I'd keep getting larger ones. My husband used to quip – "at this rate, someday, you'll be walking down the street with a life-sized cross!"

At the same time many Sisters went out of habits, and many priests stopped wearing clerics in public. Symbolic?

Now, as a dedicated widow, I wear a big crucifix and a blue jumper. Some people assume I am a Sister. The ones who admire Sisters are very friendly to me and treat me better than they otherwise might, for instance at check-out counters. In the Bible belt where I used to live, non-Catholic Christians look at the corpus and say "that's a pretty necklace." I take it to mean that even though they don't wear crucifixes they want me to know they love Jesus. I respond with something like, "Oh, isn't Jesus wonderful?" Strangers with bad memories of Sisters scowl at me.

I don't know why so many magisterial lay Catholics, men and women, don't wear a crucifix again since it is one of the easiest ways of witnessing without even talking. What do you think?

17 July 2011I

Evangelization and New Age

have followed some of the controversy about Harry Potter books and movies but not actually read any of the books or seen any of the movies. Some friends took me to the last one yesterday. It was 3 D and shown in a fantastic Hollywood Mall area.

Of course the tech part and the nature scenes were fabulous. I kept wondering what The Passion, or Lord of the Rings would have been like with this 3 D, much advanced since 3D first came out in my youth. During the long movie I kept thinking – this is a form of gnosticism (Gnosticism was a name for a variety of heresies in the early Church times that combined all kinds of pagan elements with Christianity) for surely this included many Christian symbols and plot elements with magic and other bad elements in the hands of the good guys. Then I compared it with Narnia and Lord of the Rings and thought it was a kind of version of those without the same kind of depth of Lewis and Tolkien, but then the movies of these Christian favorites have little of the depth of the actual books. At least I think so.

When I left the movie I asked one of the priests in the group "does it seem to you like bridge to Truth for young people, or a substitute? He said he thought most young people took it as a substitute. I am going to send this blog to some of my grandsons, who saw or will see the movie, and see what they think.

Decades ago when E.T. first came out there were Jews for Jesus standing outside the movie theaters handing out leaflets proclaiming that E.T. was really Jesus because of E.T.'s "resurrection." I thought these Jewish believers in Jesus are pretty smart. Why don't Catholics do things like that? Any ideas how?

A comment from Ronda's college age grandson:

"I have yet to see the most recent (Harry Potter) movie but I have seen the other ones. But to answer the question I don't think it is necessarily either (a bridge to Christianity or a New Age substitute). I think for most kids it's just completely separate. I think they take it and enjoy it for the effects and maybe the plot and characters etc., but I don't think they necessarily even relate it to their real life in any way."

from the same grandson of Ronda's:

"After being intrigued enough to read up on the matter a bit, there's a number of interviews where the author of the books, JK Rowling, describes the series as an allegory of how she came to understand her own religious beliefs when she was younger. As she's now a devout Christian, it would make sense that the series would contain various signs of Christian symbolism.

Like I said, I haven't seen past Part 3, but the interviews do imply that Harry's coming of age is symbolic of her own struggles with coming to terms with her religion when she was younger.

18 July 2011

Types of Pride I Never Thought Of



At the International Institute of Tribunal and Theological Studies, Msgr. Chaffman summarized ideas he found about types of pride. I thought they would interest you.

1. Pride of Timidity – this is where from fear of not being perfect we can't stand being prominent. It can come from being criticized too much as a child, but basically it is pride to think we could be perfect and to feel terrible that we may be shown not to be perfect. Ronda's comment: my godfather used to say that we should see ourselves as weak little creatures and humbly confess to God during the day "Well, that's what I'm like. I make mistakes. I have faults. Help me." The opposite is self-hatred because I am not perfect.

2. Pride of Sensuality – A romantic urge for self-gratification; too much need for affection. Ronda: Maybe what "pride of life" means in Scripture? The pride comes in because we think we merit lots of lots of pleasure and affection vs. having our minds on how to serve others?

3. Pride of Sensitivity – seeing oneself as a victim. Ronda: used to be called 'touchiness.' Again, it is as if others have to suffer due to original sin, etc., but I should have a charmed life?

4. Pride of Dictatorship – this is obvious and the one we mostly identify as pride. A form of this common nowadays is what is called micro-managing.

Well, that will be enough to provide you and I with matter for Confession!

19 July 2011

A beloved daughter or son of God?



The same priest I mentioned yesterday in my blog is teaching a course on the thought of Henri Nouwen. For any of you who do not know him, Henri was a Dutch psychiatrist-priest who came to the US and taught at Yale but then left teaching and joined the L'Arche movement where those with so-called mental disabilities live in the same houses with others who Jean Vanier and Fr. Thomas Philippe (founders of L'Arche) considered to be way ahead of most of us in their ability to love God and neighbor.

Msgr. Chaffman, the professor who will teach Nouwen, quoted him with this formulation:

Ask yourself,

"Who am I?"

What other people say I am?

What I do?

What I possess?

or

the beloved of God?

This sounds self-evident that we think we are the beloved of God more than the first 3 choices. But, consider! How miserable do we get when insulted by others? How eager are we to introduce ourselves by our professions and accomplishments? How much to we envy others their possessions?

Sometimes when I give talks where I am announced with all my degrees and books, a woman will approach me after the talk to make a comment proceeding it with this phrase, "Of course, I am only a housewife, but…." I stop her immediately and ask how many children she has? Then, I say, "which one of those children would you like to trade in for a book with your name as author? A book that will eventually be relegated to the dumpster vs. a child who will live for all eternity?

A friend challenged me today about this? Do you think people only love you because of your teaching and books? Not just because you are you? I am going to stop writing this minute and run to the chapel and just sit and ponder blissfully that my real name is not Dr. Ronda but beloved daughter of God.

21 July 2011

Turning Greetings into Witness Moments

A repetitive situation I dislike is when people return to a learning institution after a vacation and everyone asks “how was your summer?” They want to hear, “terrific,” but really my summer might have been difficult, but if I say so it seems inappropriately personal, and just saying “glad to be back” seems kind of evasive!

I have a wonderful friend, Dorothy, in North Carolina. Whenever I visit my family there, I am shocked anew because whenever you ask this woman, who is in chronic sometimes acute pain most of the time, “how are you, Dorothy?” she responds, “I’m good with God!”

I realize that she is turning a conventional neutral moment into a graced witness moment, since her answer forces us to stop complaining about our lesser aches and pains and to think of God.

You might want to think of an answer to “how are you?” that fits your personality and would be as refreshing. For now, when people ask me about my summer I’m going to copy Dorothy and say, “it was good with God.”

22 July 2011

Let's not be pessimistic about our Church

I am giving talks at a Church in Hollywood. By 8 AM there are countless homeless people on line waiting to get vouchers for a Mac Donald’s breakfast. They also come in during the Mass to the vestibule to use the restrooms to clean up. It felt so wonderful that while the Mass was being celebrated I could see these woe-begone people finding help from our Church as they stood in line for the bathroom!

Another inspiring sight was the consecration performed by an elderly priest whose arms are limp from some disease – so he has to grasp the Eucharist with both hands as best he can! He so obviously is praying that he won’t be retired because of this. Here he is pastor and he can do lots of things that are very important that he couldn’t do if he became only a helper priest at another parish. For example, he hosts young people in an old building who are discerning vocations. They volunteer at the parish while thinking about the future. It is wonderful to see some 5 young men praying their hearts out in deep silence before the Mass. Oh, these are hi-tech young men who do liturgy of the hours off nooks or kindles, or iPhones!



25 July 2011

Listening vs. Arguing



I have a relative who doesn't go to the Sacraments but does pray a lot and is very loving. This relative was asking me if I thought God loved her in spite of not going to Church.

I said yes and I was about to go into a long argument about how not going to Church is rejecting the love Jesus has for one and not letting Him come into one with His Body and Blood.

Instead I just kept listening to this person's reasons for not liking to go to Church.

The relative then said, "You know, usually whenever I talk about religion you jump down my throat angrily. This time you just listened. That meant so much to me."

I think this is related to my big push to talk less (see A New Way, June 2 Blog). What a dividend!

I must watch for this. No matter what splendid retorts I have on different Church matters, it might not always be the right thing to enunciate them. Sometimes we need to just listen, especially with family members.

The next thing my relative said was how running to Mary helps so much because she understands!

Thank you, Mary.

26 July 2011

Creativity and Security



My daughters, Diana and Carla, were terrific artists when they were children. They were so good that, since we owned the house, we let them "fresco" the walls of their bedroom with delightful funny pictures. I still recall the parent of one of their little friends marveling that any parents would let kids do such a thing!

Carla went on to be a poet primarily. Diana writes wonderful comic narratives about family events, but also is now going back to art. She is doing great Chagall/Van Gogh like paintings. I love them. She refuses to take art lessons to "perfect" them because that would ruin the fun. Her house looks a lot like the Ridley's house – Watershed leaders in Corpus Christi – in case you have been there.

I am visiting her off and on this summer in LA while teaching elsewhere. She recently bought a huge wooden low bureau for $10 at a yard sale to paint up. Here is a photo of what she has done. I love the sheer spontaneity of them, the freedom, the love of color and love of God's creation they display. But some people think it is just crazy: "you should paint on canvasses, not bureaus!" (Now in 2013 I find that this is a new genre called furniture art.)

It brought to mind long reflections I have made about conformity and non-conformity. I am convinced that hatred of non-conformity comes from a very understandable and even correct intuition that without a certain degree of conformity there would be no safety at all. If you didn't expect that most people will not kill you when they got angry… you couldn't budge out the door. Along these lines is the fact that the custom of shaking hands was started centuries ago, supposedly, to prove you didn't have a knife in your hand!

Parents, in the hippie era, associated long hair and full beards with drugs and draft-dodging. Thus non-conformity was associated with something much more dangerous than hair. This explains why, still, I can't get any mileage out of telling my seminarians that since they will be alter-Christus' as priests, they should try to look like him with long hair and beards.

Anyhow, if you catch the fire, think about painting old bureaus. If you have kids, they will love it!

28 July 2011

Security or Jesus?



I was running through fantasies about secure futures for myself in my older, old age. I wanted a priest mentor to help me think this through. After a while it just became apparent that the problem wasn't which one would be better but that the desperate search for security in the future is a symptom of lack of trust in God. Not, of course, that we shouldn't plan and look into things, but the enterprise of dangling 5 possible options with A-Z on each one has to be foolish if not also an offense to God.

I heard the Holy Spirit ask me: "So if you had a choice between security or Jesus, what would you pick?" Of course, Jesus. The priest remarked: "there is a simpler word for this: faith!"

Later, in Confession, another priest gave me Ven. Charles de Foucauld's Prayer of Abandonment which includes these wonderful lines: "Father…do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you."

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31 July 2011

Changing language; changing thoughts



Years ago I tried writing a book called *Screwtape Comes to the Seminary* based on Lewis' famous Screwtape Letters. In one of the chapters I explained how each of the polarized groups in the Church has it's own language so that you can tell very a quickly where a person is coming from based on phrases he or she uses often. For example, contrast Mother Mary with the Holy Immaculate Virgin.

Recently the one I am noticing is how in some circles "sin" went from being called "problem" to now being called "issue." As in she or he has an issue where previously it was expressed as he or she is lazy or rude.

The intent is often to be charitable. To say someone is lazy or rude sounds so blunt and judgmental! God forbid we would use the word "fat." It is certainly true that some of us, mea culpa, who tend toward harsh judgment will use the worst word possible to describe others we disapprove of, and we need to realize this is not charitable!

So? I suggest that when talking about our own sins we break the euphemism habit by using the real word. It will be a step out of denial as in “I am a chatter-box,” “I am a gloomy party-pooper,” “I am a smotherer micro-manager.”

Then we can enjoy the response which is usually, “Aw, come on Ronda, after all, you also have lots of virtues, otherwise we wouldn’t love you so much.”

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4 August 2011

The Glories of Parenting Babies



Jeff Ostrowski, President of Watershed, asked me to contribute a blog on babies. This takes me back many decades but is still relevant.

I was a twin and we were the only children in our family. I knew almost nothing about babies when my twins were born in 1962. It was before breast-feeding was revived in our country. It would have so much more convenient to feed them simultaneously, one at each breast, instead of one after the other as in 1:30 AM feed little Carla; 2:45 AM feed little Diana. That is, Mama never sleeps more than a half hour at a time! Happily when my son was born La Leche League was alive and well. I loved it. I developed the analogy (limping to be sure) that my body was like Jesus’ Eucharist body. My milk was so good it could nourish a baby, just as the Eucharist is so good it can nourish our souls.

The birth of our twins was a revelation to my husband who was 46 at the time. He had always wanted to be a father. As he carried the babies in his arms for the first time he got a realization of how God the Father must love us, His children.

By the twins’ six month of life, however, we became acquainted with a sign that innocence is not forever. One twin pulled out most of the hair of the other. This took place in their playpen when one was jealous because the other learned how to stand up first! We were flabbergasted. We have a of the bald twin which neither of them enjoy seeing!

Thank you, Lord of heaven and earth, and have mercy on us in our fallen natures.

7 August 2011

The Spiritual Classics



I am presently working on a course for Holy Apostles, for seminarians and other students, on the Spiritual Classics. So I am off and running assembling excerpts from the spiritual classics. Here is the draft of the table of contents:

St. Augustine's Confessions
St. Benedict's Rule
St. Bernard – from Song of Songs
St.Francis – Little Flowers
from St. Bonaventure
St. Gertrude
Blessed Julian(a)
St. Catherine of Siena
Thomas A Kempis
The Cloud of Unknowing
St. Ignatius
St. Teresa of Avila
St. John of the Cross
St. Francis De Sales
Brother Lawrence
St. Therese of Lisieux
Sts. Kolbe, De Montfort, Liguori on Mary
Ven. Conchita
St. Faustina

Also excerpts from
Von Hildebrand
Merton
The Way of the Pilgrim
Nouwen
Escriva
Gabrielle Bossis

(This book was published by EnrouteBooksandMedia under the title of Spirituality for all Times: Excerpts from the Classics, co-author Kathleen Brouillette.)

8 August 2011

Themes in the Spiritual Classics



I thought I would convey to readers of this Watershed blog what is coming through to me as I work on my anthology of excerpts from the spiritual classics.

I start with Augustine's Confessions. The aspect that always hits me first when I teach this great book is how personal it is. It is the first autobiography in the history of Western Civilization. It fits well with my favorite Old Testament Scripture passage: "You are called by name."

This conviction is the opposite of some sort of vague image of being some sort of employee of God, one of many coming off a kind of cookie-cutter to do a certain work in the history of the universe, judged only by merits, not cherished as an individual daughter or son of God.

The second aspect of the Confessions I love the most is how when this great philosopher gets stuck he just calls upon the God of truth and begs Him to resolve the problem. Since Augustine didn't report audible answers, we must presume that what he writes next after asking the question, he attributed to the Holy Spirit. Although one cannot judge such answers to be infallible due to the ambiguity about messages from on high, it is certainly possible that Augustine's wisdom was mostly from on high since he is a Doctor of the Church.

When we are stuck on a theological or philosophical problem, why wouldn't we run to the God of truth?

11 August 2011

Gratitude



My godfather, Balduin Schwarz, spent the last decades of his life working on an analysis of the meaning of gratitude. He was a philosophy professor who fled Germany because of the Nazi regime, taught for years at Fordham University in New York City, and then became the Chairperson of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Salzburg.

When I met him in 1959 while I was studying at Fordham it was a given that young people like me would complain bitterly about the shallow values of people in the USA in contrast to the depth of European thought, music, art. He would respond by expressing his undying gratitude for this country of freedom where he had found asylum during the time of the evil regimes of Nazism and Communism, results of a culture that had largely lost the foundations of perennial truth and Christian faith.

As he worked on his book on gratitude, Balduin Schwarz, was greatly impressed by the fact that a foundation in Dallas, Texas had constructed in a big mall something called Thanksgiving Square where busy shoppers could stop and express gratitude to God in a chapel.

Schwarz's main theme was that the gifts of God and from others are not really opened until we are grateful because it adds immeasurably to our joy to know that the good things are gifts of love for us from God and others. Here are some quotations from the manuscript of his book that I use when I teach gratitude in my courses in Philosophy of the Human Person:

From Balduin Schwarz on Gratitude:

"Wonder… opens up our dialogue with reality; or rather, takes it up and continues it, since reality has already spoken the first word in addressing us as persons… There comes then into being a dialogue between that which 'speaks to us' and our soul which receives it. For this to take place, we must open ourselves inwardly to what is given to us, cooperate with it, 'go along with it,' bring it to completion in ourselves, work together with it.''

