In the next issue - May/June 2014

**Living Community**
The People of God
Precious in the Eyes of the Lord
Until He Comes in Majesty

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**The Bread of Life**

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Hope for the Future

“I know the plans I have in mind for you – it is Yahweh who speaks – plans for peace, not disaster, reserving a future full of hope for you. Then when you call to me, and come to plead with me, I will listen to you. When you seek me you shall find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:11-13). These words were written to the exiles in Babylon after they had been deported from Jerusalem. There was hope for the future, God had a plan. He would restore the people when they turned back to him.

These are comforting words for us as well, words of promise, of fulfillment, of restoration. Who of us hasn’t needed to hear words like these, that the future is going to be better than the past, that God will provide, that we need not fear what lies ahead.

God is taking care of us. He gives us peace in troubled times and signs of hope. The Lord never ceases reaching out for conversion of heart, life and life-style. The Holy Spirit is always about his work of re-creation, reconciliation and conversion. Trusting God is the biggest struggle for the human race. God only wants what is best for us. And yet people question, even reject God, when bad things happen to good people, when they have disappointment, discord in families and in other relationships, when things just go wrong, when it seems that our prayers are not answered.

But the Lord tells us that he does listen to us, although the answer to our prayer may be “no” “not at this time”. God is still sovereign and according to his plan everything has its time. We tend to be impatient even dealing with God – we want now what may be for our blessing in the future. The Lord wants our faith and our trust in him; he wants us to seek him with all our heart.

We need to learn to recognize the voice of the Lord in our daily lives, and the multitude and varied ways he speaks to us to reveal the Father’s will to us and the next step of our journey into the future the Lord has prepared for us.

COUGHLIN, Rev. Dr. Peter B., Editor of The Bread of Life magazine, has a Doctor of Ministry degree from the Graduate Theological Foundation. Currently pastor of St. Andrew parish in Oakville, Ontario he continues to serve the renewal of the Church through the Charismatic Renewal and the ministry of healing.
Our Mission is to promote a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit and His presence in the lives of God’s people.

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God Has a Plan

I can still remember one occasion in which I was preaching on the words of St. Paul from his letter to the Philippians: “rejoice in the Lord always; I say it again, ‘rejoice!’” After the Mass a woman from the congregation approached me and asked: “Father, how can you ask me to thank God for what has happened in my life?” — (actually, it wasn’t me, it was St. Paul who made this demand, but let’s stay with the story!) — “Father, I can’t thank God for my life. Do you know what has happened in my life?” I made the mistake of responding, “No, I don’t know what has happened in your life. Could you tell me?” For the next fifteen minutes the lady recounted an unremitting litany of griefs — real, serious griefs — that had formed a kind of theme song for her life. A very sad song.

All the while that I was listening to her story, I was also praying silently, but desperately, to God, “Lord, please give me an answer to help this poor woman.” The answer came. At the end of her tragic tale I was able to say to her, “I’m not asking you to thank God for your life; I’m asking you to thank God for God. All of life experiences are a mixture of joy that can’t be trusted and of grief that seems to stay. Only God brings us pure, trustworthy joy. Only God can be counted on. It’s only in God that we can rejoice at all times.”

It seems to me that this little incident might serve to help us better understand God’s “macro” plan for our world and his “micro” plan for our personal lives. For instance, it might help us to understand the resistance that many people have toward the idea of a perfect plan from God. For they say, could a perfect plan include suffering and tragedy?

As Christians, we are committed to the belief that God’s loving plan is unfolding as it should. However, there’s a potential pitfall to this belief that we must carefully
avoid. The danger is that we might superimpose our own “plan” on God’s plan. The danger is that we might attempt to justify horrible events that should not be justified. We might be tempted to skip over truly tragic incidents and, by doing so, to trivialize the suffering in such incidents. We might try too much to explain the mysteries of God’s plan according to our own very limited understanding. In explaining heartache and tragedy we might in reality be “explaining them away.”

We might find ourselves in the place of Job’s three comforter-friends in the Biblical story that bears his name. Remember, at the end of the story God was pleased with Job, with Job who railed against God’s plan. God was NOT pleased with Job’s friends, who claimed to speak for him and to justify him. In “explaining” God they were “explaining away” Job! God fixed that – and them – by the end of the story!

No wonder that so much of modern thought (in existentialism, positivism, and evolutionary theory for instance) tries to disparage the idea of a divine plan. And yet, I’m still convinced that the answer God gave me for my aggrieved woman friend is the right one. God does have a perfect and a loving plan for our lives: it is God Himself in our lives. God’s plan is, in reality, a Person. It is the faithful presence of Jesus in the midst of our lives, of our world and of our sufferings.

When Jesus died on the Cross for us, He absorbed all the absurdity, the crushing chaotic disorder, the dark unpredictability of life into himself. At the same time he gave us the possibility of a new start in a new plan. This new plan does not ignore the place of what can seem to be the cruel mindlessness of life, but actually sets out from that place. The cross of Jesus Christ helps us to understand that the tragic element of our lives and of our world – our own crosses – is the raw material from which God can bring forth a greater plan. It’s for this reason that St. Paul could say in 1Cor. 2: 1-2 “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” And, as he wrote earlier in the same letter: “We preach Christ crucified; a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength”(1Cor. 1: 23-25).

At every Mass, the church instructs us about this wise plan of God, when she has us pray, at the conclusion of the Eucharistic prayer, “through Him, with Him and in Him.” That is, through Jesus, with Jesus and in Jesus. Let’s look at this.

We pray “through Jesus,” he is our Way (Jn. 14:6). In his commentary on the Gospel of John, William Barclay has this to say: “Suppose we are in a strange town and ask for directions. Suppose the person says, ‘take the first to the right and the second to the left. Cross the square, go past the church, take the third on the right and the road you want is fourth on the left.’ The chances are that we will be lost before we get halfway. But suppose the person we ask says ‘Come, I’ll take you there’. In that case, the person, to us, IS the way, and we cannot miss it. That is what Jesus does for us. He does not only give advice and directions. He takes us by the hand and leads us. He strengthens us and guides us personally every day. He does not
tell us about the way; He is the Way” (pg.157).

Because Jesus is the Way in this sense, we do not see his plan from beginning to end. Indeed, we don’t really need to see his plan in its entirety. We walk in faith, in trust, not demanding to see our destination, but walking in the mystery, and letting God unfold his plan step by step, and day by day, one day at a time. We trust in the truth of St. Paul’s words in Romans 8:28: “We know that all things work to the good for those who love God, those whom he has called according to his plan.”

We pray at Mass “with Jesus.” Jesus is our brother in all things but sin. He is the fully human one, the true son of man. We know that Jesus came to reveal God to us. Do we know that he came to reveal ourselves to ourselves as well? Just as God is a mystery to us, so we are mystery to our own selves. We don’t fully know what it means to be truly human. Jesus, the son of man, can show us the truly human. The plan of God is to exchange the stony heart within us for a heart of flesh, according to the pattern of the heart of Jesus. God’s Plan for us in Jesus is to make us, not super-human, but more human. Though we cannot always understand how his plan is transforming us, yet we trust that He will allow nothing to happen to harden us, to dehumanize us. For, he has the “human touch.”

At the Mass we pray “in Jesus.” There’s a greatness in Jesus, just as there is a greatness in God’s plan for us. All that happens to us happens in this greatness. God’s plan for us would have to fulfill and to surpass all our own desires and plans, or else it would not be God’s plan! If God’s happiness were in any way reduced to our own idea of happiness, in any way paltry or disappointing, then it would not be God’s plan. St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “I ask (God) that you be rooted and grounded in love, that you may be able to grasp, with all the people of God the breadth and the length, the height and the depth. Yes, that you be able to know his love – which surpasses all knowledge – until you are filled with the utter fullness of God”(Eph. 3:18-19).

God has a plan, a good plan, a great plan for each of us, and he wants to help us know and live that plan. It’s a plan that unfolds through Jesus, with Jesus and in Jesus. That same divine plan extends to the whole world. As St. Paul writes in Ephesians 1:9-10: “God has made known to us his secret plan, according to His good pleasure that He set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

A good plan, a great plan for each one of us and for our entire universe – in Jesus Christ. What hope, what a sense of purpose and of meaningfulness is given to us who believe! Every time we celebrate the Mass we participate in this plan mystically and sacramentally as the priest raises the host, the Body of Christ, Jesus himself to the heavens and sings, “through him and with him and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours almighty Father, for ever and ever.”

And we respond – AMEN!

Fr. Bill Trusz has served as a parish priest for the Diocese of Hamilton Ontario for 31 years. He’s been blessed to serve during the time of Blesses John Paul and Pope Benedict, but he is excited also about serving under Pope Francis, who is showing us a model of ministry particularly open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.
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Counting Our Blessings

As we begin the new year and think about making New Year’s Resolutions, we are reminded of an old song that tells us to “count our blessings” and name them one by one. When we do this, we can remember what God has done for us. Many times we talk to God about our wishes more than we remember to thank Him for what He’s done.

Sometimes when we ask God for our desires, we don’t always get what we want, but if we pay attention, we notice we’re getting what we need. There are times when requests are denied, like the woman who badly wanted a certain kitchen knife for cutting tomatoes and other vegetables she’d seen advertised in a magazine. She mentioned it to her neighbor, who smiled and told her she had ordered one. When it arrived she saw it was made of poor quality and could do very little when it came to cutting and slicing vegetables.

It’s easy to compare what we have against what friends, neighbors, and people who are admired have and then find yourself coming up short. Everyone else seems so much better off! Perhaps there is a woman who seems to be more active in the church. She is especially clever at putting lovely floral arrangements near the altar. Then there is someone else in the choir who sings beautifully. There is also another mother down the street who has especially well-behaved children. There is always someone who is more gifted, more talented and more organized.

You can spend most of the day, making a list of people in better circumstances, but that’s not a helpful activity for those who want
to be like Christ and follow him. A good way to shake off self-pity is to inventory the good things God has done. One of his blessings, often taken for granted, is good health. There are people who have a life threatening disease or a serious injury to face. If you enjoy good health, it’s time to be grateful.

Second, the necessities of life we enjoy, require gratitude. Not everyone had a warm place to live with adequate furnishings and home appliances, enough food to eat and plenty of clean water to drink. Having these things when there are millions of people in the world who don’t have these necessities should cause us to pause and remember that God has truly blessed us.

Take time to consider personal possessions and benefits beyond life’s necessities. Perhaps, it’s a TV, a cell phone or a computer, or a way to take the family on vacations and trips. You may not have all these extras. But what do you have? What can you thank God for?