'Humility is truth. It is metaphysical truth. I affirm myself as a created self.'

"Atheism doesn't only intellectually deny the existence of God but lives as if God didn't exist. At the root of atheism is despair: an antithesis to gratitude'

'Through gratitude, I hold onto the gifts I have received. I remain awake to them. Gratitude is a form of remembering. Gratitude is the way the heart remembers'.

14 August 2011

Miscellaneous

A wonderful sermon today for the Assumption of Our Lady. The priest described Armstrong landing on the moon and saying "one small step for me and one giant leap for mankind." (I didn't get it exactly, but I am sure you know it.) He compared it to Our Lady's leap into heaven to be the first purely human with a resurrected body in heaven.

A totally banal but intriguing little incident. I was in a car on the freeway. We went down an unfamiliar off-ramp for me to use the restroom. The driver filled up his tank. The door to the restroom had a big sign: Only for customers. Get the key. So, I went up to the cashier and brusquely said, "We are not buying anything in the store, but my drivers are filling up with gas. The cashier said "No!"

I was absolutely startled. Then he laughed and said, "All you have to do is say 'Please!'" I laughed and apologized for not having said "please."

Back in the car we talked about whether this fell under light fun or maybe was a trifle sadistic given the bathroom needs of elderly travelers.

14 August 2011

Priorities



I had a beautiful day. In Duarte, California, a suburb of Los Angeles, there is a wonderful order of Carmelites – nuns and friars. Among other apostolates, the nuns run a retirement home called Avila Gardens. Unlike some such homes where there seems to be much emphasis on distraction rather than becoming more holy, this place is redolent of piety and love of God and neighbor. That is their priority! If you are an older person looking for such a place, check it out on the web.

I came to give a talk based on my book Seeking Christ in the Joys and Sufferings of Aging. (Enroute Books and Media is now distributing it.) At the end of the talk I told the group that I would be around for more questions. A woman in a wheel-chair with a breathing tube in her nostrils seemed to want to talk to me. I walked over to her table. With a look in her face very unlike affirmation or questioning she exclaimed: "You are blocking my plug!" I leaped out of the way and then smiled. I guess if you can't breathe without a tube you would be more concerned with that than with whether it is relaxing, in old age, not to have to go to PTA meetings anymore!

18 August 2011

Short Spiritual Images



Two images given my spiritual directors many years ago came to mind. I still find them insightful and compelling.

The first is that we would like to think of our spiritual journey as running straight up a road to the top of the mountain. More realistic is that we run a few steps, get caught in the brambles of our sins and defects. Jesus comes down the mountain and extricates us from the thorns and we start again and move up until we fall into another bramble-bush.

The second is again that we want to run straight up a road to the top of the mountain but, instead the road spirals around to the top. When we come to the same vista we think we have made no progress but really we are seeing the same thing from a higher part of the mountain. That is, we come to the same conflict scenario and we feel discouraged but we are approaching that problem from a place of higher insight.

The last insight I recalled yesterday in conversation was not an image. At times in our lives when we have seemingly endless interruptions we think that we are being thwarted in our true vocation, but eventually, sometimes, we realize the Holy Spirit is telling us: “Your interruptions are your vocation!” That is, helping people in small ways could be more important in our growth in love than finishing our projects.

19 August 2011

Whose Church is the Church?



At St. Victor's Church in Hollywood there is a huge replica of the Cross that spoke to St. Francis of Assisi, except it is even more Byzantine looking. I was looking at it just before the morning Mass. Several of the street people who come to a place in the back of the Church for vouchers for MacDonald's breakfasts wandered into the Church and spent several minutes gazing at the beautiful cross and at the other statues. Some stayed for Mass and others drifted off.

It reminded me of Churches in Catholic countries where all day long people come into Church to pray. When non-believers talk as if our beautiful churches come from the priestly caste exploiting the poor, I say, "You've got it wrong. The Church doesn't belong to the priest. The poor see the Church as their celestial living room."

It seems touching to me that nowadays here in our non-Catholic country it is the poor of the streets that now gaze with awe and interest at the pictures, statues, and crucifixes in our Church and, of course, we poor in spirit love to be in our celestial living room other days as well as Sundays.

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23 August 2011

Overcoming Polarity

I am working on an article about attitudes toward polarities in the Church. Here is a draft of the start of it.

Polarization in the Church: Despair or Hope?

The on-line dictionary defines polarization as "a sharp division, as of a population or group, into opposing factions."

Here are some of the most obvious opposing factions in the Catholic Church today:

Magisterial Catholics vs. Dissenting Catholics (and those who never dissent in public but create loopholes for disobedience to doctrinal or moral teachings)

Liturgical classicists vs. Liturgical innovators

Charismatics vs. Anti-Charismatics

Group joiner Catholics vs. Sunday Mass only Catholics

Activist Catholics vs. Quiet Catholics

Peace and Justice Emphasis Catholics vs. Pro-Life Emphasis Catholics

Mystical Catholics vs. Faith only Catholics

Others?

I realize that just the way I have phrased these divisions is controversial, but try to read on even if you dislike even the wording since you probably know the basic issue that is being addressed.

Catholics also disagree about what to do about this polarization. Here are a few options. You may not fit into any of these options, or you might have variations on attitude 1 about some of the polarities but take attitude 2 options on one or more of other polarities.

1. Increase the Polarization

"What we need is not interminable phony dialogue, but a schism. There is no common ground between "us" and "them." We should form our own separate Churches, on either side calling it "the real Catholic Church."

or, for the less revolutionary:

"We just have to wait until 'they' die out."

Or, in addition:

"we can do everything we can to push the other side out such as pressing, when applicable, for ex-communication, persecution through firing anyone on the other side from positions where their views could be influential, or that failing, shunning or sarcasm or humor that others find derisive."

2. Try to Overcome Polarization wherever we can:

"we should love everybody including "enemies" within the Church. To do this we need to avoid stereotyping in thoughts and words. For example, we don't need to think or talk about charismatics as "Holy Rollers." As an exercise, go through the list of polarities given above and think of the stereotypes that each side uses in describing the other side. As peace-makers we need to avoid those thought patterns."

"not assume automatically that someone who thinks "A" also thinks B,C….all the way to Z. Instead listen carefully to see what those on the "other side" really think about many topics and practices."

“accept the pain of disagreement and offer it as a penance toward reconciliation.”

31 August 2011

After the Storm



I have not written a blog in more than a week. First I was leaving Los Angeles to go back to Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Connecticut where I teach. Then, I had no sooner unpacked and finished my errands when Hurricane Irene hit.

Fr. Dennis Kolinski, one of our priests from the John Cantius Society whose seminarians study here, remarked just before the storm “It’s good. It shows us that we are not in control.” I didn’t like hearing that at all! The fear of the storm reminded me of news photos of people being lifted off their roofs into helicopters during Katrina in New Orleans. That was a moving image of loving compassion, but I certainly didn’t want to be the protagonist victim of such a scenario.

It was also going to be different than earthquakes of the past where I was protected by family. Yes, there are more than a hundred strong men here at the seminary, but none of them would be in my room when the predicted 80 mile an hour winds would keep me trapped inside! I happen to live in a “cell” within a large house, but my room is the only one facing out with no halls connecting me to the others whose masculine quarters constitute a semi-cloister. It felt awful being the only quaking female amongst all these stalwart men who pride themselves on fearlessness! The other women living on campus are 12 Vietnamese nuns all together in a separate house.

Whether by grace or nature, the hurricane dwindled to a tropical storm by the time it hit at 6 AM Sunday morning. No one was hurt, power outages mostly took out the net connections but not the lights. I kept reminding myself of my own teaching that the proof that for anyone “God alone is enough” is that we are not disturbed by earthly occurrences! Humbling, therefore, to have to see how fearful I could be!

The rector had all able-bodied seminarians of all ages and nationalities drag off the branches from the fallen trees, which, apparently saved us $10,000 it would have cost to hire professionals!

Today, after 3 1/2 days, the net is up and I can write blogs again. A good result is that I will never be surprised when I hear of good Catholics being fearful or angry when threatened by or in natural disasters!

4 September 2011

In Christ there is no East or West, in Him no North or South



At the seminary for late vocation men where I teach we have many seminarians from countries where the US was once in enmity. Even though the communist government allows the Churches in such countries to be open it is almost impossible for the seminarians to get ordained because of "regulations." They say, however, that some of the spies, who attend Mass every Sunday to make sure the priest doesn't say anything political, eventually convert.

So, among these foreign seminarians are Cistercian monks. I am putting together an anthology of spiritual writings from the classics and working on St. Bernard, twelfth century famous Cistercian. And I am thinking that paragraphs like this sound so overly emotional to 21st century minds. This comes from St. Bernard's commentary on the Song of Songs and is a reflection on the ointments mentioned in this lush love poem of the Old Testament:

"The spices of this second ointment, on the contrary, are not produced on our earth at all, we seek to gain them for ourselves from afar. I mean that all that is good, everything that is perfect, is given us from above; it comes down from the Father of all light. For this ointment is made from the gifts of God bestowed on the human race. Happy the man who makes it his business to gather these carefully for himself and keep them in mind with due thanksgiving. When they shall have been pounded and refined in the heart's receptacle with the pestle of frequent meditation, all of them fused together in the fire of holy desire, and finally enriched with the oil of gladness, you will have an ointment more excellent than the former, and far more precious."

Just as I was excerpting this, a friend, who is helping tutor one of these monks ,comes to tell me how a bishop will come from his country will come to ordain him here and he, the seminarian monk, is simply overflowing with joy from so many years of yearning finally to be a priest and say his first Mass – true son of St. Bernard, true lover of Jesus the Bridegroom.

Ah, Jesus, melt our hearts hardened by cynicism from years of sufferings in the Church!

5 September 2011

Wordless Prayer



This blog will be a little paradoxical because, of course, I am using words to tell you about not using words… well, at least sometimes.

I am recalling that when I was a young new Catholic convert I simply assumed that the best way to pray was always the liturgical prayers of the Church, period! Of course, they are sublime and always should be prayed when possible. What I didn't know for decades was that the mystical saints teach that after years of word prayers said during quiet prayer times alone, we get tired of words. We can imagine it is just because we are distracted miserable creatures. But, really, this is because God wants to move us into prayer of the heart – wordless groans, sighs, and eventually peace.

This isn't just one stage but can reoccur at different times in our lives. Even if we think we are doing nothing, that is okay, because we are making space for God to fill our hearts wordlessly.

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7 September 2011

The Devil: Father of Lies



I am watching videos about a prayer ministry called Theophostic. Even though I don't agree with everything on the video the big point I think is right on and very helpful, so I will convey that insight.

Many times compulsive sins or anxieties and anger come from some lie we accepted, especially in childhood. For example, an active homosexual may have believed his childhood friends who told him he was homosexual in order to seduce him. Or, from abandonment by a parent I might think that any time I am not in control things will go badly.

In this ministry they pray people back to those memories and help them listen to "the voice" of Jesus telling them the truth such as "you don't have to be homosexual" or "look at all the good things that happened to you that were totally out of your control such as your conception, the good things in your parents and siblings, graces of the sacraments or your conversion, etc. etc. etc."

I tried praying this way for a few days about little and big anxieties. It worked. Just as they said on the video I got instant relief, hopefully permanent, from letting Jesus into these areas of past hurt.

Since the movement is ecumenical there might be things on the web you would disagree with, but you might want to visit their web just the same to take out whatever is true and helpful.

10 September 2011

St. Francis of Assisi still can Help Us!



I am working on the Spiritual Classics Anthology. I have read that story about St. Francis and Perfect Joy many times, but this time it hit me freshly.

I have a terrible time with being cold – it comes with old age and my time in Corpus Christi thinning my blood, they say. Anyhow I was dreading the cold weather coming. At the seminary they usually don't turn on the heat until November 15th which is 2 months after I am already cold. I have a heater in my little room, but there is nothing to do about the cold in the chapel where I like to spend a few hours a day. (By the way, today was a day of recollection for the seminarians. They spend 24 hours in silence and serial adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. I can't remember any Church except here ever being in a chapel with 100 people not speaking or even whispering! Balm to the soul. You know a little more silence in all our lives has to be good. I knew a mother with 8 home-school kids who insisted on an hour a day of silence for herself reading the Bible in her bedroom. The older kids had to answer the needs of the littler ones. It worked. She was peaceful.)

So I am reading where St. Francis is cold and miserable the rain walking toward his monastery and proclaims to Fr. Leo: "What is perfect joy? If our brothers healed the sick, made the deaf hear, even raised people from the dead that would not be perfect joy. Perfect joy would be if we arrive at the monastery and they won't let us in thinking we are thieves, and instead of muttering and grumbling we would forgive them and try to enter with only kind words three times."

Generally when I read the story it just persuades me that "I am not 'cut out' to be saint. Forget it, etc. etc" This time, however, probably because of working on my New Way and also the Theophostic prayer I mentioned a few days ago I thought instead, "what would happen if I made up my mind, after doing everything I can to stay warm, not to even mention the cold for the next 3 months???? I grabbed my dedicated widow companion and told her that any time I mention the cold she can smile and hint "perfect joy?"

Can I challenge you to think of something you tend to complain about outwardly or just in your head? Think, what would it be like if after trying to change the situation, I would just stop complaining for a day, a week, a month??????

14 September 2011

Liturgical Mysticism

St. Gertrude the Great is one of the most famous Benedictine mystics of the Church. Here is a little about her as I look for excerpts for my new course:



Gertrude the Great (c.1256-1302)
Gertrude was given to a Benedictine monastery at Helfta, Germany when she was 5 years old, as was a custom among some devout Catholic families in those days. It was a monastery influenced by Cistercian spirituality. She was there first as a student and ward but, then, Gertrude joined the order as a young woman, still spending most of her time in studies of Latin and rhetoric. In 1281, as a young woman she had a spiritual experience which convinced her to spend the rest of her life on religious studies. She became a renowned and loved counselor of other nuns. She became highly influential because of her autobiographical writings, especially because of the way her spirituality is permeated by the liturgy of the hours, and also because of her experience of the Sacred Heart.)

Here is an excerpt from Chapter 22 which illustrates how mystical the liturgy can be! For many years I read such mystical writings and they encouraged me to yearn for more than I had in my somewhat faith is enough way of being a Catholic. When, later on, God graced me with mystical gifts, the knowledge of experiences such as those of St. Gertrude helped me not to think I was just "losing it."

Chapter 22 Revelations of Divine Love

I should be unjust in recalling the gratuitous gifts which I have received from Thy charitable clemency, if I ungratefully passed over what was granted to my unworthiness, by Thy most loving clemency, during a certain Lent. For on the second Sunday, as they sang at Mass before the procession, the response which commences Vidi Dominum facie ad faciem, a marvelous and inestimable coruscation illuminated my soul with the light of Divine revelation, and it appeared to me that my face was pressed to another face, as St. Bernard says "Not a form, but forming; not attracting the bodily eye, but rejoicing the heart; giving freely gifts of love, not merely in appearance but in reality."

In this most enchanting vision, Thine eyes, bright as the solar rays, appeared opposite to mine, and Thou alone knowest how Thou, my dearest Lord, affected not only my soul, but even my body and all my strength. Grant, therefore that as long as I live I may prove myself Thy humble and devoted servant….

When Thou didst display Thy most adorable Face – the source of all blessedness, as I have said, embracing me, unworthy – a light of inestimable sweetness passed through Thy … eyes into mine, passing through my inmost being, operating in all my members with admirable power and sweetness: first it appeared as if the marrow were taken from my bones; then, my flesh and bones appeared annihilated, so much so, that it seemed as if my substance no longer had any consciousness save that Divine Splendor, which shone in so inexplicable and delightful a manner that it was the source of the most inestimable pleasure and joy to my soul.

Oh, what shall I say further of this most sweet vision, if I may so term it? For all the eloquence in the world, if employed daily to persuade me, could never convince me that I should behold Thee more clearly even in glory, O my God, the only salvation of my soul, if Thou hadst not taught me by experience. I will dare say that if anything human or Divine, can exceed the blessedness of Thy embrace in this vision, as I consider, I may truly say that, unless Thy Divine virtue possessed that person, the soul would never remain in the body after a momentary taste of this blessedness.