After a few minutes of reflection, we find we are blessed in so many ways. It is foolish and selfish to give in to pity, or become morose over little things we think we need. We should remember God loves us, and He promised to meet our needs as He sees fit. He didn’t promise to grant all our wishes, but he did say He’d meet our needs and that we should not worry--for if he cares for the birds and the flowers, he surely cares for us.

God can bring us from darkness into a bright light of good, if we have faith and trust in Him. God wants His children to be happy because He wishes above all things that we may prosper and be in good health.

When we pause and “count our blessings,” we find we are truly blessed, and we are thankful to God who knows our needs and cares for us.

HORAN, Evelyn is a popular Christian author and a former teacher and counselor. Her articles and stories have been published many times in periodicals for children and adults in both secular and religious publications. She holds credentials in Education and School Psychology in the state of California. For more information on her publications, please visit her web site at www.authorsden.com/evelynhoran.
Will the Lord Find Faith When He Returns?

Luke chapter 18:8 asks a very intriguing question considering the challenges to the Christian faith that are currently evident in the world today. He says, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?”

What is faith? In Hebrews 11, faith is defined as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Primarily, Christian faith centers on a person’s belief in God and in the acts of God. This means belief in the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit and all they have accomplished and will accomplish. Belief in God is a firm assurance not only in the Godhead but “a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed” (Catholic Catechism 150).

The Old Testament gives us our first revelation of the Godhead as our creator who from “the fullness of his love, addresses men as his friends and moves among them, in order to invite and receive them into his own company” (CC 142). A true response to this invitation is found in Abraham who obeys God unquestionably, preparing to offer his son Isaac to God as the sacrifice that God has requested of him. Because of Abraham’s faith a covenant was made between God and man. This covenant promised that all nations would be blessed. It was to be fulfilled through the Israelites with the coming of Christ, the Redeemer of all people.

Christ himself in the Garden of Gethsemane gave a perfect example of faith when he asked his father that if it be possible to let the cup of his suffering be taken away from him. However, he qualified this saying “not as I will but as thou wilt” (Matt 26: 39).

As these stories show, the way of faith is not easy. When God asks someone to do something as an act of faith, it is usually fraught with difficulties. Mary, our Mother, the model of faith is a good example of this. Mary was a young girl, engaged to Joseph, when the angel Gabriel came to tell her that God wanted her to conceive a son Jesus who was to be the Saviour of the world.
This was to be done as “the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 12:35). Mary’s response to the angel was a complete affirmation of faith. “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 12:38). From that point on Mary and Joseph’s life was never easy.

When we understand that there is a connection between having faith and the difficulty involved in living our faith, we can answer that question of Luke’s “When the son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” To know that living our faith involves some kind of difficulty, we can take hope that no matter what challenges arise to practicing faith and it can be expected that there will be challenges; that there will be people of faith who live out their faith despite difficulty as well as many who reject and question faith because of difficulty.

Faith sometimes requires obedience to God’s will without understanding. In today’s modern scientific world this is a hard concept for many to accept. Science posits observable proof for any belief. Science demands understanding. Faith requires a certain humility—an understanding that we cannot do much without God’s grace. The understanding that faith brings is an understanding of God and his works. As Pope Francis and Benedict point out in their encyclical LUMEN FIDEI, faith is a light, a light to understanding what God intends. It is this light of faith that makes clear what is obscure. It is light that reveals what is truth and what is falsehood. “Faith illumines life and society. If it possesses a creative light for each new moment of history, it is because it sets every event in relationship to the origin and destiny of all things in the Father” (Encyclical Letter Lumen Fidei of the Supreme Pontiff Francis 55). The illumination brought by faith is an expression of “God’s love for us. It is a fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham that was carried out in the life and death of Jesus. The true God as Pope Francis points out is the God of fidelity (Ibid 28). His plan for humankind “embraces the entire history of the world” (Ibid). “Faith-Knowledge sheds light not only on the destiny of one particular people (Israel) but the entire history of the created world from its origins to its consummation” (Ibid).

Therefore, when we ask the question “when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8), we can answer that God has provided the means through his grace for the continuation of faith. However, in humility, each of us needs to turn to the Father asking in prayer for continued faith for ourselves and for others. Also, we need to remember the importance of ongoing evangelization to all peoples as Jesus asked before his assent into heaven. “Go into the world and preach the Gospel to all creation” (Mark 16: 19). If we are truly concerned that the Lord will find faith when he returns, we must act out of our faith to teach, to spread the word, and to act in faith in all that we do. God’s grace is there for us to enable us to do this.

DEMARCO, Mary and her husband Don live in Kitchener, Ontario. They are parents to five children.
Radical is the only way to describe how we should be living faith today. Faith is not just a set of truths we believe but it is a living, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit as we are led to the Father in love. Many live faith as something we do when in reality it is a humble, childlike trust in God and his divine providence in our earthly existence as we focus on the eternal glory that awaits us.

Sharing in God’s life through faith causes us to become a new person, a better version of ourselves, as we work to root out sin and all that is negative in our lives so that we embrace virtue and all that is good, noble and pure. In every moment of life we are able to meet God who loves and provides for us. God’s desire is only for our good, our blessing, our salvation. We are always immersed in God’s love and he continually is revealing himself to his people. As we have eyes to see and ears to hear we recognize his divine touches in our lives. Everything in our life is God’s gift to us but only the person who has faith is able to be truly grateful for everything in life. Our faith, our acceptance of the divine reality in our lives, allows us to know, love and serve God alone.

Faith causes us to rely on Christ Jesus and entrust ourselves to him and the action of the Holy Spirit. We see examples in Scripture of people who put complete trust in God, such as, the widow who put into the treasury two small coins, “all she had to live on” (Mk. 12:43-44). Trusting, childlike faith expresses itself in the act of giving up everything for God, for his glory, entrusting our very selves into his care. There is nothing to fear from God; we can trust him completely at all times; we should be willing to give up to the Lord everything that he gives us, totally entrusting ourselves to him. Peace is the result of abandoning ourselves to God, to his will, to his love, to relying totally on him.

St. Paul wrote: “for power is made perfect in weakness. I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me...for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:9-10). Faith relies on God’s strength, not one’s own. God needs our weakness, our poverty, our need, so that whatever we do comes from the power of God, not from us. To be poor in spirit is to be dependent. Jesus has shown us how to become entirely dependent, totally powerless, born as a baby in Bethlehem, his death on Calvary and as he entrusts himself in our hands in the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. Everything we have, are and do belongs to the Lord. Are we willing to let go at any moment what God has entrusted to us?

Faith seen as the acknowledgment of one’s own helplessness and awaiting everything from the hand of God means having the attitude of a child. A child knows it has nothing and is unable to do anything but is full of expectations and faith that whatever it needs will somehow be provided. “Unless you turn and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:3). Conversion to the attitude...
of a child is absolutely necessary in order to enter God’s kingdom. Faith demands that we become like children, trusting, humble, awaiting everything from God. Childlike faith is needed for God to work miracles in and through us, for nothing is impossible for God. “Everything is possible for one who has faith” (MK9:24).

Conversion is a necessary part of living faith, turning away from sin, turning toward the Lord. There needs to be real contrition in our hearts for faith to run deep in our hearts. Scripture shows us real examples of this in Zacchaeus and again with the good thief crucified beside Jesus. It can be really difficult for us to be converted if there is too little contrition in our hearts. But real conversion of heart is necessary for faith to grow and strengthen.

Through the process of conversion the Lord leads us into a radical faith. In the Book of Revelation we read: “I wish you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth” (Rev 3:15-16). Radical faith does not compromise, but pushes on to the goal, to fulfill God’s purposes in my life, that Jesus could be able to live fully and reign within me. God has no limits but we so often want too little, ask for too little, and God wants to give us everything.

Living faith is not easy. It involves trials of faith, hungering or thirsting for more of the Lord, for an ever-increasing desire for oneness with the Lord, and many decisions by which one commits oneself to the Lord through obedience. Seeking God’s will is the essence of Christianity. Jesus who is peace, joy, power and the resurrection, is with us even more so during our trials and sufferings. There should be an unshaken faith within us. It is so important to live in the grace of the present moment, living each moment to the full, not giving in to anxiety, fear, haste or stress. We cannot relive the past and we should not worry about what lies ahead. Live today in faith and trust, waiting upon the Lord as we do what needs to be done.

If you are a lukewarm Christian for whom everything goes well and there are no real problems, then your situation seen in the light of faith is really tragic. It is sad because you are managing your own life, and you no longer need God. We can call this a situation of practical atheism which you may not yet recognize. In reality, the more our relationship with the Lord deepens the greater becomes our dependence on him as we are stripped of our own selves and our securities.

How can we grow stronger, wiser, in the way of faith? Knowing the Word of the Lord and the teaching of the Church through the Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church informs the mind and stirs the heart, but faith needs the experience of God to really come alive. Falling in love with the Lord stirs the desire to know God more, to want more of the experience of his love and care. To know the Lord, not just about him, we discover him in the pages of Scripture and in prayer as we invite him to enter into our lives, to reveal himself to us.

Faith involves a journey and the way is never really clear. There are twists and turns, the unexpected, trials and struggles, dying to self, conversion of heart, life and life-style, yielding in obedience to the Lord and putting into practice the love of God through love of neighbour. Living faith today involves a radical change for most people who rely on their own strength and control. The world needs radical believers who put the Lord first at all times, who live with the heart of Jesus in a world hungry for love and the witness of lived faith. What does your faith mean to you?

COUGHLIN, Rev. Dr. Peter B., Editor of The Bread of Life magazine, has a Doctor of Ministry degree from the Graduate Theological Foundation. Currently pastor of St. Andrew parish in Oakville, Ontario he continues to serve the renewal of the Church through the Charismatic Renewal and the ministry of healing.
Have you ever felt that your faith may be weak, that you didn’t have quite enough, or that others had much more than you and as a consequence of these and other painful scruples, you blamed yourself for your short supply? Most of us have felt that way at one time or another. Where and how can we replenish and or augment the remaining dregs? Where can we go when the gauge of our Faith-O-Meter indicates that we are perhaps in the red? Can we bring back the days of the dramatic signs and wonders? Are we praying and not expecting anything to happen? As the saying goes, “blessed are they who expect nothing, they get exactly what they ask for.” Our faith is not dead nor dormant at these times, the Holy Spirit is urging us instead to get busy with what we have. “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles wings; they will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint” (Is. 40:31).

The wise say that hindsight is a good way to see the presence of an active faith in our lives, or in our prayer communities. He saved us then, He hasn’t changed and so He can save us in the here and now. Can we ever be sure of the quantity, or quality of our faith? I do know that the little I have has brought me a mighty long way, through dangers, toils and snares with many wonderful signs. It may be infinitesimal, but it has surely worked! Retelling the stories of how the Lord has saved us from various troubles can nurture faith in others as well as rekindle our own. Making use of the counsel of wiser friends, or the Sacrament of Reconciliation can shed light and unblock impediments. Sometimes digging in the dirt can make something wonderful grow.

When I remove all the problems from a song that mar the sense and flow, what is left is a good piece of music. The removal of doubt, and sin will leave us with a grain of faith big enough to do any job at hand. Sin and a lack of forgiveness are always a log jam in the flow of grace. Doubt is not to be swept under the rug, but rather embraced, sought out,
challenged and defeated with the help of learned supporters. Jesus tells us we can move mountains, or uproot sycamore trees if we have faith with no doubt in it (Mk. 11:22-25).

According to Jesus you don’t need vast quantities of faith to move the many mountains in our lives that block the path to the Father’s will. You need only faith the size of the minuscule mustard seed to work wonders (Mk. 11:22-25). Faith such as this, however, needs to be pure and without doubt (Mt 21:21). It often happens that when one asks for an increase in faith, one will obtain the opportunity to use the little one has. It’s like exercise, when you use it you get stronger. Even so, the Lord would have us ask for an increase in our faith and then use it (Mk.17:5).

I once said to my son, back when he was a teen, “Michael you are so skinny, why don’t you lift some weights?” “What for?” came the reply, “they’re heavy!” Unless you do a little heavy lifting, you don’t build up strength. Using your faith helps it to grow. Faith is a participation activity, not something you observe from afar. It’s not something God has, it’s something we have; it’s not something God does, it’s something we do. We can only be apprehensive when suspecting danger and we can only be brave when we are afraid, that’s when courage and faith kicks in. Perhaps we may best know faith in times of adversity, times of loneliness and hurt. If we take a moment, we can catch the Lord rescuing us, abiding with us, and teaching us, so that we can move forward confidently. He did it before, he’ll do it again.

Recently I went for a walk beside the placid waters of Cole Harbour. It was a perfect calm mirror to the trees and surrounding islands, causing doubles of everything. There was a powerful peace echoing throughout the environs. The only sounds came from a gaggle of Canadian Geese on the far shore, who seemed to be in a heated disagreement over travel plans and also from a few kilometers away I could hear the mighty roar of the Atlantic Ocean. How can the harbour be at such peace when the nearby sea is so upset? I wondered, are we not to be like this? Peaceful on the inside while the world roars its distemper all around us.

Our faith makes us a harbour and a shelter from the storms for others. They will gravitate to us wanting to know how and why we have this peace. This faith is a small grain of blessed assurance that we are not alone in our struggles and can with confidence prevail. One of my favorite lines from an old song of praise is; “when I see the little lily pushing back the mighty sod, then I marvel at the wisdom of my God.” It seems impossible but dandelions often break through the pavement. So can we! Jesus asks the blind men who ask for healing “are you confident I can do this?” “Yes Lord”, they told him. At that he touched them and said “because of your faith it shall be done to you”(Mk. 9:29). There are a number of times in the Gospels Jesus says “your faith has saved you.” (I counted seven times).

As the “Year Of Faith” drew to a close Pope Francis stated, “When we read newspaper stories about persecuted Christians, we think about our brothers and sisters reaching breaking points, who
have made courageous, definitive choices. But let us also think about the many mothers and fathers who make small but definitive choices of faith every day, with their families and with their children.”

Blessed Pope John Paul II once said, “Be in this world bearers of Christian faith and hope by living love every day. Be faithful witnesses of the Risen Christ, never turn back before the obstacles that present themselves on the paths of your lives. I am counting on you.”

“When the Son of man returns will he find faith on the earth?” (Lk. 18:8). Our mustard seed must be nurtured, it needs the fresh water of the Sacraments, plenty of light from the Word of God and wise counsel of others. It must be planted in the rich soil of a faith based community and from time to time, weeded in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. A seed thus cared for will thrive and grow strong enough to withstand the many storms that may come.

Though Jesus often rebuked his disciples by saying, “O you of little faith”(Mt. 6:30), the little faith that the disciples had was enough to fulfill the great commission to spread the gospel throughout the whole world (Mk. 16:15). Now it’s our turn.

Seek His Will
Frances Killen

Many search for Peace and happiness in this life, finding no rest for the Soul. He and He alone, is the author and source of all Peace.

Seek to find true Peace in Him that your Soul may rejoice, No matter what surrounds your life For He has become the desire of your hungry Heart.

He, has become the One whose Will you long to follow, Surrendering unto His Mercy and Compassion.

Fear not anything of this life. Fear not abandoning to His Will, As you put to death your own plans, For His Divine plan for you is filled with all goodness and truth.

Lay aside the thing of the past as you surrender all to Him to begin anew.

RILEY, Pat is a professional musician, composer and producer. He has been a leader in Charismatic and Liturgical Music Ministry for over three decades. The main host of the CBC series “Rock Camp” and the Director of the “Summer Rock” program, Pat teaches at the Canadian Conservatory of Music. He has five grown children and three grandchildren.
It is three days until Christmas. I’m looking out the window at my neighbour’s tree, branches covered with about an inch of ice, bent low, crouching over our fence as the whole thing threatens to come crashing down on our gazebo. The trees in our front yard are about to split in half from the weight of the ice. Our car is encased in a thick glassy layer, and the only consolation is that it will prevent the branches resting on top of it from scraping the paint when we back out. Family members and friends are without power, and the drooping hydro wires near our subdivision are threatening to give out.

But this ice storm is nothing compared to the Quebec ice storm about a decade ago, they say. By God’s grace, I am able to fight back the fear as I remember to look to Jesus: “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). Really, this is nothing. We brave the storm and head to Sunday Mass, not without noticing the look of my neighbor who is shaking his head and chuckling at us—no doubt for being “crazy” enough to go to church in this weather.

There is no power at our parish, but Mass goes on, undisturbed. The organist moves down from the choir loft to the front of the church and plays the piano instead. Everyone moves up as far as possible. The lector uses his booming, motivational speaker voice. Not a Word is missed; the silence only amplifies the liturgy. Our deacon and homilist had already planned to speak about the Christmas hymn, “Silent Night.” Apparently, the power went out at the preceding Mass, precisely when he spoke the words, “Silent Night.”

He speaks about the way Christmas is becoming more secular, and society less tolerant of Christmas. He recounts how recently an elementary school teacher has become famous for de-Christianizing the words to Silent Night, in the name of political
correctness. I can’t help but noting how this time leading up to Christmas has seemed darker than usual. Then I’m reminded how God sometimes allows the darkness so that the light of Christ can shine that much more brightly. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn. 1:5).

Though it is tempting to despair at the state of the world, Jesus gives us reason to believe otherwise. Today’s Mass is beautiful. The Spirit of God is obviously present among the faithful who are singing extra loudly today to help the cantor and organist-come-pianist. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (Jn 14:27). Today, at this dark, candle-lit, fourth Sunday of Advent Mass, we are getting a taste of the peace that only Jesus can bring. I let that peace settle in my soul and transform me, if just for today.

We are to be people of peace. These days that word is tossed around so freely it has almost lost its meaning. What does Jesus mean by peace? How do we get and maintain our peace in the face of difficulty and adversity?

Jesus was not speaking of the shallow, self-willed, self-propelled optimism pedaled by some contemporary New Age “gurus.” He was speaking of a supernatural peace, an unshakable inner calm and serenity found deep within a soul, regardless of its circumstances. This is the peace that Jesus showed when he was asleep at the stern (Mk 4:35-41), and when he forgave his executioners while on the cross (Lk 23:34). Such peace is found only in a soul that is abandoned to its Creator. It is a gift of God. Maintaining an interior peace is essential for the Christian life, if that life is to bear fruit that will last.

During the Communion Rite at Mass, immediately after we say the words of the Lord’s Prayer, “but deliver us from evil,” the Celebrant makes the following supplication: “Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.”

Deliver us from evil and grant us peace...Keep us free from sin and safe from distress (anxiety, disquietude, lack of peace)...The Lord’s Prayer places anxiety alongside sin itself. St. Frances de Sales states this important connection in a profound way. He calls anxiety and disquietude the “soul’s greatest enemy,” except for sin. “Anxiety proceeds from an ill-regulated desire to be delivered from the evil we experience, or to acquire the good to which we aspire; nevertheless, nothing aggravates evil and hinders good so much as anxiety and worry” (An Introduction to the Devout Life [IDL] 4, 11).

What begins as a natural and legitimate desire towards the good and avoidance of evil can become a detriment to the soul, depending on the soul’s orientation and ensuing actions. St. Frances de Sales states,
“If the soul seeks means of deliverance for the love of God, she will seek them with patience, gentleness, humility and calmness, rather awaiting such deliverance from the goodness and providence of God than from her own exertions, industry, or diligence. But if it is through self-love that she seeks deliverance, she will be eager and restless in the search of means thereto, as though it depended more on herself than on God...Consequently, if she does not speedily find what she desires, she becomes impatient and greatly disturbed. This, instead of diminishing the original evil, makes it worse, and the soul is distressed and grieved beyond measure, so that she believes her trouble to be irremediable” (IDL, 4, 11).

Fr. Jacques Philippe, spiritual director from the Community of the Beatitudes and author of Searching for and Maintaining Peace: A Small Treatise on Peace of Heart (2002) lists the following reasons for the loss of peace:

1. **The troubles of life and the fear of being without.**

   The remedy for anxiety is given in Mt. 6:25-32, when Jesus exhorts us to have confidence in God’s provision. Here we are instructed not to worry about having enough food or clothes, and instead to consider how God cares for creation. The only thing that matters is seeking God’s kingdom. The rest will follow. We are to pay attention to the present, focusing only on the matters under our care today.

   To doubt God’s providence is to fall prey to the father of lies who sows distrust in our hearts. This is the original sin. Instead, we must return to confidence: “And all our spiritual life consists precisely in a long process of reeducation, with a view to regaining that lost confidence, by the grace of the Holy Spirit who makes us say anew to God: Abba, Father!” (Philippe, Searching for and Maintaining Peace, Kindle Edition, 384-87). In order to abandon ourselves to Divine Providence, we must overcome two obstacles: difficulty in believing in Providence and fear of suffering.

2. **The faults and shortcomings of others.**

   A loss of peace can be caused by the behavior of an individual or group who hurts us or preoccupies us. We do have a duty to reject evil, and to want and desire good things for their own sake, but we also need to want and desire them in a way that is good. Our disposition of heart must be caring, peaceful, patient, detached and abandoned to God, not impatient, wanting, hurried, restless, or irritated. In other words, we need to be patient with others, just as God is so patient with us, who are so far from perfect.