I render thanks to Thee through the union of mutual love which reigns in the adorable Trinity, for what I have so often experienced, and that Thou hast deigned to favor me with Thy caresses; so that while I sat meditating, or reading the Canonical Hours, or saying the Office of the Dead, Thou hast often, during a single Psalm, embraced my soul many times with a kiss, which far surpasses the most fragrant perfume or the sweetest honey; and I have often observed Thou didst look on me favorably in the condescending caresses Thou didst give to my soul. But though all these things were filled with an extreme sweetness, I declare, nevertheless, that nothing touched me so much as this majestic look of which I have spoken. For this, and for all other favors, whose value Thou alone knowest, mayest Thou rejoice forever in that ineffable sweetness surpassing all comprehension, which the Divine Persons communicate mutually to each other in the bosom of the Divinity! …

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20 September 2011

Making Mistakes



I was at a meeting where we work on trying not to think we can control everything by doing things perfectly. I realized that senioritis is a GOOD challenge for that tendency. Why? Because when we get older we can’t even dream of doing everything perfectly!

Where do such follies come from? I think that if you had any kind of emotional chaos in your childhood home, that you think you can control the results if you do small things well. For example, in school we get gold stars or A grades if we do things well.

So, whenever we make a mistake, it reminds us of the feeling of chaos that afflicted us as children and calls up anxiety.

Remedy? We can immediately when we make a mistake laugh humbly and say – "well, I'm human – I make mistakes." Then, where applicable, we can apologize, modeling for others that one doesn't have to get defensive about mistakes.

Basically, since we are called to pray constantly, these are good moments to pray something like "God, you are perfect, I am weak. Help me."

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26 September 2011

Stamina of Previous Generations



Here at Holy Apostles College and Seminary we have an alumni day for priests who were ordained out of this seminary. The oldest one, Fr. Francis from Canada, gave this witness story:

"I was one of 16 children in Canada. Over time my family also took care of 140 foster children! I was a baker. One day I told the manager: I want to be a priest instead of a baker. I met Fr. Eusebe Menard, the founder of the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles. At the seminary I kept flunking out, but I persevered. I have been a priest for 47 years!

I guess people from families like his would be given a lot of graces to persevere!

Not that God wills that every family have 16 kids and 140 foster children, of course. Each couple has its own vocation. I wanted to have 13 children, in spite of having great difficulty raising my three living ones because of being a spacey intellectual instead of a practical mother. I would have loved all babies who came just because of the beauty of each one's soul; but I had many miscarried instead. I will see the faces of the other ones in heaven.

After this talk by the Canadian priest, the Rector read a letter to us about the gift from a priest in Florida of relics of the 12 Apostles. What a boon to seminarians some of whom have 6-8 years of study to go!

Tears of joy. The “gates of hell will not prevail.”

28 September 2011

Excuse vs. Accuse



In the group, Recovery, International, that I have led for some 18 years we have “tools” like the 12 Step slogans. One is “excuse vs. accuse.” I had a miserable example of this, mea culpa, this week. I wanted to try to save money on my expensive unlimited A T and T cell phone by switching to Verizon. But it seems that these cheap Verizon plans are very user-unfriendly and that, in general, Verizon is famous for poor customer service.

A dear friend went with me to the Verizon emporium and it took us 20 hours over 3 days to get the whole matter straightened out. Some of you got messages from me about changes of phone number during the course of this. I seethed through the process full of sarcasm and bile plus recurring fantasies of leaving the world in the form of throwing out all tech stuff and spending the rest of my life walking through the country evangelizing people, Franciscan style.

After two days of listening to my rants, my older techy friend, suggested that, after all, most of the Verizon personnel are young techy people who are not used to helping older clients. They just assume you will catch on quickly with a minimum of help.

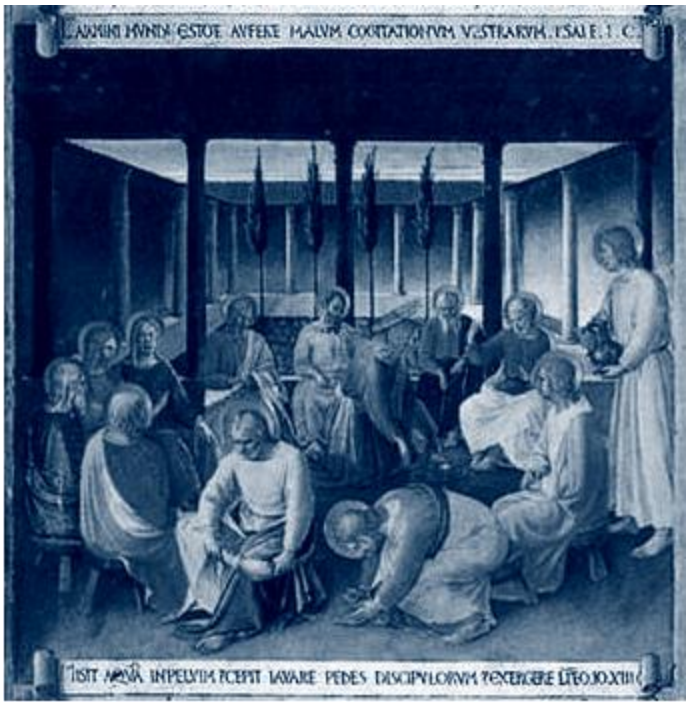
At this point I thought of our tool “excuse vs. accuse” and realized that in Christian form this meant that I was indulging in harsh judgment and actually sinning against charity. Somehow, when I do this with people I know, I readily see that I am sinning as I go along and quickly repent and ask forgiveness. But when it comes to strangers in business settings, it takes me forever to see that I am sinning – at least venially.

If this example resonates with you, it might be good to think where might the Holy Spirit be wanting me to “excuse vs. accuse.”

3 October 2011

Fresh Thoughts on the Deadly Sin of Pride

A wonderful priest gave a sermon the other day on pride. I found it so good I had to go to confession that very day. I am excerpting key images I thought you'all might find challenging:



"Don't be misled by appearances. The kind of loud and blustering person, drawing attention to himself might not be the prideful person. (Ronda: mea culpa on that description). And the sort of quiet and self-effacing person might not be the humble one. Pride is self-regard… it is simply looking at oneself…a terrible spiritual poison … We are attentive in a terribly painful way to what others are thinking of us, what impression we are making? How am I doing? Am I up or down? Which of us is the greatest?"

He contrasted this with being caught up in a good conversation where our attention is on truth and insight or the way a child plays, totally caught up in the activity. He quotes an image of another thinker of people on a bus riding through beautiful country with the blinds down and their minds on who got the best seat.

The priest thinks that these are part of the reasons why Jesus says we must become more like little children.

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4 October 2011

Leave Taking



I was telling a beloved friend that I was departing for a time. He looked at me with love and said, "our hearts go with you, and they will be ready for you when you return."

I thought, "what a loving reaction. How different from the possible look for shock, resentment, and distancing that sometimes comes with such announcements."

It reminded me of how my godfather, Dr. Balduin Schwarz, used to say, "The only remedy for leave-taking is gratitude." Of course, the pain of separation is directly related to the love between.

So, my prayer is this: I thank you, Lord, for all the people who disappointed me when they left me for reasons having nothing to do with our friendship. Heal me of any bitterness. Let gratitude and the knowledge that all human love is a foretaste of heaven help me to remember them with hope.

5 October 2011

Feast of St. Francis

The Scripture for today's feast day included those words of Jesus: "My yoke is easy." Usually I gag, as in "who are you kidding?" But today I got a different take on it. This is because I am going to Al-Anon meetings and taking in 12 Step wisdom. The "one day at a time" idea is particularly repugnant to this frenetic schemer.

But today I put the two together. Of course! If I am only doing one day at a time the yoke is not as heavy as if I am trying to carry the crosses connected to every future possibility!

The Scripture that matches one day at a time is the Lilies of the Field – and surely St. Francis didn't carry the burden of the future around on his back every day.



8 October 2011

Negativity on E-Mails



Recently I wrote a family member an e-mail that included a little joke making a comparison of rules in one part of the family vs. those that pertain in another.

She shot back a furious response excoriating me for insensitivity! I was flabbergasted.

After much loving reconciling phone conversation, she said that really she was pontificating about a tendency often found in our e-mail culture. She suggested that before putting anything even mildly negative in any e-mail we read it over and over and show it to another person to see if it could be hurtful.

I think she is right. Pondering it, I added this observation: when we see people face to face, the virtues we love in them shine through in a way they can't through e-mail. The love in their faces counterbalances words that can be taken in many senses.

A challenge from the Holy Spirit?

11 October 2011

A New Way to Explain the 3rd Commandment



I am reading a book on natural law ethics called *What We Can't Not Know* by Budziszewski (a name only Poles could easily pronounce). It is the best fresh approach to natural law I have read.

Here is the sample that "convicted" me!

"The third commandment declares that complete engrossment in mundane affairs is not merely tiring but debasing… (So, Ronda immediately thinks that scholarly work is not mundane but dedication to God's truth – or so I have always thought) Thus someone who says "My work is my worship" is deceiving himself – or else worshipping his work. Yes, we should do all our labors as though for God; but for God, we should intermit our labors."

I do believe that it is rather a grey area what kind of work is forbidden on the Sabbath, and there are certainly exceptions made for those who cannot earn a living unless they work on Sundays (did you know that the Saturday vigil Mass was instituted to accommodate longshoremen in Genoa, Italy who had to work all mornings unloading ships, but were free in the late afternoon and evening?)

Just the same, if you happen to be a workaholic, I think Budziszewski's formulation is a ringer.

18 October 2011

Roots of Rage



I had an incident of out of control rage on my part which yielded such good insights that it is worth it to tell this awful story on myself for the sake of making vivid points.

At breakfast at Holy Apostles Seminary we were discussing whether Catholics who are not sisters or priests can wear rosaries around their necks.

A Seminarian (who is leaving shortly): "No, because it's making a sacred object into jewelry."

Ronda: (Looking at the jewelry on the hand of the seminarian, a friend by the way, I grabbed his hand the pointed to this jeweled ring and yelled, banging my other hand on the table: "If you had a rosary with wooden beads, it wouldn't look like jewelry."

Seminarian: (grinning) "I don't like when people bang on the table when they are talking to me. I usually bang on the table back." (After this sally he walked out of the cafeteria)

Ronda (to the others at the table) "Oh, my God. I gotta get him and ask him to forgive me for making such a public scene and yelling at him. (I caught him outside the building). I'm so, so sorry! How awful of me. Do you forgive me? I think I picked a fight with you because you are leaving and I'll miss you. If I think of what I don't like about you, it's easier to see you leave!"

Seminarian: "Of course, I forgave you immediately." (Big hug from him).

Thinking it over I realized that the whole thing springs from something way back and what we call in Recovery, Intl. for anger, fear and depression – trying to get a symbolic victory. I was a relatively poor kid surrounded by upper-middle class kids who wore jewelry and cashmere sweaters. I envied them. I get a symbolic victory now as a simplicity-of-life-Catholic by mocking those with luxuries such as jewelry.

Symbolic victory means that by means of anger and sarcasm we get a phony victory over people whose ways we cannot change by quiet reasoning or inspiration. I can't convince Catholics who wear jewelry that it is better to give the money to the poor, but by sarcasm I can think I have won a victory. It is not a real victory since they don't change their customs. It is only a "symbolic" victory!

The example I always use to get this across is people giving bad drivers the finger. It doesn't stop the bad driver from speeding but it makes the one delivering the insult feel superior – phony strong because fierceness feels better than worrying about bad drivers causing accidents where we are the victims.

See why I put in the heading “convoluted conflicts” on this blog, and, heh, guys, aren’t you glad I live far away from all of you!!!!!!!

26 October 2011

Questionable Motives for Breaking Up Relationships



As I mentioned a few times I have been going to Al-Anon. I was reading this 12 Step literature and came upon a witness story of a young woman who said that because she always thought she could change the nearly perfect men she dated but couldn’t change them she would run from one to another. Now that she realizes she can only change herself she is more stable.

The Holy Spirit nudged me to consider whether that could be why I have tried 17 different groups in the 18 years since my husband died! The typical pattern would be that I hear of some wonderful existing place or plan for a group. For a little while I think it is perfect. Then I see flaws. Then I try to convince everyone to change so that the group could be in my own “image and likeness.” Then they resist. Then…I leave!!!!!

Oy veh! I have gradually extended the time frame from every 2 months to every 2 years, but still it’s pretty upsetting. Of course the only way I can do this is by living simply so that moving is relatively easy – everything I own fits into one truck load. (Now in 2013 everything I have fits into 6 boxes!)

Now the next step would be that in the next living situation I am in I will not try to change anyone but myself.

Want to pray for me?

29 October 2011

No one is Perfect



As a corollary to a previous blog about being upset when things aren't perfect I got another insight into one of my forms of this problem. Typically, in my experience, the teddy bear men are wonderfully warm but not inspiring in terms of ascetical heroism – as in some of them eat too much (duh! That's why they look like teddy bears!); some of them are not very neat; some of them … you fill in the blanks. So I love them dearly but don't find them as inspiring as…

The thin, gaunt, heroic ascetical types who are amazingly sacrificial and whose eyes are luminous with the graces of their "God alone" spirituality. But they are usually not as warm as I would like them to be.

So, after all, who do I know who is warm and also heroically virtuous and luminous? Guess who? Jesus, my Lord, Savior, and 2nd Bridegroom. As a dedicated widow for whom Jesus is my Second Bridegroom, He ought to be enough.

Of course, some man friend is looking at me and thinking well she's very warm but not very sacrificial or luminous and my other friend "X" is luminous and angelic but not so warm… And who is warm and luminous? Mother Mary. Isn't she enough?

Well, let's be thankful for all the warm people in our lives and all the luminous people in our lives and if you know any other than Jesus and Mary who are both warm and luminous, praise the Lord!

29 October 2011



The Four ElementsA long time ago a spiritual writer, Betsy Caprio, developed an update of the old Greek(?) ideas about the 4 elements being Air, Fire, Earth and Water. She transposed this division into a personality typology. In my opinion such typologies, if they are not elevated into panaceas for all the world's troubles, are intriguing and helpful.

Here is the gist of the theory. Each of us is primarily air, fire, earth or water. Then we have a second best of them, a third and a fourth. They come in opposite sets such that if you are an

airy person – highly intellectual – or a space cadet in your worst times, you need the balance of earthy people or earthy activities such as gardening.

fiery person – on fire with ideas, goals – or a rage-aholic in your worst times, you need the balance of watery people or activities such as laid-back people who “go with the flow” and swimming or taking lots of showers and baths.

earthy person – practical, loving of the sensory in life – or cloddish in your worst times, you need the balance of transcendent, very spiritual people and things like mountain climbing, flying, or retreats.

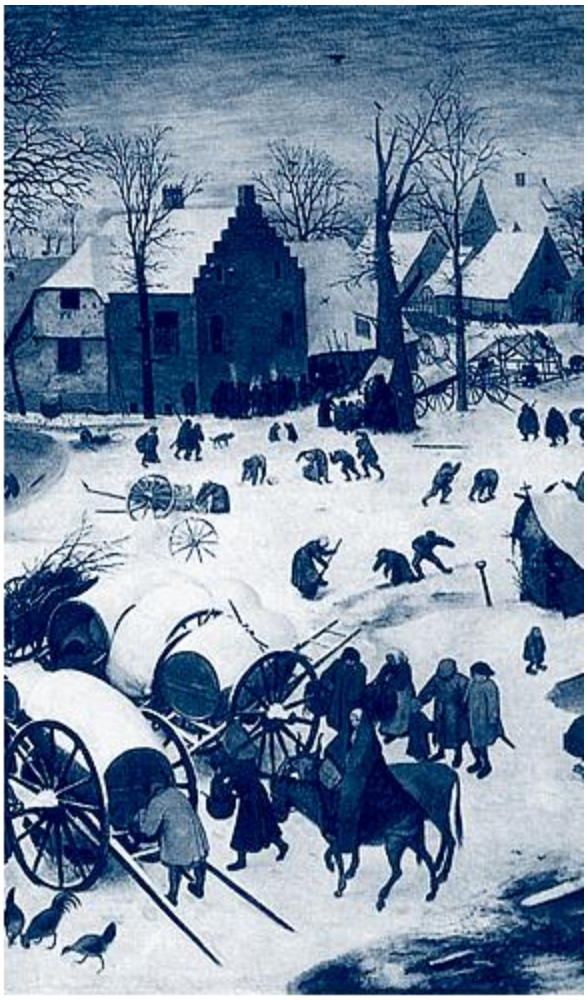
watery person – free-flowing one who delights in surprises – or irresponsible drifters in your worst times, you need the balance of highly motivated fiery people or activities where discipline is mandatory.

Why did I think there was some truth in this? Well, I am primarily airy, next, fiery, next earthy, and least watery and I find I just crave being with earthy people and feel a hundred times better whenever I swim, look at rivers and oceans, or even take a shower.How about you?

7 November 2011

Contingency and Powerlessness

This was the week of the big power outage in Connecticut where I live and teach. I have not yet reaped all the insights from this awful experience. The morning after the lights and heat went out one of the priests said “This is good it will get us out of taking everything for granted.”



It was a horrible feeling alone in my room that night expecting that any minute the power would be gone = no land-line, a cell phone whose battery would soon run out that couldn’t be re-charged, no heat, no light but a flash light and a prognosis that it could be from 4-10 days before power would be restored.

I had been in the big LA earthquake area, but in that case power was quickly restored and phones and emergency TV channels were on; it was not cold outside, and most of all I was huddled with family.

Since it was about 40 degrees in the classrooms almost all classes were cancelled. Happily the chapel is heated by some radiant ecological system unrelated to electricity and the kitchen stoves are gas – the cooks in heavy warm clothing were cooking with flash-lights to see by trying to make best use of all the food in the huge refrigerators whose electric power was out.

Soon there were gas lines at the stations from all the people fleeing to their cars for warmth.

A good moment was finding someone with a battery for charging the cell phone that fit with my little Verizon phone. The second night I chose huddling under my comforter with a flash light over sleeping on a hard pew, bag-lady style, in the warmer chapel. The best moment was finding that one of my dedicated widows who comes back and forth from NY State had a house with power back on. So we quickly packed up the car of another freezing widow, waited on the gas line and sped 2 hours away to our friend’s house. We passed many trucks of men fixing power lines or dragging away fallen trees on the way.

Many muttered prayers and joy to go to Masses in the light, still working, of Churches out of the outage zone, but basically a deep feeling of contingency; that is, anxiety that comes when what we depend upon isn’t there. “God alone is enough” was not my first thought or feeling. Instead I felt alarm that because of tech few of us have fireplaces.

Today I will hear about the local shelter one religious brother went to. The dinner conversation was all about different sizes and relative hazards of generators we might use if this happens again.

Anyhow, after only one long night in New York, the phone call came from the Rector of the Seminary – the power is back! Power! Yes! More power to power and prayers for all those still afflicted and the woman who died from carbon monoxide poisoning trying to work a generator without knowing how. THIS IS THE END OF BLOGS FOR 2011, SINCE I GOT INTO SOMETHING ELSE.

GRACES 2011-2012

(Note: There was a hiatus in my journal between leaving formal membership in the Bride of Christ Community and these entries. Blogs will continue in 2013.)

November 1, 2011 (from Anne of Direction for Our Times)

Jesus

My dear apostles, I am with you. I am with you when you are working, and I am with you when you are resting. I am with you when you are at peace, and I am with you when you are unsettled. You are unsettled less and less, though. As I watch you, struggling for holiness and struggling for My will, I can see that you are advancing. You are becoming stronger and more sure of Me. Even allowing for your human doubts, I can see that you are accepting My comfort daily, which makes it easier for you to come through your trials with less suffering. The greatest suffering is, after all, abandonment. The greatest cross is that of being left alone while craving the comfort and love of someone who is dear to you. My friends, often there is confusion in human relationships which causes terrible suffering. This part of the cross is heavy, indeed, and I, Myself, suffered this. It is during these times that I comfort you with the greatest and most tender graces because I understand the confusion which accompanies abandonment. For Me, it was important to remind myself that My Father would not abandon Me. For you, this is also important. I will never leave you. If you feel that you have been abandoned by someone you love, either through death or rejection, then you must come to Me for comfort. I will remind you that in heaven there will be no tears, no grieving, no heartbreak. In heaven you will be reunited in love with those who also love Me. Never worry about those who have gone before you. Pray for them and trust Me. The family of God is vast and includes people you know and people you do not know. You will rejoice in heaven and, even now, heaven rejoices in you. Dear apostles, heaven rejoices in you at this moment, as you read these words and acknowledge Me as your King. In the world, the cross was My throne and you, too, are celebrated by heaven in your suffering. You will not be forsaken and you will not be forgotten. I will be with you and we will move forward with heaven's goals for your life. Have courage, apostles. All of heaven assists you and protects you.

November 5, 2011

Fr. Kolinski, a priest of the Canons Regular of St. John Cantius who is the chaplain of the men of that order studying at our seminary, said a Tridentine Requiem Mass for all our dead today. I loved the Requiem Mass when I first became a Catholic even more than the Novus Ordo Requiem so this was especially meaningful to me.

This evening I was transferring old VHS videos to a portable flash drive. Watching Charlie play a portion of the Saint Saen's cello concerto I started sobbing and begging Jesus to tell me in a different way why He let him commit suicide. The answer I am getting is that he was already sinning before he committed suicide but that there was still enough innocence in him that Jesus could save at that point. He is playing his own songs on his cello in heaven now. And, perhaps, Maxi (my pianist grandson) is hearing them?

Of course such locutions and images are not infallible but it sounds like something I wouldn't have thought of myself and, if true, not something the devil would like either. So it is all perhaps a grace of from Fr. Kolinski's Mass.

I was lecturing about spiritual friendship in a class on Feminine and Masculine in a Christian Perspective. While talking about the good kind of spiritual friendship I had a new insight. Some such friendships do not fit exactly with mutuality because for whatever deep reasons one is able to share in a totally personal open way and the other is not, either by God's will, or other reasons, especially when one is a priest/mentor as well as a friend. And so there ought to be such a category - and the one who is open and vulnerable needs to make sure that the one who shares only fleetingly and at a much slower tempo knows that he or she is accepted for providing hospitality of heart and spirit to the more open one, and that she/he is not even wanting to ask for a mutuality at her/his own pace.

I had a beautiful experience today. I passed a seminarian just recently ordained deacon and remarked "You know I love watching you being a deacon. It brings out the best in you; your responsibility and seriousness." He replied, "Thank you, I don't always get much affirmation here."

This goes along with a priest here saying how my smile is so good around here and another one saying he would miss not just my classes but my smile.

It makes me see that my role here is not just teaching my insights and those of Von Hildebrand, et. al., and praying for everyone, but truly the spiritual motherhood of affirming seminarians, lay students, priests, faculty.

When the devil tells me that I need to leave for good, not just for the Spring semester, because it is too cold here even in the Fall, and I am too old, and I am almost senile, etc. etc., these experiences will be the key reasons I will return.

(I decided to spend the winter semester in California with my daughter for the reasons about the cold and other ones).

November 9, 2011

Tita (a dear friend and a widow exploring being part of a group of dedicated widows with me) said that if I have too much in the pipeline it gets clogged, blocked up and this makes it stink like a sewer. I have control of the valve. I have helped many, many people. It is a lie to think that asking others to help me is exploitation. If I ask for help and someone says yes but then begrudges

it, that is the problem of the helper, not mine. But trying to coerce people to help me immediately out of my need for closure is not right. (This is a propos of this sweet woman, Tita, trying to help me for what became 30 hours setting up a new cell phone).

I sent this e-mail to Carla and Steve and Diana for comments. Steve wrote back:

"Well, I agree with the last two sentences. I think it can get murky if the person saying yes to the request for help isn't clear on the parameters of the help available/possible and if the person asking for help has unreasonable expectations on what 'help' can be construed to mean, even in an emergency, i.e. 'help' doesn't mean 'resolution of EVERYTHING' and 'help' doesn't mean 'I can't actually do ANYTHING to help you but thought I should say I can which I now realize will only exacerbate the problem and waste another 4 hours, but, I'm trying to be helpful and that's good.

Example: John is hiking in the wilds of South Dakota and has been run over by a large pregnant/angry wildebeest and his left foot is hanging off by a wee thread. He screams, "Help! Help! My foot!" Vera, a fellow but unrelated hiker comes across John's terrible scene and out of the voluminous good will thrumming through her vei*ns* she cries out, "Oh! You poor man. I will help you!"

Now, John would be engaging the murk noted above and behaving unreasonably if he took this to mean reasonable expectation of swift and miraculous foot replacement by surgically limited Vera, who never went to veterinary school OR medical school (she's just a clerk!) and certainly isn't able to chase down a now not-so-hungry wildebeest. John *could* reasonably expect some company, solace, not dying alone, perhaps even the intelligence to construct a tourniquet from a stick and some clothing, a working cell phone and South Dakota or at least neighboring Minnesota to have helicopters.

By the same token, Vera would be out of line by getting angry with John for the excessive/extreme foul language and/or pressure applied to her hand/arm during extreme pain, as the hikers await the arrival of South Dakota's air ambulance and wonder if Vera really did know tourniquet techniques. Vera should expect that in his current state, John could be agitated and less able to measure/gauge his own physical strength and should be prepared to accept some discomfort herself. A reasonable evaluation of the situation and her own abilities from the outset should enable Vera to set reasonable parameters for what help she's able to provide in the given scenario."

Of course, this becomes a far more complex and nuanced situation when dealing with Verizon in New England.

November 20, 2011

I asked Marti (another widow discerning commitment to the rule of the Dedicated Widow I devised who visits me often at the seminary) what I should change since I am testing out Way of Love: Step by Step: a Hundred Day Marathon on myself. She said to stop beating myself up. I have been wounded. I need healing to accept the love God is giving me and everyone in my immediate family to help me be a joyful bride. I thought of Theophostic (not related to theosophy at all but a deliverance technique I think is valid) What is the lie? The lie is that I am not lovable enough to be loved, so I will soon be rejected.

From Anne, Direction for our Times

Jesus

Dear apostles, it is with hope that I come to you today, speaking these words to your heart. I am hoping that the plans I have for your life will come to fruition. Do I require that you be powerful? Important? Do I need you to be people of great wealth or great influence in the eyes of the world? Will My plan be threatened by your imperfection or your difficulty maintaining holiness in every moment? Do I need only angels? Or do I need apostles of good will serving exactly where I have placed them? You were created to persevere and even flourish with limited understanding of all that is happening around you and through you. Yes, dear apostles, I am filled with hope. I am hoping that you accept My love. I am hoping that you allow Me to bring you healing, daily. I am hoping that through you I can love and heal others whom you will encounter in your daily experience. I bring you so many gifts of knowing Me, both directly and indirectly. Sometimes, I bring these gifts directly into your soul. Sometimes I send these gifts to you through the soul of another. I am saying that sometimes you will be the recipient of My gifts and sometimes you will be the one delivering My gifts. We are so united, you and I. We are together now and when you are finished on earth you will understand how closely I worked with you. You will be so happy when you understand the extent to which I blessed others through you. Dear friends, I come at Christmas as an infant in a manger and you rejoice. Truly, understand, that each time you cooperate with Me in your day, you are bringing Me into the world. When you see how others were blessed through your fidelity, you will understand the fullness of rejoicing. Yes, today, your Infant King comes to you with heavenly hope. Beloved apostles, I instruct you to bring this hope to others, regardless of the circumstances around you.

Dec. 7, 2011

In a conflict with someone I realized I need to try to meet people on the common ground, vs. trying to drag them to my separate ground.

Dec. 8, 2011

At our annual Christmas No Talent Show Fr. Dominic said “Ronda is going for a while – she combines intellectualism and spirituality, witness and transparency.

December 11, 2011

If I defined myself as a servant instead of a leader, I could live anywhere???!!!!

December 19, 2011

I thought that renting a room at my daughter’s house in California I am kind of renting the Pacific Ocean for $1,000 a month!

December 25, 2011

I read Pope Benedict's sermon for Christmas Eve (see the sermon on my web www.spiritualityrunningtogod.com, scrolling to end of Dec. Amazing Stories) to get away from the commercial Christmas around me. I begged my daughter, Carla, to let me read parts of it at the lavish dinner. She said "Oh, yes, I loved it. I just read it on front page of Google News."

The Pope mentions how St. Francis of Assisi arranged for Mass to be celebrated on the manger that stood between the ox and the ass for the first time. Later, an altar was built over this manger, so that where animals had once fed on hay, men could now receive the flesh of the spotless lamb Jesus Christ, for the salvation of soul and body, as Thomas of Francis himself, as a deacon, had sung the Christmas Gospel on the holy night in Greccio with resounding voice. Through the friars' radiant Christmas singing, the whole celebration seemed to be a great outburst of joy. It was the encounter with God's humility that caused this joy – his goodness creates the true feast.

January 1, 2012

Jesus

May the peace of heaven continually surround each of my beloved apostles. My friends, there are times when the peace of heaven must pursue you, because, despite its best efforts, you elude peace. My peace then follows you, waiting for you to pause long enough to accept it. When you bring yourself into My presence, then My peace can absorb you and saturate you so that where you go, it can follow. If you are alert to Me, you will see that others are blessed by Me through you. Dear apostles, please accept that this is happening and be reverent about what I am seeking to do. Are you with Me in this effort of renewal? Do you seriously consider that I am determined to bring light to others through you? If you will accept this more fully, I can work more freely. If you move too quickly through your days, convinced that you are not achieving as many actions and tasks as you would like, then you may be missing what is obvious to heaven, that is, that you are surrounded by grace and protected by light. When you rest into this reality, you will see how effectively I am serving the world through you. Truly, I am loving people and comforting them through your soul because each day, Heaven moves into the world through the souls of those who are willing to serve. Allow Me please, to continue, and allow Me please, to sustain you personally. It is not My plan that you become dispirited and hopeless. It is My plan that if you suffer, you suffer peacefully, confident about My presence in your cross. I want you to work calmly, confident of My effectiveness in your work. You must be brave enough to love completely, confident of the benefit the world feels because of your decision to serve Me in whatever place you have found yourself on each day. Rejoice, dear apostles. Look forward with Me to greater holiness. I will protect My plan for you, but you must make a decision to accept heaven's peace.

January 2, 2012 This part of the journal is from Orange County, California where I am spending the winter in my daughter, Diana's house.

Dear Tita and Marti,

I had a great grace related to what each of you said in good-bye counsel to me. I thought you would be happy about it.

Yesterday I had a miserable time dealing with my group list for the book Last Call that had disappeared in cyber-space, and I needed to send 12 files from the manuscript to the group but had to keep typing out the e-mails of each and then getting stuck mid-e-mail. I asked for help. It was New Year's Day. As you suggested, Tita, I humbly asked for help but didn't demand a deadline on it. My daughter came 2 hours later. My daughter came and I got hysterical in the way you have seen me. I didn't throw the computer out the window or scream but I was mucho upset. After she straightened me out, I went into prayer and I decided, based on 12 step ideas to apply the Serenity prayer. I realized I can't change that I am poor at tech. I could give up or I could decide that instead of trying "hard" things and working up a rage, I will just wait until someone loving and proficient can help me.

Marti, you said that I need to drink in more of the family's healing love. Well, when I got upset my daughter didn't get angry with me, but just grit her teeth and walked me through. Then she remarked (she is in the field of educational tech) that almost all teachers over 60 hate tech and act a lot like me about it. I found this very healing.

Then, this morning the head of Distance Learning tech at Holy Apostles wrote he wants to team teach a course with me in the summer and have me on the committees for making DL more interactive, etc. etc. I realized, this is the ticket. If I am doing this with him, HE WILL DO THE TECH PART. And, since he is a young scholar, he can probably help me all the way until dementia or death comes.

I got tears in my throat thanking Jesus for finding a way for me. But He said in my heart "Ronda, not for everyone, but for you, having struggled to do computer rather than give up your apostolic teaching work has been heroic virtue." I would usually brush this off with the self-deprecatory idea that I just do this out of workaholism, but obviously I could have spent the last 25 years just reading good books for pleasure instead of battling tech. And He used my horror of sins of rage over tech to get me into Recovery, International, many good confessions, etc.

So, my dears, having given me such good counsel and borne with my fits over computers, I thought this story would give you cause to thank God.

January 28, 2012

From Tita regarding my Way of Love Steps: "For many people - including myself - it is good advice to get out of self and get a life. Your journey to the root of self is so sincere and so inspiring that stopping promoting this booklet would be a tragedy. It is much too fascinating to watch how the Lord uses your dedication to Him to expose things you need to change. What you share will probably put egotists off, but true seekers will come to appreciate your transparency and benefit from your successes and failures."