3. **Our own faults and imperfections.**

   If we are not careful, our own sin and weaknesses can lead to sadness, discouragement, torment...
and anguish. These feelings are rarely pure, usually stemming not from the pain of having offended God, but rather from wounded pride. If we fall, we must remain at peace, get back up again quickly and entrust ourselves to the mercy of God, who can make good out of our sins. At the very least, our failings can leave us with more humility, which is the foundation of peace.

4. Unrest when we have decisions to make.

Many times we are afraid to make a mistake that may have disturbing consequences, or we fear that what we decide may not be the will of the Lord. On the one hand, we need to avoid being hurried or arbitrary in our decisions, considering our motivations and intentions at all times. On the other hand, we can have a “false obedience” to God, always having to be absolutely certain we are doing God’s will. When this happens, it could be representative of a difficulty in enduring incertitude, or the mistaken belief that we must be infallible, which is really a manifestation of pride. It helps to know that if we are sincerely seeking God’s will, he will never be displeased with us. God knows we are fallible, and he can always make good out of our poor choices.

The peace Jesus promises us flows directly from our relationship with God, first and foremost. It is experienced in proportion to the amount of trust we have in God and in his providence. Trust in God grows through a strong prayer life. As inner peace grows, by God’s grace, it extends beyond ourselves to the people and circumstances around us.

St. Leonard of Port Maurice (1676-1751) offers us four “rules” to help achieve peace of soul:

1. Be attached only to God, not status, wealth, objects or persons;

2. Surrender to Divine Providence, holding God’s will above all else;

3. Welcome suffering and hardship, carrying the cross of Jesus and enduring scorn and rejection from others willingly; and


Finally, we mustn’t lose our peace if we aren’t at peace as much as we like! This requires patience and perseverance. We must never become discouraged. Instead, we need to be satisfied with achieving small things. If the Lord finds us faithful in small things, he will give us more. “Don’t be anxious; instead, give thanks in all your prayers and petitions and make your requests known to God. And God’s peace which is beyond all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6-7), (Philippe, Searching for and Maintaining Peace).

CAUCHI, Jennifer is currently studying at St. Augustine’s Institute of Theology in Toronto. She and her husband Geoff live in Oakville, Ontario and are members of St. Andrew’s parish and prayer group.
“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope” (1 Pt 3:15). This passage presupposes we have hope. Even for Christians, it can be difficult to be hopeful in the midst of a vast apostasy and militant atheism growing around us. Many people have lost hope and don’t know where to find it.

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, (para 4), Pope Paul VI asks “What has happened to that hidden energy of the Good News, which is able to have a powerful effect on man’s conscience?” Recently, Dr. Mary Healy spoke of the destructive effects of pushing God from the human horizon. Many will turn to counterfeits in an attempt to fill a deep inner void. We know that, “people eat rotting garbage out of a dumpster to avoid starvation.” Dr. Healy went on to tell the story of a woman named Nancy. Nancy's parents had wanted a boy. She grew up believing that she should have been a boy. Society offered an answer. Nancy had a sex change operation and called herself Nathan. But the operation left Nathan feeling like a monster, filled with despair. The culture of death had another answer.

Nathan’s life ended through assisted suicide. In the battle for hearts and minds, the stakes are high. Lives are at stake. Here is a link regarding her story. http://gendertrender.wordpress.com/tag/nathan-verhelst/

In EI (80), Pope Paul VI indicates that without the “energy of the Good News” we have “fatigue, disenchantment, compromise, lack of interest and above all lack of joy and hope.” We don’t have to look far to find someone in our life who lacks joy and hope. Perhaps we need only look in the mirror. But, it need not be so. The real answer to life’s trials is not death, but life – abundant life in Jesus, as revealed in Scripture (cf. Jn 10:10).

St. Jerome admonishes us with “ignorance of Scripture is...
ignorance of Christ.” Scripture reveals not only that we should have hope, but that we will find it in the kingdom of God.

In Acts 1:3-5, 8 Jesus gives his final instruction to the apostles before he ascends into heaven. Explaining how to bring about the kingdom of God, he instructs them to “wait for the promise of the Father.” Effective witnesses need the Holy Spirit. It would only be through the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus would become King in the lives of believers. By choosing Jesus as Lord of their lives, his disciples would no longer be ruled by sin, despair, and death.

The same is true for us today. Fatigue, disenchantment, compromise, and lack of interest is replaced by new energy, conviction, passion and above all hope and joy when we accept the Good News and become his disciples. Through the power of the Holy Spirit words and deeds manifest the truth and power of the gospel as bondages are broken, the sick are healed, and the dead are raised to new life!

“For ‘everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.’ But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how can men preach unless they are sent?... So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” (Romans 10:13-17).

Blessed Pope John Paul II, who I consider a patron saint of the New Evangelization, wisely said: “We need heralds of the Gospel who are experts in humanity, who know the depths of the human heart, who can share the joys, the hopes, the agonies, the distress of people today, but who are, at the same time, contemplatives who have fallen in love with God, striving for holiness.” We cannot give away what we do not have. To bring Jesus to others, we need to have an intimate relationship with him.

It is from Jesus that our hope springs forth: Hope for the blessings that God will turn all things to the good because we love him (cf. Rm 8:28); Hope for the salvation of our loved ones based on Psalm 37:4 “Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart;” Hope for mercy because “God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3:17), and hope that we will be eternally united to the One who is our hope. If we stay close to Jesus, we will have hope and be ready to help others find hope too!

Miriam and her husband Bill are members of St. Patrick’s parish in Burlington. She is a mother and delighted “Oma” of two grandchildren. Miriam works full-time as a Manager of Information System and is working on a Masters of Theology and Christian Ministry. She is a member of the Bread of Life Editorial Board and the Board for Renewal Ministries Canada. Her passion is the New Evangelization: leading others to experience a personal Pentacost and Freedom in Christ so that they may live forever in the blessing of being a beloved child of the Father.
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**For information about Unbound Freedom in Christ Prayer Ministry or Ministry training contact:** unboundfreedom@gmail.com
You have heard the ultimate in secular despair, when someone says “Is that all there is?” Because we have the Holy Spirit within, because we are children of a loving God, and because Jesus has saved us, we can answer, “No, there is always more, and then more after that.”

Jeremiah knew it. The ancient Hebrews knew it. They listened when Jeremiah spoke directly in the voice of God and said – “For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” There is a hymn version of this by Fr. John Foley, and when I hear it, it sounds like God speaking right to me. If you need an encounter with the Lord, you can listen to him speaking these words directly to your heart. We can take the words of scripture right off the page, and hear them spoken to us.

I was so encouraged when I heard someone say, when defining grace, “Grace is a Person.” Grace or graces can be defined by the ways they act in us, but ultimately Grace is a Person, Jesus Christ.

This is just what evangelism is about – not so much doctrine, as getting across to others that God desires a relationship with them. Our pastor said recently that repentance comes after we know we have a God who loves us. How could it possibly come before that?

And speaking of definitions, think about this one. God is a verb. Wow. God said that He is I AM. Sounds like something active to me. When you are tempted to picture God as the old man looking down from heaven, remember that God wants to be defined as active and living, always a creative force, always ready with plans for us, plans for our good, plans for a future filled with hope.
And what happens when we mess up? The founder of Madonna House, Catherine Doherty, had a wonderful saying to help us with that. “With God, every moment is the moment of beginning again.” We don’t have to wait until a time that God will accept us again[that’s bad theology], we can turn to him right away in repentance and begin anew. “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning…” (Lamentations 3).

In the last year, I’ve come through an experience where I needed to hear and believe those words. I gradually became full of fear, anxiety and depression. It came slowly and then with full force. My fear centered around death and eternity. This was an old fear that has been around a long time but this time I was obsessed with it. I began to be able to pull apart the threads of what was happening, and I saw that it was a real oppression from the evil one (I was able, with God’s help, to identify where I had let this in!). This was combined with a clinical depression which manifested itself in the anxiety. I was thankful for training received from the Jesuits which keeps us from seeing some things as ALL spiritual or ALL physical. Sometimes this can be the case, but this time, I needed help on four different levels—medication, spiritual direction, confession, and some changes in my associates.

The priest who assisted me said at one point, I know it doesn’t feel like it, but this very well may be God healing you. You’ve had these fears before and now God wants to take you into the heart of them, so that you may be healed. That struck me as a definite possibility and actually, quite a wonderful one - but scary, none the less. At some level, I was able to give God permission to do this. The depression and anxiety lifted little by little, until I could wholeheartedly give God this permission.

On an intellectual level, I came to realize that it just made sense that I needed to be healed because I couldn’t enter heaven if I didn’t want to!

We have a future. In the midst of pain and confusion, let us say with Julian of Norwich, “All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.”

We have a God who loves us. Let us say to ourselves, with Jeremiah, “For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Regina Rolph is the proud grandmother of seven, but still tries to define herself as something other than a Nona. She belongs to two great parishes, loves her book club and scripture study group. She sometimes longs for warmer weather but is happy God lead her to Canada.
of my life, which often calls me to trust him more. It is in the daily rub of life – the challenges in relationships, health and financial concerns, broken-down vehicles and house repairs – that I will grow in holiness. My daily prayer time is essential to keeping my relationship with the Lord open and fruitful, but honestly my reactions to the “stuff of life” show me how far I need to grow in trusting in him.

Some days we can look at our lives and wonder what God is doing in them. There is great suffering in our lives or in the lives of those who are close to us. We don’t see prayers answered in the ways we might hope or expect. But the Lord said to Jeremiah (and to us): “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares

FAMILY FOCUS

Sue Atkinson

Trust in the Lord

Several years ago the pastor of the local Catholic church celebrated Mass at our son’s school. He was Nigerian, and brought with him a favourite African saying: “God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good.” Hundreds of people over the years have heard this message of hope and trust, thanks to this holy priest. It seems to me that these words are at the heart of trusting the Lord. If “God is good, all the time”, then we can trust that everything he permits in our lives is for our good. However, if we look at circumstances through our own eyes rather than through the eyes of faith, we can miss out on the glorious work that God is doing in our lives. Instead, we need to heed the words in Proverbs: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths” (Prov 3:5-6).

I have learned over the past several years that God wants to bring me to holiness through the people, events and circumstances of my life, which often calls me to trust him more. It is in the daily rub of life – the challenges in relationships, health and financial concerns, broken-down vehicles and house repairs – that I will grow in holiness. My daily prayer time is essential to keeping my relationship with the Lord open and fruitful, but honestly my reactions to the “stuff of life” show me how far I need to grow in trusting in him.