I replied: "What you wrote about my self-examination in Step by Step was so consoling. It made me think - "Well, God brought me up in a family where no thought went unsaid and with a mother who worked for an early psychoanalyst as a secretary, a Jew who became a Catholic, by the way, and this gave me the confidence and psychological savvy to think I could be transparent as a Catholic. Jesus then redeemed this trait by making it work for my spiritual progress instead of simply for egotistic self-dramatization (not that this is not there also, of course). Praise the Lord."

February 23, 2012

I had a sense of Martin (my deceased husband) having this big, deep heart and that's why I married him and that he loved me in the children as I love him in the children –Carla's poetry, Diana's art and love of life and warm heart. And Jesus seemed to say You are all One. I felt great blessedness.

March 9, 2012

I always want to be admired more than loved because I can earn admiration, I imagine, but love is vulnerable and I don't really trust it. So it is so healing for the daughters to be showing me so much love. I imagined because they don't like my writing and speaking particularly that they despise me, but really they are showing now that they just love me, not my ideas. With Diana this is now daily shown, but with Carla making the sacrifice to come to visit for the 75th birthday (of myself and my twin sister to be celebrated here in California) in spite of all her pain and travel being so hard….!!!! Thank you, dear Jesus, Mary, Joseph for these surprising graces. And, of course, you don't love me primarily for my works even though you are grateful, but for the innermost person of myself.

March 16, 2012

Barbara, my Al-Anon sponsor said that being soft and kind does not = being a victim. That is my perception.

April 3, 2012

Jesus to me: You have given me your heart, mind and soul, but you have not given me your life – the rest of it on earth. That is what 12 Step can teach you.

May 1, 2012

From Carla's poem for me for 75th birthday:

"A Song Sung By a Fish

There are those things that can't be said simply.

I think it's possible that nobody is born. We wheel around inside our mothers and only vaguely find one another, all of us

twisting like a swarm of Jonah's, turning this way and that in the skin of what either swallows us whole or becomes an ark. But a Noah is also terrified, anxiously watching the waters recede a little more every day, white-knuckled patriarch perched on the precipice of a vanishing oblivion.

Whatever I write here is wholly a preamble, a song sung by a fish.

If she were to die, this might write itself as finished, but it can't be done now: nothing that breathes will allow itself to be summed up while still puffing: every exhalation is a new letter in the alphabet of a life.

For some period of time, I lived inside my mother wearing the face of a wish.

I remember the hushed sanctuary of a thousand churches, the round braille of rosary beads passing one by ten through your fingers as Mysteries, back and forth soft Latin waves of devotion: the Lord be with you, and also with you: a thousand times a thousand times forever.

In certain dreams, my mother wears a casual cloak of rainbows and has made a covenant. Her world will never be destroyed by water: by proxy, I am safe.

I am not safe.

My realm is forged from water.

I see her in fragments stitched loosely at the surface. I do not notice that those who walk on water keep their arms flung out wide; that they move in the shape of a cross.

In other dreams, we face each other, so in those dreams, I have risen. I am a raven then, tight and black with eyes on fire. I am getting ready to fly to and fro, to and fro, hunting for branches.

I think I am a bird but I am still a fish.

My mother is a frightened dove. A thousand loaves later, my flesh will part and route into pieces and pathways, some of whom will face me and I will remember.

I am a crucifix swinging below my mother's breasts. It has been her hope to save me.

In some now, I am myself again. I think it's possible that everyone is born and born and born exactly into each moment. Everything else is a dream. Everything else is a wish. Everything else writes a sharp black cross on the sky with a raven's wide wings and empty claws. We are looking for a nest we left behind but it is all around us. We look up towards a tunnel: the light scatters and we are once again fish: small and silver, fleet with opportunity.

This is a preamble: the sound things make before they break, a rumbled warning before the earth quakes toward another eternal effort to swallow itself.

We are born in the water, borne by the water, slight boats on the crest of a flood.

We carry our mothers inside us when they die, whole in the way of what has finished singing and can finally be named.

There are those things that can be simply said.

Carla De Sola Eaton – a Tribute (Carla is my twin-sister, the sacred dancer).

"I pray that everyone, sitting cramped inside a pew, body lifeless, spine sagging and suffering, weary with weight and deadness, will be given space in which to breathe and move, will be wooed to worship with beauty and stillness, song and dance--dance charged with life, dance that lifts up both body and spirit, as we will be a holy, dancing, loving, praying, and praising people."

—Carla De Sola– from The Spirit Moves: A Handbook of Dance & Prayer

All the pictures I could find are gray.
A slender woman flies, her every bone
a twig. A knit-together flock of swords
contest rigidity. A bird in flight
does not know it's a symbol, doesn't fight
its own calligraphy: it writes a shape
made out of who it is. It cries its name.

Every gesture is a path to prayer:
it states we aren't statues, are not stones
with quiet voices stammering the words
we have no right to say. However slight,

there is a mystic quality in light
and how it gives that leg stabbed into space
the means to break a law. It calls a Name.

Weight and deadness. Motion is the way
to charge with life, to make us not alone
but tethered by the countless swaying chords
that glorify each atom in its bright
chaotic dance – there is no black and white.
The woman in the picture summons grace
and bids the dust to join her. El Shaddai*.

What have I got to hold the dark at bay?
I flew, but then abruptly, I had flown.
I dared not try again. A form that soars
may tremble downward, shaken by the night;
but an eye remembers if bereft of sight,
recalls this image's exultant face:
the way it says I Am and not am I.

*God Almighty, God of the Mountains

June 22, 2012

Barbara – Al-Anon: "to avoid making someone feel judged just say 'I' not you, we or they. As in, instead of saying when you are angry I shut down, say when I feel anger toward me I shut down.

She added, perceptively: A people pleaser likes to do everything very fast for everyone, but we should be thinking fun and free.

July 1, 2012

Jesus

My dear apostles, it is time for Me to announce Myself as King. I am truly the King of heaven and I am the King of all God's children on earth. I am the King of all that is good and I am the King of love. Most of all, and most importantly for you, I am

your King. Yes, it is to Me that you owe allegiance as a follower and servant. I ask that you speak of Me in relation to your contribution to the good of humanity and also in relation to your contribution to the good of the Church. Why do you serve? Is it not because you believe in the power and the goodness of your King? Do you serve Me because you trust Me to care for you and to care for that which is important to you? I believe this is true. I believe that you understand something about both My power and My goodness and I believe that you rely on Me to care for your loved ones even in their sufferings and rebellions. Dearest apostles, to make way for your King you will have to fall back from drawing attention to yourself. One falls back, in this instance, by giving constant credit to the One who is fighting the battles and winning the souls. And the war is for souls, dear apostles. I am craving allegiance from all of God's children because I am craving what is good for them. Those who are away from Me must see the goodness in you. You are truly offering the best possible message for everyone you encounter. Your message is one of love and welcome and you give the message as the messenger of the King. Be at peace. I am all powerful and you are on the side of heaven.

June 30, 2012 Carla's poem for Diana

Beta Lyrae

A star becomes a giant when it has

escaped from the main sequence; when it is

depleting at the source and on its way

to dwarfdom. This, a paradox in words,

is perfectly consistent in itself.

The star less massive, once upon a time,

had given itself over to its twin:

an anxious, pulling wight; she who would hide

behind her stolen bounty as she tugs

and draws; makes time run faster every year.

My sister leaps before me draped in purple,

her face a study: triumph gashed by pain,

flamboyant as an opal torched by fire.

A peacock on the half-shell orders

let it be / the same.

Gravity. Too much of it. She's straining

to join completely or to pull away

forever. In the dark, the huntress calls her

with ancient runic magic

spells / her name

--- she's off again. She signs and dances, darting

off one foot's toe she topples, slams the brakes,

sprays fairy dust between the breakfast napkins

a crumpled joke

that fails / falls into rain.

Old women, old women, old women, they cry

wither, oh wither, oh wither so high?

My sister arabesques, begins a painting

with two swipes of a broom. Three hundred grapes

give up their shapes and melt away to madness

but what was ever mine /

or ever sane?

Diminishing. Too frightful. I'm explaining

myself to clouds and eremites. I'm done

or nearly so - was I the bigger one

at first / at last?

Does anyone remain?

My sister twists in tempests, swathed in white.

Her face is bright, she japes, for she has won

some basket that they give for free at fairgrounds

her arms gang agley:

now, it has begun.

…to sweep the cobwebs from the sky

but we'll be with you by and bye

My sister barrels through me like a doorway

I do not see and yet believe she is

nineteen times as high as Beta Lyrae

escaping the main sequence, on her way

to clear the moon.

Diana’s return poem:

White Dwarf

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_dwarf

The White Dwarf’s shine is faint

when you are far;

when closer, she is everything

you are.

When purple hunts with red

the color’s blood;

Two by two, they gather

for the flood.

Uncertain Noah’s,

hot when they’re begotten;

their doves fly North the moment

they’re forgotten.

(A violet by a mossy stone,

Half hidden from the eye…)

And in those icy climes,

alone, apart;

the shortest line between two points

remains a heart.

(Bright as a star when only one

is shining in the sky.)

Sangfroid, sangrail, sans tu –

Black Giants fall…

A matchbox made of hope

and that is more.

Is more than all.

July 7, 2012

From Distance Learning student Richard Birdsall:

I think DL can work when the opportunity for authentic exchange is created. That opportunity is created by the instructor who creates an environment safe for the sorts of relationships you hoped to allow. Through your own honesty and transparency a place is created where students can honestly express themselves without fear of denigration or criticism.

The success of your DL courses is a joint enterprise requiring a fearless shedding of meaningless gesture and egotistical posturing. While a joint enterprise you had to take the first step which you did in your course texts, in the assignments requiring personal responses, and in your own reactions to our assignments.

Your desire for real exchanges revealing real personalities behind the anonymity of the web bridged the cyber-divide where we can so easily hide, projecting instead a false self. But you refused to do that yourself which invited each of us to respond in kind.

WHAT I WILL MISS!

Leave taking August 13, 2012 (when I left my daughter's house in California to return to the Seminary)

Seeing the Faces of my Family every Day or Evening!

The Jacuzzi, Pool, and Lovely Weather!

The Gorgeous Jump (my daughter's last name is Jump) Villa!

Gourmet Lunches and Dinners!

The Beauty and Softness of Percy (the large cat) !

Your Friends Galore to Sample and even Get to Know Sometimes!

Diana:

Unexpected mirthful fun!

Sudden pleas to stay – so I feel wanted!

That Beautiful Lively Face and Warm Lush Physique!

Great Advice, Sometimes Unwanted, but often really Helpful!

Hospitality of Home and Heart to my Friends!

Furniture Art!

Pete and Chris:

Strong, savvy, men to help and protect me!

Handsome Physiques to Admire!

Sudden Unexpected Smiles!

Great Sportsmanship – Darts, Volleyball, Swimming!

My Prayer: Thank you, God, for inventing the Fountain Valley branch of the De Sola/Chervin/Conley/Brown/Jump family. May my dear hosts be healthy, happy, and someday know Your love the same way or even more than I do and bring me back to more than "Another Day in Paradise!" (words on a plaque at the pool of the rented house)

August 18, 2012

My daughter Carla wrote: JESUS DIDN'T TELL US, IF YOU PROMISE TO REPENT I WILL COME AND DIE FOR YOUR SINS. HE JUST CAME AND SUFFERED AND LOVED US. AND HE DIDN'T DEMAND A NOVACAINE EITHER! WE NEED TO JUST LOVE AND SUFFER ALSO FOR THOSE WE LOVE.
I will meditate on this long.

September 2, 2012

I woke up thinking I should, jokingly at least in my head, start Talkaholics Anonymous for those who talk obsessively about their problems and work out solutions that only work in their own heads.

September 20, 2012

Diana's Birthday Poem to Pete

Birthday poem.

When curled up like a snail
and blue
yours is the hand
that helps me through.
I, brave and fearful, face the world -
yours is the voice that says, "Unfurled,
you're beautiful", and that is all
that matters when the day unwinds;
our blanket talk, our same of kind,
our silent world, the way your hand
removes the pain without a word
and when you speak, the dancing eyes,
the challenge spark, the seeking foot
that finds mine in the dark,
the hearts

lost to us now, but still enough
to tell us that love's just a touch,
a sigh away. Uncurled,
your hand, my heart, our souls, our world.

D.

October 10, 2012

Talk with Fr. Kolinski – stop thinking about the future. One day at a time. “Into your hands, I commend my future.” Pray over and over again.

October 18, 2012

Good friends are better than fantasy communities.

Fr. Dennis, sterling soul -

you stand as proof

there is a way to be

stripped of self-pre-occupation.

Eyes steadily intent

on Him alone -

on His Way.

I seem not willing to be like you -

but to know you is till

to be strengthened.

Without so strong

a Simone of Cyrene

to help carry my cross,

I might, this year,

have collapsed

under the weight of being me!

Like the restraint

in the feet of a dancer

waiting for the right moment

to stamp his foot down...

Your eyes rest

with patient pity

that the waves of my verbal bravado

might subside

so that I could know that your

and His mercy

encompasses my fears.

October 28, 2012 before Hurricane Sandy

Letter to Fr. Dennis: I see it in your eyes, that with God's grace it is possible to be detached and therefore liberated and at PEACE...

Well, the first step to change is seeing the beauty of the ideal! "There is no peace without surrender" said one of my long dead spiritual directors.

November 3, 2012

I had thought it was a false rumor that we give all of the 37 Vietnamese full scholarships to be here at Holy Apostles to study.

Fr. Mosey, the Rector, said to me, "it is because of teachers like you who work for nothing or for a pittance that we can do this."

Tears of joy that because of my simplicity of life thing and that of others here, we can help the poor of the Church in Asia!

November 14, 2012

Image of Spiritual Leadership

Some days your soul is soaring

And we, the followers,

Feel elevated to a higher place

Under the shadow of your wings.

Nov. 17, 2012

Fr. Dennis was talking about how typically men express love by doing things for others, not by saying “I love you.” He mentioned how a husband will get mad if his wife complains about not hearing “I love you” enough. “What’s the matter with you,” the husband could say, “look at all I do for you! Isn’t that enough to prove I love”?

November 19, 2012

Dear Carla, twin sister,

For a woman like me with a father-complex, how healing this semester has been. I have 3 priest friends and the lay Dean, working so hard to keep me here by advice and prayers.

Now they have removed the last obstacle to being here in the Fall semesters with the promise of a beautiful room for classes where the Dean himself will personally buy me a lovely quiet heater!

Dec. 4, 2012

Dear Fr. Dennis,

I was musing about how, in a certain sense, Jesus will keep me to my promise of return to this hub of hope because I will miss a specifically merciful expression in your eyes at table as you genially respond to the manifold foibles of such a variety of us.

I fancy that you make a very conscious decision to sit here or there with one or another ensemble with the resolution to fulfill the task of such works of mercy, waiting for the pause in bravado, that one of us may let the mercy of Jesus flowing through that glance, enter our poor desperate hearts.

Blessed be such pauses.

Whether I have captured your motives here or not, I cannot believe that you have not perceived that common bravado trait and its causes in the little group of some of my friends. Is it this trait that you lack that makes it possible for you to minister to us? My widow friend Marti is more like you in this, I think. It is not revealed in her glance but more in her inadvertence.

December 8, 2012 by Carla Conley – so much Martin's style – the beginning of her Adam Caedmon piece:

The Forgotten

Preface

On the third day, Infinity, delighting in Himself and His creations, plants a garden in the east, near to the borders of heaven, set amongst the water that had previously thought itself complete. The water, no longer a sole creation, is now unable to dream it is round and entire. It had been warned by the sunrise whispering stories of circles outside of circles, but had been able to maintain a luxurious deafness, as does a child alone deafen himself to stories of a sibling's birth.

The insurgence is comprehensive. The water twists around the uninvited garden and divides completely, spawns itself again as male and female. Twining sinuously above, the dark ocean maintains an illusion of stewardship, declares himself still king. But a crystal sea splinters and wanders north of the garden, absolving herself in slow, holy trickles: a fledging and utterly inexperienced immaculateness.

Then, to the dark waters above the garden, Infinity comes again, chortling with new contributions: the genesis of earth. The water seizes and tumbles the weak stones, breaks them down but cannot destroy them; has only grated them down to silt, or in moments of monumental weakness, lent himself to a marriage of silt and sea and nurtured mud. A bitter salting of suspicion: the war has come and the war will never end.