Some days we can look at our lives and wonder what God is doing in them. There is great suffering in our lives or in the lives of those who are close to us. We don’t see prayers answered in the ways we might hope or expect. But the Lord said to Jeremiah (and to us): “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares
the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”’ (Jer 29:11). Because God is good and loving - and we know that because we have at some time or another experienced that love, or at least know other people who have - we can trust in him.

Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman wrote a beautiful prayer in which he says the following: “Therefore I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve him. My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be necessary causes of some great end, which is quite beyond us. He does nothing in vain; he may prolong my life, he may shorten it; he knows what he is about. He may take away my friends, he may throw me among strangers, he may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me—still he knows what he is about.”

When life becomes difficult, we can repeat to ourselves, “God is good. He knows what he is about.” It is an act of faith, but the more we remind ourselves of the truth of God’s goodness, the less we will look at our circumstances and the more we will find ourselves trusting in him and being grateful to him for all that he allows.

In the song “Blessings” by Laura Story, a Christian singer-songwriter, she writes: “What if your blessings come through raindrops? What if your healing comes through tears? What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know you’re near? What if trials of this life are your mercies in disguise?” That last line has sung in my heart many times over the past couple of years, as I have attended the funerals of loved ones who died too soon and too tragically, spent a year recovering from a shoulder injury which limited my ability to work and do household tasks, watched our bank account dwindle due to a number of large unexpected expenses, and walked alongside family members and friends who were suffering. I have struggled to see everything as God’s mercies, since everything passes through his hands. My trust and confidence in the Lord have grown through these difficulties.

God is good, all the time. We can trust in him, because he knows what he is about. If we walk in these truths, we will see our faith grow in ways we never expected.

ATKINSON, Sue and her husband Paul have five children ranging in age from early grade school to university. The Atkinson family attends Annunciation of the Lord parish in Ottawa.
Hope for the Future

What will the future bring? It is with faith, hope and prayer each day that God will lead us in doing his Holy Will and give us peace about the future. Our hope for the future is in the hands of our Lord God and He has made it known to us.

“For I know the plans I have for you, “declares the Lord”, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

We like to plan our own way, but always remember God directs our steps. It is good to make plans for the future but let us give those plans to God in prayer and let him decide what is best. Surrender your hopes to the Lord and you will grow in faith and wisdom.

“Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off” (Proverbs 23:18).

As we walk into tomorrow, know that the Lord provides a future full of blessings, guidance and his love. Remember to always give him praise.

PRAYER FOR HOPE
Heavenly father, I am your humble servant,
I come before you today in need of hope.
There are times when I feel helpless,
There are times when I feel weak. I pray for hope.
I need hope for a better future. I need hope for a better life.
I need hope for love and kindness.
Some say that the sky is at its darkest just before the light.
I pray that this is true, for all seems dark.
I need your light, Lord, in every way.
I pray to be filled with your light from head to toe.
To bask in your glory.
To know that all is right in the world, as you have planned, and as you want it to be.
Help me to walk in your light, and live my life in faith and glory.
In your name I pray. Amen
(Catholic Online)

JUURLINK, Doreen and her husband Tony are parishioners of St. Matthew parish in Oakville, Ontario where she is a Eucharistic Minister. They have three adult children and six grandchildren.
Learning From the Past: What does History Teach us?

The Christian has a unique view of human history: God is the author of history. He is in control of its plot and brings it to a meaningful end. This distinctive concept of God’s presence is called “salvation history”. In salvation history, God initiates a personal encounter between him and human beings and reveals his saving design. History is the medium through which God spoke in the past and continues to converse with humanity (Dei Verbum #8). The foundation of this uninterrupted contact with God is hope.

The history of Christianity is a history of hope. Hope is evident in the lives of the countless people of faith from every age and place (Rev 7:9). They offer the world a visible sign that it is possible to have hope. In order to explore the lessons that the past teaches us, two models of hope will be examined: an individual from Biblical times (Abraham) and an individual from modern times (Blessed John XXIII).

God’s steadfast love and providential care are revealed in history right from the beginning of the Bible. God entered into an intimate relationship with Abraham: “I will maintain my covenant...to be your God and the God of your descendants after you” (Gen 17:4-8). Although Abraham was childless, he relied on God’s oath that he would be the father of a “host of nations.” Even in the face of adversity (God’s demand that Abraham sacrifice his only son), he was completely obedient to God’s will (Gen 22:1-18). Abraham’s trust and belief in God and in his fidelity were firm and unyielding. Over time, God did fulfill his promise in Isaac.

It is for this reason that Abraham is an inspiring portrait of hope. He “believed, hoping against hope that he would become the father of many nations” (Rom 4:18). His total dependence upon God provides an example for us to imitate: “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Like Abraham, we can confidently plead for God’s intervention and protection in our lives. We can trust that God loves and cares for us, will always be there, and will help and strengthen us especially in times of uncertainty, trouble and danger: “I praise your fidelity and love...you guard my life...you stretch out your hand... The Lord is with me to the end...Lord, your love endures forever. Never forsake the work of your hands” (Ps 138:2,7-8).
Blessed John XXIII is a second model of hope from our past. Pope John was viewed as an interim pope who would do nothing to upset the status quo. He shocked the world when, shortly after his election, he announced that he was convening an ecumenical council. In his opening address to the Council, he shared his dream of the “aggiornamento” of the Catholic Church. He stated that, although Revelation remains the same, it unfolds in history. But the way we understand those truths can grow and develop. John XXIII’s life gives witness to the importance of being open to new directions.

For Pope John, there was no need to fear either the present or the future. He had an acute awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst. Vatican II was truly a new Pentecost for its spiritual renewal and reform enabled the Church to be more effective in making Christ and his Gospel known to the world. That is the power, grace and hope of this historical event.

John XXIII’s life attests to the truth that hope is a power that is infused into the soul by God at Baptism (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] #1813). Hope is the virtue by which we trust Christ’s promises and confidently expect divine blessings. However, we rely not on our own strength, but on the grace of the Holy Spirit that is freely given in the “rebirth” of Baptism. Amid the many changes of life, there is one constant: “...will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of Truth” (Jn 14:16-17). This gift of the Holy Spirit unfolds our faith and hope and moves us to live the Gospel message in creative, dynamic and meaningful ways in the dusty marketplaces of our time. The Incarnation (intimate union of the human and divine) continues in us – even today. The challenge is to encourage and support the growth of this confidence within ourselves and others.

In this regard, Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, states in his article “The Gospel Unfolding in History” that the Cross is the most revolutionary event of human history. But the Cross is an instrument of victory and triumph over sin, evil and death. Since Jesus is the fullness of God’s revelation to humanity, hope is what God is revealing through the Cross. The resurrected Christ and His promise of eternal life are the firm anchors of Christian hope.

It is for this reason that Rolheiser concludes that we can draw hope from the picture that the past gives us. We no longer justify slavery, capital punishment and most forms of inequality and violence in God’s name. We have good reason to hope that the Gospel will continue to unfold. The meaning of the cross, like a time-release capsule, will continue to release more deeply its meaning into history.

Therefore, like John XXIII, we must not be fearful. The Holy Spirit, who raised Jesus from the dead, dwells continually in our hearts. John XXIII’s absolute belief, trust and reliance on the Holy Spirit is his legacy. That legacy can also be ours. Once the Holy Spirit takes possession of us, our lives will bear fruit abundantly: “May the God of hope fill you all with joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13).

Both Abraham and Blessed John XXIII affirm that hope is an attitude of such joyful trust in God that we willingly put our lives in His hands.
We are convinced that God is close to us and will never abandon us: “Cast all your worries upon him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Because of this assurance of perpetual divine assistance, we can remain dauntless in the face of misfortune, hostility, rejection and discouragement. The promise of the Risen Christ to be with us means that weakness and sinfulness will not have the final word. In spite of war, violence, hatred, suffering and injustice, victory is on the way. Good will triumph over evil. One day all things will be perfected in Christ: “But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength. The Lord will rescue me from every evil and will bring me safe to the heavenly Kingdom” (2 Tim 4:17-18).

To summarize, as Christians, we neither yearn for the past nor live in the past. We appreciate the past because the past influences the present. We have the present that we have because the legacy of the past is still alive within the present. “History is the page on which the today of God is written” (CCC #2705). In turn, we leave a legacy from the past to the future. Due to the ever present reality of the Spirit, we can help shape the future by our present decisions.

The two heroes of hope discussed illustrate that our religious heritage can become an inspiration for both the present and the future. Vatican II’s teachings stressed that our present existence is future directed by referring to us as the “pilgrim people of God”. We are moving towards the absolute future of the “fullness of time” (Eph 1:10). At that moment, Christ will come again. God’s plan will be complete, and both history and time will cease.

But, until that day arrives, as disciples of Jesus, “gathered under the shadow of his wings”, we should confidently persevere until the end: “but whoever endures to the end will be saved” (Mt 10:22).

The ultimate lesson that history teaches us is to be a hope filled people. Hope, as a theological virtue, along with faith and charity, never works alone. Hope is always connected with the virtue of faith. When we have faith and hope in God, it does not mean that we know all the regulations and rules. It means that we believe and trust God’s word to be true, and with the help of the Spirit, act accordingly. Hope is embracing the power that comes from God Himself to live with the unwavering conviction that God is our origin, our courage, our support and our destiny.

Bibliography


Roland Muzzatti is a candidate in the Permanent Diaconate Formation Program for the Diocese of Sault Ste Marie (Ontario). As a member of Christ the King Parish in Sudbury, he has been involved in the RCIA Ministry for over 30 years. Prior to his retirement from the Sudbury Catholic District School Board in 2010, he served as a teacher, vice-principal, principal and superintendent of education. He has been married to Shirley for 38 years, is the proud father of Adrian (29) and Justin (25) and a friend to his feline companion Cohiba.
“Hey Bill, my folks are taking me fishing! We are going to the far north to a small stream that flows into Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories. It will be the fishing trip of a lifetime!”

“Wow! I’m certainly jealous. Any chance that your Dad would want to adopt me?”

“I’d love to bring you along, but be careful what you ask for. Dad says it is pretty rugged up there; with bears, sleeping bags, and rocks! If you break an arm, or a leg, you are over 5 hours away from even the simplest of medical attention. It can be a little scary!”

“But you are not going alone, are you?”

“No, Dad has hired a local trapper to help us as a guide. He is someone experienced, who knows the rivers and the lake; someone who knows the best places to fish. The Guide can scare off bears, and, if need be, he carries a rifle. I expect that, if we were hurt, he would be able to get us medical attention”

“So you should be pretty safe.”

“I hope so! You never know what the devil might throw at us, and things can always go wrong, but with our guide we should be able to work through any dangers that might come our way.”