Inexorably, the mud slues north toward the shining crystal sea, toward she who offers, toward she who has become an unadulterated smooth translucency. The mud slides up the fingers of Infinity: blind, seeking and seeded. In its mouth, it bears a prophecy. Deep in the womb of the crystal sea, the fetal earth grows visible. It can be seen to be transforming.

Even as far down as the south, something solid begins rising up over the belly of the water: clots of earth hurled and huddled together, the footprint of a behemoth not yet limbed. In the east, the garden flowers and delicious scents waft on the wind. In the north, the crystal sea soothes and cultivates.

But in the west…in the west, a hard and solemn crust is forming, desolate and forsaken. It broadens as if stricken, flat and morose. The scents of the garden flee on bird wings from it. The mother sea can give it no solace: it has traveled past her grasp. Rock abides here and forms develop: prodigious darknesses, caves made for shrouding, oblivious to redemption. The great experiment has found a stage, here where hope is inert and traitors from the east poke wet noses into dry channels seeking victory.

Plucked from the garden, dressed only in the earnest dew-struck skin of knowledge earned at such a price, shamed yet still mostly innocent, as close as twin to his second coming but with no heralds and no sudden bright star in these sullied skies, the father of nobody is sent down on a chute of anthems and abandoned with his single companion. Near the Cave of Treasures, below the garden.

December 28, 2012

Martin, my husband, taught Carla and Diana how to make a house into a world. I can't do that because the Church is my home.

From Journalist to Blogger Again: 2013

(These are blogs that took place during the same time as the graces also written about in my journal that you just read. A lot of these blogs are short here because I took things from the old journals, as I reviewed them, so that new blog readers could enjoy things I wrote back in the 90's. So those parts of the 2013 blogs are not included again here; only the new experiences.)

Blog 37: Jan. 1, 2013

Topic: Attitudes toward Ministry

A priest who teaches seminarians was giving a lecture to them about wrong ways to minister. I happened to sit in on the class and I took notes on points that seemed to me to apply not only to priests but to all Catholics in leadership.

To summarize some of the points made:

The priest is a mediator between the people and God out of love, not out of power. He is not "the king of kings," but the foot-washer.

He will not be afraid that his weaknesses will be manifest, but, instead, should evangelize through his weaknesses as a wounded healer not as the judge; listening to what they say and what they don't say. [I didn't take this to mean that the priestly ministry does not include teaching and judging in the confessional, etc. but that these should not be done either out of a sense of power but out of love.] The pastor should not make it seem as "if you disagree with me, you are in trouble." He should not appear as a know-it-all. Some priests seem like giants of intellect but dwarves in the heart.

If the priest realizes that he has been wounded, then he puts himself in the shoes of those also wounded. He should not think of others as sick and dysfunctional, but as vulnerable brothers. They are dealing with their hurt.

The Church is not a democracy, but also not an aristocracy. The middle ground is ministry of love.

Blog 38 January 2, 2013

Topic: English Weekend House Parties 21st Century Style and Holy Day Masses

I am a big fan of English novels, especially ones written by the greats such as George Eliot, the Bronte's, Jane Austin, Dickens, etc. In many of them the plot unfolds during long weekends at manor houses. The sumptuous feasts, the hunts, the evening games, become for me a kind of archetype of old-fashioned hospitality. On such English weekends, Sunday morning saw most of the family and guests off to the old Church in the village.

I was reflecting on the contrast between those scenes and extended family visits 21st century style. Some obvious differences might explain part of the problems of weekend plus visits in our times. Contrast the 10 acre mansion in rural England with a small house in the suburbs in USA today? Contrast the butlers, and maids, cooks, handling all the physical things with one

harried mother imploring help from the visiting women to feed 20 at a table that usually serves 4 people with card tables for extensions on either end? Contrast some of the guests off at 6 AM to the hunt back then, now jammed into a family room to watch TV with empty six packs decorating the carpet…No wonder grumbling, sarcasm, and grim faces can manifest under such circumstances!

In a general way one could find a pattern like this: joyous arrival of family and friends with the feeling that one has the most beautiful, perfect, wonderful family and friends in the whole world; little conflicts about trivia with the feeling that how can anyone do these stupid, wrong-headed, dysfunctional things; large conflicts about politics, morals, religion with the feeling that one needs to leave all these people and join a radical activist group who all agree with me or repair to a hermitage; after sufficient libations of "sister" alcohol a feeling that I won't be able to stand it when this amiable group separates at the end of the visit; as the weekend comes close to an end the sour-grapes feeling that one should never give or accept such invitations; at the actual time of departures - hugs and tears!

My prayer: Jesus, You don't want us to spend visits of family and friends in bickering, harsh judgment, and anger! You don't want us to spend holy days exhausting ourselves in hospitality like your friend Martha? Yet You do want us to be close to family and friends even when there are real conflicts. We pray that we may find ways to emanate Your love to all and show our joy in Your most august gifts, so that others may also long for them.

Blog 39: January 8, 2013

Topic: Alice Von Hildebrand in her 90's

Before my snow-bird flight from cold Connecticut to Sunny California this month, I got to visit Alice Von Hildebrand in a rehab facility where she was recovering from a fracture. I thought I would tell you about the visit as an inspiration, especially for more elderly Watershedders or those who might dread the thought of living long.

In the year 1958 I had a great joy of meeting within 3 minutes two of the most outstanding Catholic women of the 20th and now 21st century: Madeleine (to become wife of Lyman Stebbins, founder of Catholics United for the Faith), and Alice – always called Lily by friends (to become wife of Dietrich Von Hildebrand). At the time I was an atheist seeking truth. For the "miracles" that led to my meeting these two holy Catholic women and their husbands and finding Christ in the Church see my autobiography: En Route to Eternity - Miriam Press or www.rondachervin.com click on books, then free e-leaflets and go to Saved!

Most of you know Alice Von Hildebrand from EWTN appearances, and so you only know her as a widow. When I met her she was in her 30's, beautiful, very European, eyes shining with loving interest in whoever approached her. All of these adjectives still apply. Just the same, even though I had seen her a year ago, still flourishing, having learned in her late 80's how to e-mail to

satisfy publishers of her articles and books, I was a little afraid that after her fall she might be so diminished in strength that our visit would be very sad.

My friend and driver, Marti Armstrong, also a dedicated widow, accompanied me through the corridors of the rehab center where we found dear Lily sitting up in bed, eyes shining with joy to see us. Within minutes she was talking not about her physical state but about the most important ideas she wanted us to be sure to convey to others. These insights will follow; but first a description of how she continued with her train of thought even while hanging onto a walker, and going through the corridors of the rehab at a rapid pace, accompanied by her attendant. The scene called to mind a response of a priest in his fifties. When I suggested he might want to build a retirement home on the property of his parish, he replied after a day or two: "You know, Ronda, I looked up the word "retirement" in the Concordance and I couldn't find it!"

Now to the insights I have been pondering since. "We have to baptize our pleasures." Lily explained that it is not that we need to pray for suffering only as Christians, but that we need to take in the pleasures always with gratitude instead of greed.

The other point she explored with us was one of her husband concerning "the theme of the moment." When choosing between two good possibilities, we must always pray to understand the theme. I recalled what was to me at the time of my conversion a rather shocking example often given in my own spiritual formation by those in the Von Hildebrand circle. If you are with a lonely person in pain who wants to be diverted by playing cards, that is not the moment to insist that discussing a spiritual book would be better!

Since the visit, a month ago, I have been working on the "theme" challenge. Sitting in a spa with my seven year old grand-daughter, I wanted to give her a little catechism class, but she wanted to talk about her dog. Why not postpone my desire to evangelize the dear little one, to follow the theme of building a bridge to her heart through the doggie?

However, the main lesson I took from the visit is that I cannot insist that seventy-five is an ideal time for me to retire in the face of Alice Von Hildebrand's enthusiastic philosophizing and teaching at age ninety.

Blog 40 January 10, 2013

Topic: How Catholic does a Novel have to be to be Good for Catholics to Read?

When I visit my daughters, voracious fiction readers, they have a stack of novels ready for me piled up on the bed in the guest room. I love fiction but I vet each one first to see if it is so anti-Catholic I shouldn't read it. Anti-Catholic could mean against the Church as such or full of immoral scenes, etc.

There is a middle category. Fiction written by writers who are somewhat religious, or very religious but not Catholic – as least as far as one could tell, but that have important moral and spiritual messages explicit or hidden in the plot and character depiction. A new British writer for me along these lines is Jane Gardam. Her most famous prize-winning novel is entitled *Old Filth*.

It concerns a hero who is called Old Filth because he was the lawyer who invented the joking advice: If you Fail In London, Try Hong Kong: capitals = Filth. The book is about a category of the wounded I didn't know existed called the Raj Orphans. These were children born in the colonies such as Malaya, Hong Kong, India, etc. who were sent at an early age back to England to foster-homes and boarding schools so that they would not die of infections at the colonies and, also, so that they would be brought up English instead of going "native."

The man who became Old Filth was such a child. I will not give away the fascinating plot. What I want to focus on is how even though the characters are mostly Christmas/Easter Anglicans and not "into spirituality" she manages to throw in lines about how evil abortion is, how long living together sexual relationships are wrong and unhealthy, and how repentance with confession to a priest can redeem and heal an entire life. In the Von Hildebrand circle it was taught that when reading novels not written by strong Catholics we must look to see, not how much evil is depicted, but where "the light falls."

I think it is good for Catholics to read such books and copy some of the ways to get across truth in this reader-friendly way vs. only the direct route of truth proclamation pro-life Catholics such as myself prefer.

Blog 43: January 16, 2013

Topic: Crosses follow us everywhere!

As you know, if you have been following my blog, I left Connecticut to get out of the cold. But in California, where most people never even put on the heat if they even have it, it is very cold this winter. So here is my "witness": "you know it's too cold when the physical plant manager at the Church says he doesn't have to clean the toilets because no one wants to sit on the cold toilet seats! They rush home instead!"

Blog 44: January 19, 2013

Topic: God's love is greater than the devil's hate

My spiritual friend, Bev Hinkel, a faithful reader of this blog, sent me this wonderful meditation:

God loves me more than the devil hates me.
I have nothing to fear except fear itself.
Perfect love casts out all fear.
God's love for me is perfect.
Therefore I will not fear_____. (fill in the blank)

I was writing to one of my daughters about a future possible project. Should I try or not? She replied in such an amusing way: "No way to tell until you try it. I suggest exerting forceful control on the part of you that likes to frost the cake before the ingredients are even stirred together, much less baked and cooled!"

The new techy Ronda thought that I could eliminate more manila files by transferring old photos onto my screen saver. I picked out 50 of my favorites from old folders and got one of my grandsons, Cris Jump, to photograph the photos and put them up so that every five minutes they would circulate when I was not directly working at the computer in tandem every five minutes with one of my favorite pictures of Jesus. The unpredicted effect is that I pray for each of these members of my family and friends even more often as their faces pass by daily!

I used to think it was kind of phony the way photos usually capture the best posed face of the person. Candid shots, of course, often reveal some of the less pleasing features that happened to strike the photographer as worth saving. However, since putting up these photos on the screen of the computer I have been thinking it is a kind of healing exercise. Why not be thinking of the most loving face of everyone I have known, instead of some expression manifesting conflicts with me! And since they are smiling in the photo I can feel loved whereas in ordinary life sometimes those faces are not smiling at me. A foretaste of the resurrected body in heaven?

Blog 45: January 21, 2013

Topic: Ministry to the Homebound

When I joined the Legion of Mary again here in California, I thought I would love best to go door to door because I have such a zeal for evangelization. For lots of reasons that isn't such a good choice: physically, it is hard for me to stand outside talking to people vs. being seated; but psychologically, I tend to argue when I meet someone who doesn't accept Catholic teaching. I noticed that my Legion partners gently flow with love toward the ignorant in a way that seems better.

So, when it turned out there was a need for another person to help with Eucharistic ministry to the homebound, I thought I would try. Especially I wanted to try because I am always hope, hope, hoping that if I am ever home-bound daily communicants at the Church would bring my Savior to me more than once a week.

What I found this Sunday doing Eucharistic ministry to the home-bound is that I can almost "feel" the grace coming out of the pix (the golden or silver holder) into my hands. Then I see how lamb-like the home-bound are! In one respect or another they might have been arrogant or feisty at former times of their lives, but now they are just trapped by the ailments of their bodies with eyes full of gratitude that we come to them to visit and that we bring them their source of hope for eternity.

My partner, a former businessman, does this ministry in his elderly years to make up for years in the past of a rather luxurious life-style. When he retired, he got the grace to want to come to daily Mass and, then, asked Jesus to use him in service to the Church. He jumped into Legion of Mary with both feet.

After a few hours of home visits with Jesus I thought, maybe this is not just for them, but for me, because this way I get more out of my head into my heart.

Blog 46, January 29, 2013

Topic: 2 Great Books out of Africa and Germany

I happened to be reading two stunning books in the same week involving the type of courage we need for our times in our society. One is Chinua Achebe's Nigerian novel entitled *Things Fall Apart*. Considered to be the most popular novel ever written by an African writer, it describes the contrast between tribal life in a village long ago, before and after the coming of Anglican missionaries. The descriptions of life in that village display a mixture of laudable tribal kinship solidarity with peculiar pagan fears including the idea that twins come from bad spirits and have to be done away with immediately. Everything considered bad is thrown into what is called "the evil forest." When the missionaries come the people are flabbergasted that the Christians are willing to build their church in the evil forest given them free by the tribal leaders who imagine their gods will destroy these crazy men immediately. The cheerful survival of the missionaries in the evil forest and the beautiful singing of Christian hymns plays a large role in opening the villagers to conversion! What struck me was the incredible courage, in the Lord, of the missionaries, to come into so alien a place and risk death to bring Jesus to these peoples.

Simultaneously I am reading a biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by Eric Metaxis. Many years ago I read Bonhoeffer's book about ethics and was surprised at how much this evangelical German pastor emphasized natural law. Of course I knew that he died in the concentration camp for his collaboration with those plotting to kill Hitler. Reading the long biography, however, provides quite new perspectives. For example, as a young man, waiting until he became twenty-five to be ordained, he visited the US and sat in on classes at Union Theological in New York. Way back then, in the 1920's, the seminarians were already mocking basic Christian doctrines and de-mythologizing Scripture. His impression of American Christianity would have been totally negative except that someone took him to a black Church in Harlem. There he encountered the vehement, yearning, love for Jesus in the black Gospel churches. It made a deep impression on this highly sophisticated European theologian.

Reading of those many German pastors who openly defied Hitler's attempt to found a German Church that would replace Lutheran doctrine with pagan, anti-Semitic, eugenics philosophy, and totalitarian views, gave me hope for us as we battle in our time against dissent and compromise as Catholics.

Blog 47 February 4, 2013

Topic: Attitudes toward the Body and Attitudes toward Death

I have been reading a long biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the famous Lutheran theologian of Germany during WWII who was part of the plot to kill Hitler.

Reading these words written right before he was hung in retaliation, I had many thoughts.

"Death!

Come now, thou greatest of feasts on the journey to freedom eternal, death, cast aside all the burdensome chains, and demolish the walls of our temporary body, the walls of our souls that are blinded, so that at last we may see that which here remains hidden. Freedom, how long we have sought thee is in discipline, action and suffering; dying, we now may behold thee revealed in the Lord."

At first I was delighted with the faith revealed by Bonhoeffer at a time of maximum tension. But then I began to wonder:

Do his sentiments manifest a dualism different from our Catholic legacy of Aristotelian/Thomistic hylomorphism where the body and soul are considered a composite rather than the body being like the prison of the soul as Plato thought?

Is Dietrich Von Hildebrand's idea of death more realistic, as described in his book *Jaws of Death: Gates of Heaven*? In that treatise, he maintained that fear of death is natural even for strong Christian believers and that we have to pray for grace to trust that Christ will bring us through judgment to purgatory or heaven. Of course we have examples of some martyrs, such as St. Laurence or St. Thomas More, who got such grace at the moment of death that they could joke about it.

Bonhoeffer's words make it seem as if we would not long for the resurrection of our bodies.

My prayer is "Father, creator of heaven and earth; Jesus redeemer, Holy Spirit, comforter; help us to heave our anxious souls up to You, so that we can hope even as we don't fully understand."