“The devil? You make this sound like Church!”

“Well in a sense, it is. Not just Church on Sunday, but the history of the whole Church,
from Pentecost to today.”

“Ah, come on. That’s a stretch!”

“No, Bill. Think about it. I’m talking about going on the fishing trip of a lifetime, and Jesus made the Apostles ‘Fishers of Men’. A task that would involve them in an eternal lifetime! I’m going way north to the Canadian wilderness, and Christ sent his Disciples to the farthest corners of the earth.”

“Well, you win that one. There are fish, I give you that, but to compare it to a missionary trip is a little much.”

“You may not see it, but Jesus sent them out two by two, and you wanted to come. You can’t deny that!”

“Okay, so what about the guide?”

“That is the best part of all! The guide, my friend, is the Holy Spirit!”

“What?”

“The Holy Spirit came down to the Apostles at Pentecost. He was there to inspire and advise the Church. The Spirit certainly knows the territory, and could teach the Fishermen how to do their job because He knows where to fish! The Spirit knows all about the bears who could attack the church, and how to keep them at bay. He can even strike down the enemy if need be, and if we are hurt, the Spirit does not panic, but knows how to get the attention we need.”

“Oh, you have to give me an example of that one!”

“Well, after Judas had betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, Judas had to be replaced. The Apostles turned to the Spirit to inspire and guide their selection, and they chose Matthias as the replacement. It is a job the Holy Spirit continues to do, right up to this present day. Even as the world grows darker, and evil appears to win, The Spirit inspires the selection of Popes. He has sent us great men, like John Paul II, Benedict, and now Francis! Yes the Holy Spirit knows the territory, and he knows how to guide us even in the wilderness!”

Charles Barton and his wife Cathy attend St. Leonard’s parish in Brampton. They have a son, and a daughter who is studying at the Catholic University of Dallas. Charles has been involved with the Renewal for over 30 years.
You and I, in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, are helping to give birth to a new and dynamic role of the laity within the Church. Can you not perceive it? If there is a part of the laity in the Church who know, deep in their hearts, that they have a role to play within the Church, it is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Through our Baptism, we are part of the priestly, prophetic, and kingly people of God who have understood what this means. It is written in our hearts! And it is the Lord Jesus who has awakened us to this call through our own baptism in the Holy Spirit. It is not our own doing at all!

Francis Cardinal Arinze in his book - “The Layperson’s Distinctive Role,” says: “We have a positive and dynamic definition of a layperson: one who by Baptism is incorporated into Christ and the Church and is called to evangelize the secular order.”

(P. 14) On page 30, he goes on to say: ... “the right of the laity to be involved in the mission of the Church is not a benevolent concession from bishops and priests. The laity has this right and duty by reason of their Baptism.” However this does not mean that the laity does not need the guidance from their pastors. The laity does not take the place of the priests. And the priests do not take to place of the laity.

Many parishes are in a ‘maintenance mode.’ On page 110, Cardinal Arinze says: “The movements (CCR) and communities can help the local church avoid the mentality of being a ‘maintenance church’ by bringing with them the freshness of missionary enthusiasm rather than an attitude of ‘business as usual’.

As we gather to share about the Lord with others, we often talk about our ‘understanding’ of our own baptismal call as laity. Renewal leaders have to talk, study, and read about this emerging laity role in the Church so as to more deeply understand what the Spirit is doing. We have to help others get freed up in their particular call as lay people. Lay people have a role within the Church beyond being a lector or an extraordinary Eucharistic minister, though these are important. The Renewal can offer many services
to people and do not need the parish priest’s permission to do it. It is given to us through our Baptism.

We can bring the anointed word of God to someone; we can lay hands on a person in need and give them whatever Word of Knowledge or Wisdom that the Spirit gives us; We can bless a person with blessed oils from a shrine or that a priest has bless for our use without taking over the Sacramental oils that the Priest uses; we do not stop using blessed oils used by the laity; we can share a Word of Scripture with someone; we can minister to anyone whom the Lord brings to us and we should! We can have healing services when a priest is not available; we can give Life in the Spirit Seminars in our homes; we can teach and preach the Word of God in the ‘periphery’, that is, outside the boundaries of the parish where the priest cannot usually go! Etc. Etc.

We have a direct part to play in the New Evangelization, especially in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Michelle Moran stated at our Atlantic Summer Conference lately that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal already knows all about the New Evangelization and has been doing it for years. But a word of caution that the Renewal knows well: Be wise and put on the armor of Jesus Christ every day. The laity has to now take up their God- given role and task in the New Evangelization and do it in earnest!

We have been given a charism: Baptism in the Holy Spirit – find new ways to offer it far and wide! We have to begin again and again. We have to bring people into a personal relationship with Jesus – a personal experience of God’s love for them. Then we can bring them to the parish and the sacramental life of the Church! When a person is evangelized, then that person needs to be properly catechized. The Renewal knows this very well.

But this is yet not enough. We have to take them to another step and that is to be on mission themselves and bring others to Jesus Christ! The basic duty of the Church is to evangelize. It is the duty of every baptized Christian. So let us wear out our shoes for love of Jesus and the salvation of souls! Press onward!!!

I believe that the Holy Spirit is leading the Church into this dynamic and emerging role of the laity that has never been seen in the Church as yet!! It is becoming more and more evident that the priest cannot do it all and never was called to do it all!!

Let us pray that Jesus will set bishops, priests, and lay people free through a new wave of the Holy Spirit (some of us think it is already here) within the Church for the urgent task of New Evangelization.

Now isn’t that a good reason to hope! It is a sure hope for it is what Jesus and the Spirit are doing in this our times. Praise the Lord!

(Quotes taken from “The Layperson’s Distinctive Role” by Francis Cardinal Arinze – Ignatius Press)

SHONAMAN, Lorraine and her husband Fred live in Rothesay, New Brunswick. They are parents of two and grandparents of one. Her parish is Saint Peter’s in Saint John. Since 1984 she has been involved in the Renewal through Queen of Peace Prayer Group, as well as at the Diocesan and Atlantic levels. She has written a book entitled: “What is the Spirit Saying to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal after 40 years?” She has written many articles for Catholic publications.
erine of Siena, St. Vincent Ferrer and Lacordaire, to name a few. The conviction that was instilled to us as young Dominicans in formation, was that our founder had bequeathed or better handed on to us a \textit{gratia praedicationis}, a special grace or charism of preaching, a kind of “spiritual gene” whose activation is necessary for the effective preaching of the Gospel, i.e. for evangelisation. In that sense, Vatican II has “re-discovered” evangelisation and is a great proponent and beacon for the absolute need to evangelize.\(^1\) It has indeed been affirmed that “the evangelical shift brought about by Vatican II, Paul VI and John Paul II is one of the most dramatic developments in modern Catholicism”.\(^2\)

In my own teaching and pastoral experience, I have come to realise more and more that a great number of practicing Catholics know little about the Faith they profess and whose Sunday Eucharist they more or less faithfully attend. Hence, the great responsibility for sound faith formation or catechesis (doctrinal and moral). I also quickly discovered that among practicing Cath-
olics (including some clergy), few have developed a vital, intimate and loving relationship with Jesus Christ; few have experienced a living and personal encounter with the Risen Lord in the Eucharist, in the sacraments, in their personal prayer and their activities, choosing him as the true centre, Saviour and Lord of their lives. The dearth and poverty of these two essential components in the life of many Catholics (knowledge of the faith and personal relationship with Christ) have led to a hemorrhaging out of the Church, especially in Europe and North America and a lukewarmness combined with doctrinal and moral confusion in the lives of many practicing Catholics.

All this has made me firmly believe that, in our present age of indifference, increasing hostility towards Christianity (especially Catholicism) and rampant secularisation, the Church urgently needs to rediscover the primacy of **Kerygma**3, ad intra and ad extra.

As the new evangelisation is mostly geared to those who still identify themselves as Catholics, I will deliberately restrict myself in this presentation to speaking about the liturgical homily during Sunday Mass. As far as large portions of the Catholic Church worldwide are concerned, the Sunday homily is still the best place for the proclamation of the Mystery of Christ.

My purpose here is not to detail the content of a good homily, but to delineate the focus and attitudes of heart and mind of the homilist himself.

It is my conviction borne out of 25 years of experience that the essential condition for a fruitful homily is the total surrender of the homilist to the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. He must have experienced a “personal Pentecost” and put his life and ministry under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Despite the claims of the prophets of doom and obvious abuses, the reception and the proper interpretation of the Second Vatican Council4 is ongoing. I am a firm believer that Vatican II was guided and led by the Holy Spirit who is the very dynamism of renewal and therefore of evangelisation. Let us remember that just as Pope Leo XIII prayed for a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit in 1901, Blessed John XXIII prayed in 1962 for “a new Pentecost.” In preparation for Vatican II, he prayed “O God, renew your wonders in this our day, as by a new Pentecost. Grant to your Church that, being of one mind and steadfast in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and following the lead of blessed Peter, it may advance the reign of our Divine Saviour, the reign of truth and justice, the reign of love and peace. Amen.”

If Vatican II is the Council of renewal and continuity by the grace of the Holy Spirit, then, by the same token, the Sunday homily as an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word, can only be renewed and energized by the Holy Spirit. **Kerygma** or the proclamation of the Paschal Mystery should lead to **metanoia**5, a progressive (or radical) conversion of the heart to the Gospel. But it is the Holy Spirit who is the great “Converter” waiting to be “stirred up” or “fanned into flame”6 in the hearts of the faithful through the preaching of Christ crucified. As Pope Paul VI said in his very powerful apostolic exhortation
“on evangelisation”: “the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelisation. It is he who inspires each individual to proclaim the Gospel, and it is he who causes the word of salvation to be understood and accepted. It was not by chance that the inauguration of evangelisation took place on the morning of Pentecost under the inspiration of the Spirit.”

It is noteworthy that the greatest aspect of the renewal of the Eucharistic Liturgy that Vatican II has brought is the introduction of the επίκλησις right before the words of consecration of the bread and wine.

That is why, preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit is essential. Hopefully, this kerygmatic preaching will elicit conversion which in turn awakens the desire in the believer for a deeper knowledge and understanding of the Faith, which is catechesis.

However, what is sorely needed in our parishes, before faith formation or catechesis which is in itself very important, is boldness in the kerygma, the proclamation of Christ crucified and risen.

A kerygmatic or evangelistic homily is characterised by the boldness of the delivery of the Gospel message as it comes directly from the work of the Holy Spirit inspiring and empowering the homilist to preach. We see this clearly in the preaching of the early Church: especially in the Book of Acts as well as in the letters of St. Paul and St. John, the frequent use of the word παρρήσια which means “freedom in speech, confident frankness, assurance and boldness” is indicative of the Holy Spirit imparting to the praying Christian community or to the preacher of the Gospel the boldness of proclamation of the Kerygma.