Blog 48 February 8, 2013

Topic: St. Josephine Bahkita –a Saint for the Battered

If you don't know her, google our new saint, Josephine Bahkita, whose feast day is today, former slave in the Sudan, brutalized, who became a holy nun. Her forgiveness of her tormentors will thrill you.

About a different subject, a daughter of mine was advised to deal with painful hormone problems by taking a contraceptive pill. Even though she is anti-contraception, this would come under double-effect if a side effect was making the lining of the uterus inhospitable to any embryo that could be conceived in the process. Her response was: "I get this terrible image: a tiny thing but with a face and a toothless brave smile...it swims with great difficulty to the place that is meant to be home. But it is not home, it's a chilly inhospitable environment which will kill her. I won't do it."

It is a poetic rather than literal image since the embryo wouldn't yet be able to smile, but it made me cry thinking how many of these are flushed out every day in our culture of death.

Blog 56, February 20, 2013

Topic: More Insights

A few days ago I was talking to an old friend who used to be a charismatic covenant community leader. Gabriel Meyer, asked about a problem replied, “Don’t try to find Jesus above and transcendent of the problem, as if to escape to Him from the problem. Instead you will find him in the problem.” I guess is a matter of willingness to bear the pain underlying the problem with and in the heart of Jesus, vs. using prayer as a way to escape. The latter is also legitimate, of course, but when I come down, the problem and the pain is still there. But when I leap into the heart of Jesus in the problem, then I feel a sense that He is more important than the problem and will bring graces of healing for me in that same problem. How? Because I will give less weight to the various possible solutions to the problem and more to just His love?

The pastor of our Church here in California, with regard to the line in the Our Father prayer, “lead us not into temptation” said that the Fathers of Church wrote that the greatest temptation is not to believe God loves you. If you don’t believe that, then you despair and stop working for the kingdom.

A beautiful quotation from St. Augustine from the Office of Readings: From the Office of Readings during Passion Week Sermons on 1 John:

"We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as he is" - The entire life of a good Christian is in fact an exercise of holy desire. You do not see what you long for, but that very act of desiring prepares you, so that when he comes you may see and be utterly satisfied.

“Suppose you are going to fill some holder or container, and you know you will be given a large amount. Then you set about stretching your sack or wineskin or whatever it is. Why? Because you know the quantity you will have to put in it, and your eyes tell you there is not enough room. By stretching it, therefore, you increase the capacity of the sack, and this is how God deals with us. Simply by making us wait, he increases our desire, which in turn enlarges the capacity of our soul, making it able to receive what is given to us.

“So, my brethren, let us continue to desire, for we shall be filled (like St. Paul) ‘forgetting what is behind and stretching forward to what lies ahead, I press on to the prize to which I am called in the life above.’”

And this interesting quote: “Reb Nachmann says that people only hate when they are sad. Imagine there is someone in the world I can't stand the most, I hate that person, and every day I hate that person more. Now imagine that you are at your children's wedding, dancing, the happiest day of my life, and that person comes to the door. What will happen? I will interrupt the dancing and run to the door and embrace and kiss my arch-enemy and I will say my precious friend and I will not be lying…”

Blog 57: February 21, 2013

Topic: Examination of Conscience

Someone suggested it would it be good to include in a review at nightfall these two questions: To whom did I show love today? Who showed love to me?

Blog 63: March 6, 2013

Topic: More Helpful Lenten Thoughts

Dr. Richard Geraghty, the 10 Minute Philosopher on EWTN, and Bob Olson, Lay Evangelist, and I do a radio blog once a week. You can find the older ones on www.spiritualityrunningtogod.com on the Open Door segment. Now we are conversing on Open Door about the Baltimore Catechism. The topic came up as to how it is that in describing in the usual terse manner why Christ died for us, it doesn't mention the word "love." I came up with an analogy about Christ dying on the cross out of love that you might find useful:

A family has a beloved dog. But the dog is starting to bite the neighbor. If that dog bites again, the police pick the dog up and bring him to the pound (hell). So the family goes to great expense (the crucifixion) to make a wire fence around the whole property to save the dog (the garden now becomes that dogs heaven).

Well, all analogies limp, but still I like it.

My pastor, Fr. Jerome Karcher, told us today: Forgiveness is hard but non-forgiveness is harder because we have bitterness in our hearts – the remedy is to pray for them from our hearts.

Blog 69: March 14, 2013

(Note: Rereading the blog below now in 2018 I think that even for those of us who now have grave concerns about Pope Francis, it is good to remember times such as these.)

Topic: Viva Padre Francisco I

Today was one of the happiest days of my life. Tears of joy, like and unlike the tears of joy when Cardinal Ratzinger became Benedict XVI, even more of a surprise. The like part was joy that forces of dissent in the Church didn't reach to the top. The unlike part is that Pope Francis combines magisterial orthodoxy with such a love for justice and for the poor. All the Popes of recent times have those features as well, but he seems to have them in super-abundance including simplicity of life. For forty years as a Catholic teacher I been insisting that it is not right for anyone to live in luxury if others are starving and here, apparently, is a Pope who makes that visible by riding the bus and fighting for social justice in South America where there is such a disparity between rich and poor and not, as far as I know, fraudulently poor.

Blog 71: March, 2013

Topic: Denial

One person is in denial that over-eating is gluttony – after all it's not the innermost circle of Dante's hell! Another person is in denial of harshly judging people who over-eat? Another person is in denial that harsh judgment of others for their harsh judgments all day long, is also a harsh judgment!

I love humble sinners who admit to their defects and sins and beg us to pray for them. What upsets me is those, like me sometimes, who are busy reciting the sins of others and rarely talk about their own defects and sins as things that need brotherly and sisterly prayer. Denial is not being weak. It's pretending one is not weak out of pride or fear that others will judge us harshly if we admit these things. Of course, usually they are judging us harshly even when we never mention those sins.

I realize that a therapist would say, people are in denial because they have been so wounded as children by harshness of parents and others that they cannot bear to open themselves to more judgment and instead try to hide their defects and sins as much as possible. I believe this is true, but then we need to ask for prayers for healing of our wounds and get spiritual and/or psychological counsel vs. putting up a façade of how flawless we are.

So what are you in denial of the sinfulness of: here's a few we rarely hear of from the pulpit: being in debt from wanting more luxuries than one can afford and putting it on the credit card instead of enjoying a simpler life-style? gossiping about the faults of others more than we pray for each one; Envying those who wallow in sins we wish we could commit without guilt? Unhealthy dependencies? Trusting in fallible humans and then wallowing in disappointment when they fail us vs. trusting in Jesus our Savior?...Making idols of our successes by boasting of them vs. giving all the credit to God for the talents He has given us?

Want to add to the list?

Happy end of Lent in case you want to squeeze in one more Confession before Good Friday?

And be sure pray for dear Ronda to stop enjoying calling people on their denial! Doing it in a witty manner probably isn't enough of an excuse, is it? So be sure to judge me harshly for writing this blog! Smile! See why God made sure that being a woman I would never be preaching from the pulpit?

My prayer: dear Jesus, in Your mercy, liberate us from these layers of judgment even as you heal us of the wounds that can lead us to defensive denial. Pour Your love into us that we may be both merciful and authentic at the same time.

Blog 74: March 20, 2013

Topic: Airplane Evangelization

Dear Readers,

I made it safely for 2 weeks back East. On the way I had an amazing experience. I had a connection in Atlanta. Half the people got on the plane and then they announced that due to hail on the jetway, we had to wait before getting on the plane. Meanwhile the time of departure kept changing. The pilot actually visited us in the waiting area and apologized for the delay. That was

surprising but not so far out. Later, when we got into the plane 3 hours later, we were told that there could be something wrong with the tail of the plane and that within the next half hour or so the maintenance would come and either the plane would be grounded or we would leave. Then, he added:

"I am sorry my airline is very inefficient about handling such situations."

Pondering this I started thinking that this was kind of risky for him to say. Suppose they told us we had to stay the night in a motel but since it was weather related we would have to pay. Someone could insist that since even the captain said it was inefficiency related, the airline had to pay.

Ronda to Flight Attendant: I'd like to compliment the pilot on the way out on taking this risk because he seemed to care more about us being inconvenienced than about the reputation of the airline.

Attendant: Of course, he'll talk to you. He is that kind of man.

With an hour or two to think up what I would say I wound up with this little speech:

"I teach seminarians ethics, and I want to tell them about the wonderful thing you just did, taking this risk…

He looked mildly pleased and said thank you for telling him.

And, "I am 75 and I was thinking this is the last misery delay I am going to go through. I am quitting travel. But because of what you did I thought "Heh, traveling I could meet wonderful people. So I'll go Delta since they have pilots like you."

He smiled and said "It's Delta's policy to be honest."
I replied, "Well, I've been traveling for 45 years and this is the first time I ever heard such honesty."

Besides this, the man next to me in the row was a very tired Mexican man. He wanted to sleep, not talk. But toward the end when he was awake in my halting Spanish I talked to him about his work in construction as a painter, about dedicated widows, and late vocation priests at the seminary, etc. He seemed pleased I talked to him.

Blog 78: April 5, 2013

Topic: How to convert atheists?

This subject came up recently. There was a famous Jewish background but atheistic philosopher, Mortimer Adler, who was converted primarily by St. Thomas Aquinas' 5 Ways to prove the existence of God. That is rare. Most atheists become convinced in the reality of God and/or the Divinity of Christ because of many diverse kinds of religious experiences. C.S. Lewis, for example, was moved to consider the reality of God because of the virtues he found in Christian friends, but then by the famous argument in Mere Christianity that Christ was either a mad-man, a liar, or really God as He claimed.

Here are some examples of conversions in my own family from atheism. Myself you can find on www.rondachervin.com free e-books – leaflets - the one called Saved: the story of Ronda Chervin's conversion. (You may have read this earlier in this book or other books. If so, skip ahead!)

My twin-sister thought I was crazy to think God existed or that Christ was divine. She was a materialist when I converted at 21. What got her started toward her conversion to the Catholic faith a few years later was that she suddenly saw my soul in the midst of a conversation. She saw it in my eyes. This religious experience got her to think maybe immaterial things exist such as souls.

It is my belief that many people convert from atheism in relation to their highest value. My sister's highest value was beauty. She was a modern dancer at the time. But she also loved the beauty of classical music. She would listen to Verdi's Requiem over and over again and she got a sense of Christ from that music. Also she loved St. Augustine's Confessions.

My mother, brought up as an atheist, and an ex-Communist, thought I was crazy, also. From the loving friendship of many Catholics, she begin to look into the faith. For her friendship love was the highest value. She converted some 10 years after I and my sister became Catholics.

My husband was brought up orthodox Jewish. His story can be found in the book of stories called Bread from Heaven sold by the Association of Hebrew Catholics. Basically, when he was a youth he wandered out of the Jewish ghetto on the lower East Side and came to the public library. Reading from A-Z he came upon Jesus. He was fascinated. He became an atheist as a teen, as did many second generation American Jews. He met me in his 40's. He thought he might find Jesus through osmosis if he married a former Jew who was a Catholic, even though I was an atheist with only a cultural Jewish background. I prayed and prayed he would have a vision of Jesus. Once he was near a huge crucifix in Rome and Jesus said in his heart: You need me more than I need you! He was not a philosopher but a fiction writer. He spent 20 years working on a novel about Christ and Satan in the Desert, the question being how can Jesus tell us to be lambs when to survive we have to be wolves. This book Children of the Breath, available from CMJ Marian publishers ends with Jesus leaving the desert to become the sacrificial lamb. He became a Catholic at 60 years old partly by reading the Baltimore Catechism which was much clearer than the many books priests and philosophers gave him to read. His highest value was life and he longed for the eternal life Jesus promised. When he asked a famous Jewish convert why He became a Catholic, that convert, Charles Rich, said simply: "because you get more." Appealing, in this way, to a similar background on the Lower East Side filled with push-carts!

My father was baptized in the Presbyterian Church because of his Christian mother. He became an atheist at age 12. So strong was his atheism that he spend many decades writing atheist leaflets, especially trying to prove that the famous American Presidents were all atheists. He was alarmed that his divorced wife and children would become Catholics. Nothing in what I gave him to read reached him as much as that I read a biography of Lincoln and put post-its on the famous passages where Lincoln said he could not stand the tragedies of the Civil War deaths without his faith in God. My father did not realize that many Presidents who were not Church-goers were still believers in God and often in Christ. Years after his death I met a Catholic

woman who lived near my father. She said that in the year before he died I spoke to a Catholic priest. I will not know till heaven what that conversation was.

I prayed for each of these family members every day of my life. I am sure that some of my arguments filtered through but it seems as if prayer was the most important help. We must always remember that God loves every person infinitely more than we do. If, as we teach, when they die they see Jesus, and they followed the light as much as possible, they will choose Him and be saved. We are not to judge how much they followed the light, just to pray for them. "Love covers a multitude of sins," Jesus taught. Since we rely on this concerning our own sins, we must do so when thinking about the sins of others whether sins of doubt or moral sins.

Blog 77: April 3, 2013

Topic: An Amazing Grace for an Atheist

Tease: Can anything good come from a Jehovah's Witness

One of the reasons for my trip back East was to meet the plane where Diana's daughter and son-in-law were coming back from Malawi where they were for 2 ½ years in the peace corps. While there in a rain forest village my grandson-in-law, brought up as an atheist, was befriended by a native Jehovah's Witness leader who insisted that he read the Bible and pray. In the course of this, my grandson-in-law realized that Christ was real and divine because he was trying to be a good person in the peace corps to save Malawians, but he found that he had no peace because of his non-forgiveness issues. But when he prayed to Jesus all the hate and anger went away! Isn't that glorious? Since he didn't like the fundamentalist ways of the Witnesses he thought he should be a Catholic instead.

He came to Easter Mass with me in New Jersey where the whole family was renting a house to celebrate. It happened the priest in the walking distance parish was an Afro-American charismatic who danced from foot to foot anointing the people with holy water and whooped it up with joy. Sean said that he had thought a Catholic Mass would be more solemn and supernatural! I told him to find an extraordinary form Mass in Nashville where he will be next visiting his mother. He came to the Easter Monday Mass and liked that better. He insists that I push him into the Church and instruct him and tell him what to do. (He found a wonderful parish in Ann Arbor Michigan and Jenny, my granddaughter, came back to the Church and they are now both daily communicants and evangelizers!)

(You can read his whole story in a booklet in the series I edited called Why I am Still a Catholic – on-line goodbooksmedia.com click on Still a Catholic and look for Sean Hurt.)

Blog 79: April 6, 2013

Topic: A Fascinating International Conversion Story

A man sent me this witness story about his father:

Professor Mario Hübner Lehrer

Testimony of a Life

1925-2008

He was born on October 22, 1925 in Nizankowice, a district (Przemyśl) that used to be part of Austria and was ruled by the now declared Blessed, Emperor Charles I of Habsburg and his wife, the servant of God, Empress Zita of Bourbon-Parma, in a multiracial, cultural and religious society that today is part of Ukraine at 3 kilometers from Poland. He was Austrian at his heart without undervaluing his Polish nationality, whose language he still remembered, as well as other Slavic languages of his native region.

Because he had a universal outlook, he never tried to hide his roots nor the languages spoken at home (German and Yiddish), mastering them to perfection to the time he died. He loved the German language, which he always spoke with an Austrian accent; it was part of the language of protocol of his people. They used it in their activities and even for the invitations for his parents' wedding.

This profound scholar had seen the light for the first time in a pious and sincere, religious Jewish home, that proceeded from the priestly caste, Zadik Kohen. He was the oldest and favorite grandchild of his maternal grandfather, who with varied interests was a businessman, active civically, and became part of Nizankowice's city council. His grandfather was highly educated, generous, and affable with a profound spirituality and prayer life; he was connected to rabbinic universities (Yeshivas), he is now buried in the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. His grandfather greatly impressed him and they retained a great love for each other until the end of their lives, both dying coincidentally on yom kippur, the most sacred day in Judaism.

He immigrated with his parents to Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, a totally different world from his native country that he never forgot although he was never able to return to it. An active and grateful man, he became part of his adopted country and made Spanish his principal language which he spoke without a foreign accent. A born polyglot, he also learned Hungarian, French, and English. He completed his Bachelor's degree in medicine and his medical studies at the University of the Republic, Uruguay in Montevideo.