Given that a Sunday homily must never exceed 12-15 minutes, the homilist - bishop, priest or deacon - has to break open the Word of God for the faithful and preach the Paschal Mystery to them in a simple language and in a passionate way, not only for the sake of keeping them alert and attentive, but most importantly to convey to them, through his own experience and witness of life, the infinite love of God.

This is where passion and enthusiasm to communicate the Kerygma are absolutely necessary. However, it is very important that these be authenticated by what the New Testament and the Church Fathers call martyrria, the witness of life of the homilist/preacher. Once again, we listen to Pope Paul VI: “this century thirsts for authenticity. Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you preach what you live? The world expects from us simplicity of life, the spirit of prayer, obedience, humility, detachment and self-sacrifice”.

Enthusiasm and passion are summed up by St. Paul and some Church Fathers by another word: πλεροφορία which means “full certainty, assurance, conviction, persuasion”, an experiential manifestation of fullness that the Holy Spirit gives both to the listeners and to the preacher of the Gospel. This “pneumatic” experience of the power of God working through the words of the homilist may also be accompanied by a manifestation of the charisms of the Holy Spirit leading to a deep conversion of life of the listeners.

Finally, we need to stress what
Paul has so beautifully and powerfully said in his hymn about the agapè love of God: “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing”.

The life of the homilist is thus meant to be an expression of God’s infinite love for those he is evangelising, a love that yearns to bring them to salvation, to fullness of life in Christ. The Greek Fathers called God “the Lover of mankind” (ho Philanthrôpos) and went so far as to describe his love for wounded and sinful humanity, his creation, as “crazy, extravagant, scandalous love” (manikon erôs), so intense and total it is.

At the heart of an anointed and fruitful homily is the preaching of this madness of God’s love for each and everyone, who “loved the world so much that he gave his only Son”.

The homilist would have reached his goal when his listeners become true disciples of Christ, joyful witnesses and missionaries of Jesus as Lord and the evangelical life offered to them by the Church. They would be definitely journeying on the road to holiness which is one of the greatest legacies of Vatican II that emphasised so powerfully the “universal call to holiness”.

ADDENDUM

Useful words and phrases

gratia praedicationis: (Latin) a “special grace”, a charism of preaching
catechesis or didachè: (Greek) instruction on the faith; faith formation
euanggelizô: (Greek) to evangelize, to announce good news; to preach
ekèrusso: (Greek) to be a herald; to proclaim; to publish; to preach
kèrygma: (Greek) proclamation by a herald (denotes a message); preaching
metanoia: (Greek) conversion of the heart, the changing and transformation of the mind in order to place ourselves under the Lordship of Christ and the values of the Gospel.
epiclèsis : (Greek) “calling down upon”. It is an “invocation” addressed to the Father that he would send his Holy Spirit on the Church’s offering so that this may be changed into the Body of Christ. The epiclèsis is the central moment in every sacramental anaphora (i.e. the eucharistic prayer); it is that which gives the Christian liturgy its new and distinctive efficacy. Ordained ministers are there primarily to serve the epiclèsis, for they are servants of the Spirit (according to St. John Chrysostom), who acts with power.
parrèsi: (Greek)
• freedom of speech; unreservedness in utterance; speaking without ambiguity, plainly, without figures of speech
• the absence of fear in speaking boldly; hence, confidence, cheerful courage, boldness, without any connection necessarily with speech; boldness
ho philanthrôpos: (Greek) in the language of the Church Fathers:
• (God) the Lover for humankind

\textit{manikôn érôs}: (Greek) in the language of the Church Fathers:

- the crazy, extravagant, passionate love of God (for humankind)

\textit{martyria}: (Greek) witnessing (by words, life, love);

- the testimony of Jesus;

- confession and witness of faith that can go as far as laying down one’s life (martyrdom)

\textit{plêrophoria}: (Greek) entire confidence; full assurance; fullness, abundance

- in the language of Paul and some Church Fathers, experience of fullness (accompanied by joy, even in the midst of great persecutions) given by the Holy Spirit to the preacher or the Church with “signs and wonders” confirming the preaching of the Cross of Christ or the holiness of an individual

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i  “Vatican II marks an important stage in this recovery. A simple word count indicates the profound shift in focus. Vatican I, which met from 1869 to 1879, used the term \textit{gospel} (\textit{evangelium}) only once and never used the terms \textit{evangelize} and \textit{evangelization}. Less than a century later, Vatican II mentioned the \textit{gospel} 157 times and used the verb \textit{evangelize} eighteen times and the noun \textit{evangelization} thirty-one times. When it spoke of evangelization, Vatican II generally meant the proclamation of the basic Christian message of salvation through Jesus Christ”: Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J., \textit{John Paul II and the New Evangelization: What does it Mean?} In Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson, Editors, \textit{JP II and the New Evangelization: What does it Mean?} p. 4.

ii I bid., p. 9. We can certainly add to the list the name of Benedict XVI.

iii The name, life, the truth, the words and teachings, the signs (healings, exorcisms and miracles), the salvation of Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Man and Son of God, his passion, death on the cross and his bodily resurrection and his return in glory to judge the living and the dead, heaven and hell “There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed” in Paul VI, \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi}. 22.

iv what Pope Benedict XVI has rightly coined as “hermeneutic of continuity”.

v \textit{metanoia} is conversion of the heart, the changing and transformation of the mind in order to place ourselves under the Lordship of Christ and the values of the Gospel.

vi \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi}, 75.

vii “calling down upon”. It is an “invocation” addressed to the Father that he would send his Holy Spirit on the Church’s offering so that this may be changed into the Body of Christ. The \textit{epiclêsis} is the central moment in every sacramental \textit{anaphora} (i.e. the eucharistic prayer); it is that which gives the Christian liturgy its new and distinctive efficacy. Ordained ministers are there primarily to serve the \textit{epiclêsis}, for they are servants of the Spirit (according to Chrysostom), who acts with power (in Jean Corbon, \textit{The Wellness of Worship}, p. 17).

ix 37 occurrences.


xi \textit{Enthusiasm} comes from the Greek “en-theos” which means “in God”, connoting the joy, passion and boldness the presence of God in the preacher brings.

xii \textit{EN}, 76.

xiii \textit{Col 2:2}; \textit{1Th 1:5}; \textit{Heb 6:11}, \textit{10:22}; \textit{Pseudo-Macarius hom. 9.5}; \textit{Chrysostom hom.3.1 in 2Thess.}; \textit{1Clem. 42.3}

xiv \textit{1Corinthians 13:1-3}.


xvi \textit{John 3:16}.
Do Not Afraid

“Be not afraid.” These words appear in bold print, in Portuguese on a large banner decorating the outdoor altar in front of the Basilica of Fatima’s “Sanctuario.” These words echo the words Jesus Christ uttered so many times in his public ministry. The words are also the theme of the centennial celebrations of the Fatima apparitions.

Jesus asks us, “Can worry add a single moment to your life span?”

“Does your heavenly Father not know what you need?” “Why worry about tomorrow, today has its own problems and tomorrow will have others if tomorrow comes” (Matthew 7:vs25-34).

Furthermore, whenever we try to get closer to God, it seems that he finds ways to test our faith,

(reliance on his word), as well as take the measure of our hope in his word.

St. Joseph was a righteous man. Imagine the terrible turmoil he was in when he discovered that his beloved betrothed was pregnant. Mary’s purity was in question in a very strict Jewish milieu. Joseph loved Mary and would have divorced her quietly to save her from shame. God spoke through an angel who counselled St. Joseph not to be afraid to take his wife Mary into his home. The wonders and mystery of their current situation came about by the will of God through the power of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:vs.20-21). Joseph being a man of God, a man of faith, trusted and hoped that all would be right with God, and so it was.

Who among us does not have fear? To be afraid at times is perfectly natural, totally human, and all too often part of our human condition. Life has its twists and turns, and sometimes a hard curve ball thrown in for good measure. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are not without the virtues of faith and hope. The Catholic encyclopaedia has a great definition of these cardinal virtues which are infused virtues.

Hope is usually married to the virtue of faith. They are so entwined that they are inoperative unless they are joined together. Why is that so? It is one of our faith’s mysteries. However the result of this marriage is that when a person sorely tested, relies on God’s word “faith” in a spirit of “hope” then charity becomes possible. The point is that God wants us to place our focus on him rather than on ourselves, and then his work becomes manifest in us.

Fear and needless anxiety as many spiritual writers have commented indicate a guarded faith or a limited hope. Anyone who has read the journal of Ste.
Therese, St. Faustina, or any mystic will see the same dynamic time and time again. Trust God, not yourself.

My life experience thus far has exposed me to three types of people where the question of faith and hope come into play. The first type are those people who refuse to live in the present moment. They long for the “good old days” but often regret their past.

Yes we can profit by reflecting on past mistakes, but the healthy course is to grow from those experiences and move forward. Some sadly never get the message and continue to repeat the same mistakes over and over again.

The second group of people are those who worry about tomorrow, all the time. Even more confusing to me are those who see God as the “big stick” who will make the future brighter and better. The God who will “get even” for them and make all things right. They do not seem to appreciate that their lives are gifts and the present moment is the moment that matters.

Yes we hope for the future, but we can shape that future by what we do today.

The healthiest and happiest people I know are those who live the present moment, fully alive, with Christ. They have learned from their past; they are always ready for the future at any given moment. They have faith that God will keep his promises. These souls rely on his mercy and not themselves. These are the successful Christians. They are balanced people, who take life in stride, confident that God who brought them this far, will bring them home safely no matter the challenges confronting them. They are courageous people. And these I admire. Our church grows in the kingdom because of souls like these. And they join countless others from the past who form a solid matrix of Christ-like charity, premised in faith and hope.

The Blessed Virgin Mary best exemplifies in my unworthy opinion the perfection of faith and hope in her Son’s promises to return after his death. What mother, what human being, deserves to witness a brutal and cruel death of her only child? This woman did. I am certain that the pain and anguish in her maternal heart was stretched to the very limits of human understanding and endurance.

Yet Mary persevered. Her faith and hope were justified. Her example ought to instil great confidence in us. More currently, look at church leadership in recent years. Our Pope Benedict had the courage to resign from office and pass on the papal torch. Pope Francis 1st has given an example to the entire world, that has brought joy and hope to many of us. He has done this with simplicity and outreach to those who need to hear that they are important and recognized as such. Two of our recent popes, John XX111 and John Paul 11 will be canonized in the new year. Saints have been added to our church calendar, and the work of Jesus Christ continues daily through those unspoken and unknown saints, who serve Christ faithfully and with joyful hope. Pope John Paul chose the words, “Be not afraid” in his first pontifical homily at the mass of his installation as pope.

We are blessed indeed. The Kingdom of God will continue, and we can trust in Jesus`s promise, to be with us until the end of times. He promises too that all the satans, all the gates of hell, all those that would secularize and try to blot out God`s name will not prevail.

Easter comes. It is a season of great joy, justifiable hope, and testing of faith. There are many who set an example of faith for us. We are a blessed people, indeed. Therefore, “Be not afraid.”

VERE, Deacon Victor was ordained to the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie in 1984 and has been practicing Criminal Law in Sudbury, Ontario for over 40 years. Deacon Vere is married with three children, four grandchildren and two Siamese cats, Azzurri and Tirah Misou. He is currently assigned as deacon to Our Lady of Hope parish.
The Theology of Giving

The goods of the earth have been given for all. We are to share those goods not simply when we don’t need them, but also when we do. These are key principles of Catholic social teaching.

Giving, whether of our time, talent, or treasure, is based on the very nature of God. Though He did not have to create us, He did and then became one of us and died for us. He taught us the meaning of giving when we don’t have to and of giving from our very substance, from our very life. The Lord Himself referred to a theology of giving. After observing the rich putting their sizable donations into the temple treasury, he saw a poor widow making her contribution, whereupon He said, “I assure you, this poor widow has put in more than all the rest. They make contributions out of their surplus, but she from her want has given what she could not afford -- every penny she had to live on” (Luke 21:3-4).

Most of us give to some charity, and we give what we do not need. But how often do we give away what we do need? And the fact that we need it is precisely why we need to share it.

The needs of another are not just the other’s needs; they are ours. We are one body. “The body is one and has many members, but all the members, many though they are, are one body; and so it is with Christ...God has so constructed the body... that all the members may be concerned for one another. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members share its joy. You, then, are the body of Christ. Every one of you is a member of it” (1Cor.12:12, 24-27).

How much should we give to a cause that we know is right? The measure of our giving should be how much the other needs the gift, not how much the giver does not need it.

No group of people is more needy in our society than the unborn, deprived of the very right to their lives. More money is spent in this country to kill the unborn than is spent to save them. Some wealthy people contribute billions to the very groups that promote the killing.

“I ask you, how can God’s love survive in a man who has enough of this world’s goods yet closes his heart to his brother when he sees him in need?”(John 3:17). Given that the greatest of “this world’s goods” is life itself, we can rephrase the verse: How can God’s love survive in anyone who is alive yet closes his heart to his brother who is in danger of death?

When we give out of our very need, we give life itself to others. Nowhere is that more true than when we give to the efforts to end abortion.

PAVONE, Fr. Frank is an internationally known pro-life activist, speaker and author. He has led the Priests for Life movement since 1993. He has served at the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the Family. Norma McCorvey, the “Jane Roe” of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision Roe vs. Wade, called Fr. Pavone “the catalyst that brought me into the Catholic Church.” Priests for Life can be contacted at P.O. Box 141172, Staten Island, NY 10314. Phone: 718-980-4400; email: mail@priestsforlife.org; web: www.priestsforlife.org.
Nazareth Family Spirituality: Celebrating Your Faith at Home with Catherine Doherty edited by Fr. Blair Bernard, MH Publications, 230 pages, $15.95

In page after page of her writings, as well as in hour after hour of talks and teachings, Catherine Doherty spoke about the Gospel as it was lived in Nazareth, the village home of the Holy Family, where Jesus spent thirty years of hidden life.

In this book, we find a collection of these reflections, some never before published, as well as liturgical customs and traditions to help bring Nazareth alive in Catholic families and homes.

The titles of its five sections tell us specifically what this book is about: “Nazareth Spirituality for Your Family,” “Wife, Mother, Foundress: Catherine’s Meditations on Marriage and Family,” “Handing on the Faith Through Celebration: Family Customs and Traditions for the Church Year,” “Questions Parents Ask: Q. & A. with Catherine Doherty,” and “‘Till Death Do Us Part’: First and Last Things in Marriage and Family.”

Before she founded Madonna House, Catherine was a married woman who knew the challenges of family life, and she had a heart for families.

The friendly, conversational tone of Nazareth Family Spirituality draws you in to experience the heart of Nazareth, and it gives you the feeling that Catherine is alongside you offering encouragement and love.

Early in the book, Catherine states, “We go to Nazareth, that hidden little village and live with the Holy Family to become whole again. Here we learn about the little things done with great love, perfectly, for the love of God.”

Nazareth is a place where growth in holiness and love of God through ordinary everyday life can transpire. And Catherine connects the various aspects of Nazareth to modern Catholic family life.

These reflections can be an inspiration to young couples as well as to those who have been married for many years. This book can also be a resource for study for them, individually or in a group.

My own adult faith life has been profoundly formed by the words of Catherine Doherty. When I was a young wife and mother trying to live out my vocation, her words sang in my heart.

Her winsome way of putting things—even deep spiritual truths—gave great encouragement to me as I sought to live “the duty of the moment” and grow in my understanding of Nazareth.

In this book, the traditions from Madonna House are presented in such a way that they can be easily adapted to Catholic homes, and over the years, our family has followed many of these customs. Through such things as food...
There have been many speeches and books written on the last words of Jesus, however I found this book to be unique in its approach, which was the author's intent.

The author, a Franciscan friar was asked to give a talk on this subject due to the author’s blog www.DatingGod.org. Friar Horan hopes that this book will help us to better understand Christ’s last words on the cross not only in his life and reality, but also in ours. We are guided throughout this book to better understand how Jesus' last words might speak to us today.

The introduction is quite long, giving guidance on how to read and use this book. The author's intent is for this book to be used during the Lenten season, hoping that the reader might find this book thought provoking and enlightening.

His desire is that your “Lenten journey and life long Christian pilgrimage will bring you closer to the transformative love of God and the suffering that such love entails.

Friar Horan often uses the Gospel of Luke as his preference to quote the last words of Jesus. The first words, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34), is quoted and then the author explains what is happening at the time Jesus speaks these words. After this he writes a reflection which does not stay in the time of Jesus, he relates what Jesus said to the reality of our world. After that we are given questions to reflect on, and then the chapter is ended with a prayer; each reflection, each prayer is a profound experience for the reader.

I read this book slowly so that I could grasp the meaning of what the author was saying. The last words of Jesus are not to be read quickly, you need to inhale his words into your spirit so that you can live them in your heart.

In the last two weeks I have found lumps in my breasts and have been going

and decorations, these customs have brought to life the richness of the faith.

Nazareth Family Spirituality is a treasury of love, wisdom and celebration from the heart of Catherine Doherty. It is a treasury that presents a way of passing on the faith that is accessible and vibrant. Through it, families can find healing and joy.

The author, attended Cana Colony at MH in 1996 and the Nazareth Family Retreat in Combermere in 1992. Since 2003, her family has been part of the core team of families that hosts Nazareth Family Retreats at Dominus Vobiscum, a family camp north of Montreal. Nazareth is, naturally, very close to the heart of her family.

ATKINSON, Sue and her husband Paul have five children ranging in age from early grade school to university. The Atkinson family attends Annunciation of the Lord parish in Ottawa.
Glimpses of God-
A Place of Intimacy
Author: Elizabeth Symons
Published by: Outskirts Press, Inc. 2013
www.outskirtspress.com
ISBN# 978-1-4787-0747-9

When reading this book you will need many quiet moments in the presence of God to fully understand what the author is trying to portray. This book is truly filled with moments of quiet meditation as the author guides you into intimate moments with God.

I recommend this book to prepare you for Easter, but it can also be read all through the year. Most of all you will get a unique understanding on the Last Words of Jesus and on how they mean so much more than just the words themselves.

You can buy this book at your favourite Catholic/Christian book store for about $20. You can also buy it on Amazon.ca for approximately $15. The audio version is about $22, at this writing it is not available on Kindle possibly because at this time the book has not yet been released. The release date was December 23/2013.

In the introduction she states, “As you read this book, the desire of my heart is that you will see Jesus. The desire of God’s heart is that you will know him as a God of intimacy, concerned about every detail of your life...I pray that you will draw closer to him than ever before...”

The author also states that we can come to God alone, that Jesus made the way for this intimacy on the cross and that we no longer need a person to go to God in our place.
That said she then takes you on a journey by placing you in a spiritual window, “...and maybe, just maybe God is opening a spiritual window, to give you a glimpse of what it is like to be on the other side of the veil...where you can be alone with God, just you and him. A spiritual glimpse, received in your spirit, discerned by your spirit...a moment with God.”

Every chapter she guides you into a spiritual window to meditate and seek the presence of God. The first is a Table for Two, just you and God where you can speak to him saying everything your heart feels. During this time God speaks to you where you become “his own”

All through this book you will go through many scenarios where the author gently pulls you in to the most holy of places; the presence of God. Each scenario/spiritual window is meant to open up your heart, your spirit to see yourself as God sees you. In these moments you will find that God is calling you to a relationship with Him, “...one of betrothal to him.” In that moment you are given the choice to make that commitment.

This book is not a light read, it is deep and must be a source of meditation as the author calls you deeper, deeper into the heart of God. As you look deeper into your own heart it might be difficult for you, the reader, to see all that fills your heart and the many ways in which your life choices changed you.

Although it might be difficult to look at, there is a purpose, a calling to healing your spirit, heart and body. Every chapter brings you closer into intimacy, closer to understanding yourself and your God.

Towards the end of the book you will be seeing your heart as “...God sees it...It will be like you are looking at a surgeon examining a heart on the operating table, making sure that every part is functioning as designed...” only spiritually.

This book is meant to draw you closer to God, to know that he loves you and that he desires a personal relationship with you because...”He is a God of relationship.”

Your spiritual growth is up to you. Your relationship with God is personal and it is up to you to seek him, to spend time with him, and this book helps you to do just that.

The last chapter is about prayer, described as “just speaking what is in your heart...a choice to communicate...” The very last words in this book is a prayer, a calling, a surrendering of your heart to God.

Because I read books to review, I usually do not have the time to go into depth, this is one book I will have to read again to get the full blessing it offers.

You can find this book on Amazon.ca/ for approx. $14, Kindle price is $7, you can also buy this book on the above publishers site at the top of this page.

BALESTRINI-VIZARD, Elaine has been married to David for 40 years and will be celebrating their anniversary May 5, 2013. She is the mother of five loving children and seven grandchildren. She has worked as a nurse for over 30 years. She enjoys bible studies with family and friends and alone time with her Lord and Saviour.
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