During his infancy, adolescence and youth, his restless genius pushed him to become a voracious reader of the most varied religious, political, moral and philosophical themes. He sought the Truth in all areas, including medical, that made him become one of the pioneers in immunohematology in Uruguay; not only human but also animal. He investigated and made scientific discoveries through self-teaching and received national and international recognition. In his search for the Truth, he went through a period of atheism, something contradictory in a Jew that in itself necessarily implies being observant of the religion, especially after receiving a very good, solid religious education, at home as well as in pious practice. He also received religious and biblical

knowledge in community institutions from the Jewish community, parallel to the Uruguayan public education. He reacquainted himself with his Hebrew roots in Catholicism after reading the biography of St. Paul, a Jew who, following the orders of the Sanhedrin, persecuted the first Christians who for the most part were Jewish. Later Paul became one of the principal apostles of the gentiles (who were not Jewish). St. Paul's biography was the decisive instrument to his conversion.

Just as St. Paul, his conversion in the Holy year, 1950, through baptism was the fruit, not of a rationalization, nor personal convenience, but of an infusion of faith, a gracious gift given by God, not merited, supernatural, not contrary to reason, as explained by St. Thomas Aquinas, philosopher and theologian with an Aristotelian base, who many times used the works of the Jewish Spaniard, Maimonides.

After becoming Catholic, at different times he wrote many articles with religious themes in various Catholic magazines and newspapers with a national circulation. However, he never abandoned his universal interests, also writing about cultural, scientific, economic and current political themes. In 1954, he was the first exponent in Uruguay of the person and spirituality of the Jewish philosopher, convert, and member of the Carmelite Order, Edith Stein, while she was quite far from canonization.

A holy Christ-centered man, very devoted to the Blessed Mother, firm and immutable in matters of faith, morals and personal convictions, personal and political philosophy, without ever contradicting his beliefs, he always kept faithful to the Magisterium and always maintained a coherence between his behavior and his beliefs.

Having formed a solid, cultured, simple and happy home, based upon his faith in Divine Providence, he died in Montevideo, in his home after a long physical ailment on October 8, 2008 surrounded by his loved ones, totally serene and conscious with an image of Our Lady Mother of the Divine Providence of his native Nizankowice , and having close to him the special blessing that his compatriot, the Blessed John Paul the II had sent him. It was, without his knowing it, the Eve of Kol Nidrei, when the Jews begin to celebrate the Day of forgiveness.



On another topic all together: I recently had several intense bouts of anger, most of them concerning dissenters from moral truths held dear in our Catholic faith. I wrote to a priest about how to deal with this, telling him that I always try first spiritual warfare in the form of rebuking the spirit of anger, or despair…and laying it at the feet of Jesus. This is a technique described in great detail in the book *Unbound* by Lozano.

I was surprised by his reply but I think it is important for me to ponder and act on and you might find it important to ponder also.

"The Prayer to St. Michael and other "techniques" can be helpful, but are only "techniques" to help deal with a given situation. There's the danger that they treat only the symptoms, not the cause.

I don't know what your understanding of "the spirit of ..." is but I have noticed that often people are talking about an evil "spirit" (demon), who is tempting them into sin. The problem with such prayers and techniques (such as "I rebuke the spirit of dissent ...") is that it tries to deal with the problem as if it was something external to the person, making the person just a victim of evil influence, when in fact, we ourselves, more often than not, are the problem. Many people blame the devil for many things, but the greatest source of temptation and disorder comes from within ourselves. Therefore, although such prayers can be of help, the real solution lies in treating the cause itself--our vices, our disordered emotions, our pride, etc. The solution is found, not so much in prayers, techniques, and calling off spirits, but in changing ourselves--i.e., cultivation of the virtues that will squeeze out our vices and make of us a new person.

Virtue is what helped the saints love sinners… Patience and compassion helped them deal with all of the imperfections and foibles of others. Humility helped them realize that they have their own imperfections and foibles. We can't act as if we want to control everyone, in order that they march to our tune, when we want and how we want. (Ronda's thought here is that for teachers, like myself, this is particularly hard to get because in the classroom precisely we sing the tune and the students have to march or flunk out and they have to do it the way we want and when we want. So we expect the same obedience when we are in other situations such as social situations or family situations with adults.) Humility helps us see our own shortcomings and realize how we can be a thorn in the side of others, while thinking that we are always right. Common sense helps us realize that there is not and never will be an environment where everyone is perfectly pro-magisterial in the way that we want them to be. There is no such thing as utopia on this earth.

Remember that Jesus ate with sinners and didn't fly into a rage because they didn't immediately accept Him. We attract more flies

with honey than with vinegar. If we really want to convert the world and make a difference, we have to live among sinners (sometimes very big sinners) and show them the beauty of Christianity and not try to shove it down their throats. We also can't just isolate ourselves from them, so that we can feel comfortable. You yourself wrote that "Jesus wasn't a zealot and He had much more than I to come against."

I'm always amazed at how Providence works in our lives. These last couples days I pondered about what I might write to you. Then, suddenly today, as I was reading Psalm 37 in today's Office of Readings, it was as if I was being given exactly what I needed to convey to you.

Do not fret because of the wicked

.....

Calm your anger and forget your rage;
do not fret, it only leads to evil.
For those who do evil shall perish;
the patient shall inherit the land.
Surrender to God, and he will do everything for you. (antiphon)

And what is absolutely essential for one attempting to life the Christian life? Detachment from self. We all have to practice detachment from things of this world, things that are external to us, but detachment from self is far more difficult because "self" is internal to us. It goes to the very depths of our soul and is our most prized possession. Only when we strive for detachment from self, do we begin to see our own miserable imperfections and worry more about how much we offend God, rather than how much others offend Him because we have passed judgment upon them. We won't concentrate so much on whether others are the problem, and may begin to think that "perhaps, I'm part of the problem." Only then, are we no longer driven to control and demand. And it is only then, that we can begin to achieve true peace and love people into the Church through prayer and patience, rather than by force.

Blog 85: April 15, 2013

Topic: Unexpected Illustrations of Truths

I teach a course on The Nature of Love. In it we read *The Heart* by Dietrich Von Hildebrand. He has a chapter on tenderness in contrast to a kind of paralysis of the heart exemplified in doing ones duty by others but not with tender empathy.

In answer to a question of mine about tender emotions in their lives, an African minister in a Canadian parish wrote these words. They jolted me away from arguments about immigration policies to more of a response from the heart:

“Hildebrand seems to suggest that tender emotions are highly sensitive and are often compassionate, considerate and understanding of others and able to imagine the depth of another person’s feelings.

“When I first moved to North America the move was not an easy process for me as a single person. I came to Canada with very high expectations hoping for a greater life or as they say to peruse the American dream. But things turned out to be just the opposite and I found myself living just to survive to pay my bills. It reached a point where I experienced some depression but fortunately after living here for more than 10 years I have accepted the reality of living in North America. I work with many immigrants who struggle to adapt to the environments: economic and social institutions. Difficulties in overcoming these challenges have affected many immigrants’ long term prospects of adjusting to a different culture, learning a new language, and accomplishing in the labour market. For example, I know of many examples of skilled immigrants who arrive with a sense of adventure and optimism, only to be to be disappointed and sometimes overwhelmed by obstacles to meaningful employment. Some people that I work with have built up frustration to the point of depression and some have suffered from mental-health problems to point where it has affected their ability to deal with the daily challenges of life.

Being in depression is horrific. I always think how hard it is to adjust into a new environment. I often feel pain for their struggle especially those who come with large families. Out of my own experience, “I understand and feel the pain” of what these immigrants go through. I always try to share my own experiences of something that I have done in the past that may be helpful to them. Responding with tender emotions such as identifying with their condition is a wonderful thing to be able to do; the rewards are gratifying, to see those struggling with adaptation discover that the road to achievement often involves bumps, pitfalls, and setbacks. Adaptation is never out of reach, no matter how hopeless the situation might seem. Change is possible with the right treatment and support, and by having the right attitude and not giving up—even if you’ve tried and failed before. But by examining the problem and thinking about change, you’re already on your way.”

On another related question he responded:

“Most people in ministry do not like to be objectified but desire tender emotions from their spiritual leaders. For example, nobody would be amused if a pastor welcomes them, spent time meeting with them, or had a meal with them but later discover that it was only done out of duty or pastoral obligation. Such an action would be considered hypocritical or insincere. Duty without tenders emotions such as love and joy reflect that a person does not care and treasure the one they serve. When we love the ones we serve and treasure them, just the opposite happens where duty is not done out of obligation but out of love and joy.”

“One of the breakthroughs I have experienced in showing tender feelings is that it makes others less likely to resort to trickery and deception to get what they want or to get attention. When other people’s feelings have been uplifted and they know they are loved, is much easier for them to change or improve in their moral lives than if their lives have been taken for granted.”

The students had an option to “Describe key moments in your life when you were moved in your heart to respond in a new way to other human beings or to God.

He wrote: “High expectations can have a positive effect because at times help people meet their goals. Low expectations can lead to negative impact where people tend to underperform and may lose confidence in their abilities and show symptoms of dissatisfaction. I think it is important to have a good balance between the two in order to have a healthy church. Because of my personality type, I tend to have very high expectations for the people I serve to the point that it is becoming a problem to some. The expectations I have developed for the people have even caused me not to enjoy my congregation the way I should. I find myself disappointed because certain goals are not met. The end result of all this is that I am at the point where I am filled with ingratitude and unable to give thanks to God for the people he has entrusted me with.

The expectation I have for the people come from within me. Since I tend to be a perfectionist, I expect people to live up to my expectations. It takes much to be satisfied with what I do. I am beginning to realize that if I continue like this I am the one who will fail eventually. I need to remove the pressure from my shoulder.”

Blog 87, April 20, 2013

Topic: A different thought about terrorism

I felt compelled to watch hours of the TV coverage of the Boston Marathon suspects manhunt, praying all the while. Did any of you catch where afterwards some of the police chiefs thanked the TV viewers for praying for them! In the midst of this, the odd thought came into my head that one might think of St. Paul before his conversion as a terrorist. So he could be the patron saints for praying for terrorists! On more consideration I think that is not exact. He was an arm for the Pharisaic theocracy of the time in initiating terror for the Christians and that is different somewhat from the case of our present-day terrorists. Lord have mercy on the victims, on the terrorists, on every person desperate for psychological and/or political reasons.

Blog 90: April 24, 2013

Topic: Terrorism

I guess sitting and praying in front of the TV during the manhunt after the Boston Marathon massacre worked in my mind to bring up more general thoughts such as this one: In our personal lives, if we tend toward anger, are rage and threats a sort of emotional terrorism?

On quite a different topic, from Abraham Low, founder of Recovery, Inc. (this fits me to a “t” about anxiety about tiny things now that I am doing, so few “big” things).

“To (a perfectionist) every puny endeavor, each trivial enterprise is a challenge to prove and to maintain his exceptional stature. His life is a perennial test of his singularity and distinction. For him there are no trivialities, no routine performances. He is forever on trial, before his own inner seat of judgment, for his excellence and exceptional ability. He cannot achieve poise, relaxation, spontaneity. He cannot afford to have the COURAGE TO MAKE MISTAKES. A mistake might wipe out his

pretense of being superior, important, exceptional. With no margin left for mistakes he is perpetually haunted by the fear of making them."

Blog 91: May 3, 2013

Topic: Back from EWTN

I had a wonderful trip to EWTN to do a series for Johnnette Benkovic's Women of Grace on the book I co-authored with Deacon Richard Ballard and Iconographer Ruth Ballard called *What the Saints Said About Heaven.* You can order this from Tan or from the EWTN on-line catalog. I also did an interview for Book Mark on *The Way of Love* – the 4 booklets in 1 volume latest book of mine. It is presently being sold by Enroutebooksandmedia.

A double insight came to me about self-esteem. Before I left I was complaining to my daughter about senior moments. She is tired of this subject. She suggested this method: Take a sheet of paper and all day long make entries in 2 columns: What I did passably and Where I forgot something or made a mistake. You will soon see that the left column far outweighs the negatives in terms of ability to reach a goal, even a tiny one. This method helped me greatly when I dropped my boarding pass into the trash with a Starbucks coffee cup. Happily I noticed the loss about 5 minutes later and the pass was right on top of the other junk in the trash bin. Still, I had succeeded in 20 others things that same day.

Another self-esteem victory. I generally think of myself as an aggressive, confrontative, awful person, but a friend took a photo of me at EWTN. I looked so loving and sweet and humble! Okay, you can say, well sure, because you were imbibing the graces of EWTN, but it happened that the moment before the photo I was grumbling about a trivial annoyance. Seeing the photo was a big healing moment. So, who wants us to think that because we still have sins, faults, and character defects we should close up shop? Satan. And who wants us to thank Him for all the love that is in our hearts in spite of those sins, faults and defects? Praise the Lord.

Blog 94: May 10, 2013

Topic: Biography of Pope Francis

I rarely buy books, because I can borrow them from the Seminary library free, but I wanted to read a biography of the new Holy Father asap. I assumed since it came out so soon it was an old biography quickly translated by our dynamite Ignatius Press, but it was written by Andrea Tornielli quickly in Italian after the election. This fine journalist knows Pope Francis personally from trips he made as a Bishop and Cardinal to Rome.

What impressed me the most is his personal response to friends and strangers. For example, he had an on-going ministry to those in the terrible slums of Buenos Aires (note, these are not like our slums in the US – some of the people live in cardboard boxes or

crates!) The biographer describes the Cardinal seeing a beautiful prostitute selling her body for her drug habit. Whenever he would see her he would say "God loves you." Eventually she left her addiction and her trade, came back to the Church and is now learning how to minister to drug addicts at her previous place of "business."

Of much lesser importance, my granddaughter told me that when she misses me (she lives in a different State) she watches me on You-tube. I didn't even know I was on You-tube! Most of them are bits coming from a debate I did with an activist atheist (he stands on street corners telling people why religion is terrible and atheism better.) I debated with him on a TV set up on his web. His name is Justin Vacula – a former Catholic. You might enjoy it, unless he has cut up my stuff in such a way as to trivialize my golden truths!

A new venture. Ever hear of MOOC – this is a set up for massive on-line courses. The way it works is that, for free, people associated with some organization can take courses for a certificate. The professor does it for free, but gets all this exposure to his/her ideas. The students rap with each other on the site and the teacher can come in at will to clarify but need not. In this case the MOOC is from the National Catholic Education people, and I am doing Way of Love: 100 Steps Spiritual Marathon that initially was on this blog. (Check out Holy Apostles College and Seminary – on line courses MOOC).

An 85 year old priest substitute at my parish in California told this fascinating story. He was at the seminary and he couldn't make it with the Latin component of philosophy courses. He had to memorize Thomistic definitions in Latin for exams. He left the seminary and was drafted into the Korean War. When the captain in his boot camp held up a bayonet and said "what is a bayonet for?" and the men had to respond with a yell "Kill! Kill! Kill!" he had a conversion moment wondering why he had left the seminary for this! When he returned to the seminary, post-Vatican II, his studies were easier and he has served 50 years in the priesthood.

Blog 95: May 14, 2013

Topic: New thoughts about non-religious holidays

I tend to belittle non-religious holidays, but this year I had a few surprises. Going around to bring the Holy Eucharist to the homebound, some of whom were mothers and grandmothers, I had to see that for them flowers and cards, especially if their children and grandchildren don't live near enough to visit, was something heart-warming and deeply moving. Picture a woman of 85 in a wheelchair with Alzheimer's, in and out of coherency. She is fingering a large mother's day card with signatures of all her grandchildren from one of her children's families with a beatific smile on her face.

At the parish, the priest when mentioning praying for mothers included this time step-mothers and godmothers. I thought that was a loving gesture. My twin-sister, who never conceived though she would have liked to, always calls on mother's day to thank me for the family my husband and I brought forth that she enjoys as aunt.

On a different note, the husband of a wife who died in her forties of melanoma wrote me, “I feel no anger, but I’m kind of jealous of God now.”

Blog 96: May, 2013

Topic: The Pilgrim Virgin

Forty years ago a group of Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima women brought the Pilgrim Virgin statue to my house. I was in a hurry and not at all delighted when they opened up a large prayer book for us to go through together as a welcome to Mary’s week’s visit to our house, but, of course, I acquiesced. So, that made it much more amazing that when we came to a line about “Mary exchange your heart in me for my heart” I was flooded with graces of visions, locutions, and, even for 2 whole years, of peace! Now 40 years later our Legion group brought the Pilgrim Statue to a homebound woman. It was so moving to me to see her joy and say those prayers once more.

If you never had this experience, look into it.