

## **From Journal Writer to Blogger? - 2011**

**(After the Journal from 2009 ff. called Spiritual Mother, I decided to stop writing journals. However, a dear friend suggested that I write blogs. Blogs?!? I find the word blog much lacking in aesthetical qualities. I like writing long things, not paragraphs, or so I thought. Then other friends of mine suggested I write blogs for Watershed – a wonderful web-site mostly specializing in sacred music (see [www.ccwatershed.org](http://www.ccwatershed.org))**

**I decided to try. After just 2 attempts, I fell in love with this new media approach and decided that it was the perfect outlet for exhibitionist ego-maniacs such as myself. The lovely graphics, when I could copy them off, were supplied mostly by Jeff Ostrowski, web-master of Watershed and composer of sacred music.**

**I wrote about 100 or so and then decided to extend the outreach of these blogs by making them into a sort of journal for 2011 to be a kind of sequel to my older journals on this free e-book part of my web.**

**Hope you like them. Feel free to respond anyway you wish by writing to me at [chervinronda@gmail.com](mailto:chervinronda@gmail.com). )**

BLOGS [HTTP://WWW.CCWATERSHED.ORG/BLOG/RONDAVIEW/](http://www.ccwatershed.org/blog/rondaview/)

## **Contemplative Photography**

**17 February 2011**

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

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

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

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

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

## **A Poem for the Saint John Cantius Society**

**18 February 2011**

Dear readers,

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

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

Thank you, dear brethren.

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

## **Beautiful Music is from Heaven**

**19 February 2011**

One of my favorite quotations from Newman is that “music is so beautiful, it can not have come from us but has escaped from heaven.”

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



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

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

Yes!

**No discounts on getting to heaven?**

**21 February 2011**

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



Here is one of his delightful stories: A man notices a beautiful suit in a store window. But it is \$100. He saves his money and finally walks into the store to buy the suit. It is as wonderful as he thought. But then he thinks, if I buy a suit, I ought to also have a new shirt, and a new tie. But I can’t

afford them. So, he winds up getting a cheaper suit that isn't very good so that he can also get the shirt and the tie.

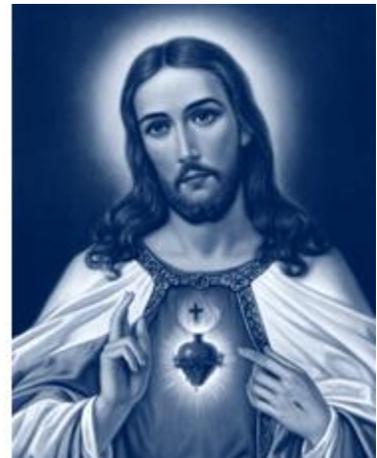
Here is the comparison. We realize that being a saint in the sense of only doing God's will and getting to heaven is the only thing that really counts. But, then, we think – I would also like to have the comforts of a good life, a little success, etc. etc. And so we don't go for heaven really but, instead,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

You can find a link to Charles Rich's biography by me and numerous of his pithy sayings on my web — go to [rondachervin.com](http://rondachervin.com) and look for the link to him.

"You will find him in my Sacred Heart"

21 February 2011

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



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

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

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

You might want to hear his beautiful music to Tolkien's Lord of the Rings on [rondachervin.com](http://rondachervin.com). Click on Music of Charles Chervin. He also wrote, just before he died, a plaintive piece called Requiem for a Lost Childhood, which you can also hear at the same place. There was a concert by the musicians from his music school a few months afterwards. I ran around saying, please steal his melodies so that he can live. Since this web is redolent with composers, please steal it if you like it!

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

23 February 2011

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

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

A related favorite a quotation is that the perfect is the enemy of the good. I looked all over to find the author of this adage. No, it was not in Scripture, or in

Shakespeare, but from General Sherman! In case you're sure exactly what it means since, after all, Jesus says "Be ye perfect," it is designed to help



**perfectionists do something good rather than nothing at all since you may reason that if you can't do something perfectly, why even do it?**

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

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

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## **Anger Management that Works**

**23 February 2011**

**Eight years or so ago, my dear friend suggested that I write a book on Catholic Anger Management. The idea is that many Catholics don't believe in pop-psychology and so would stay away from Anger-Management groups even though they need to manage their anger better.**



**This resulted in my book Taming the Lion Within: Five Steps from Anger to Peace. It weds Abraham Low, Ph.D.'s Recovery International Self-Help techniques with Catholic spirituality.**

**Here's a sample: Even if I go to daily Mass and prayer the rosary, the mercy chaplet, etc. etc. if my underlying vision for my life is that I am the heroine of the drama and everyone else is either a secondary character or a cameo role**

designed to enhance my drama queen role, then I am going to be angry every day. Why? Because, guess what? The others want me to be a secondary character or walk-on in their dramas, so they refuse to play minor roles in mine!

Remedy: go to Recovery, International – there's a group in such familiar towns as Corpus Christi, Texas. The techniques of this system got me from 5 fits a day to 1 a month. My family was ecstatic! If you're too proud to try a local group, wherever you are, (groups can be found on the web be sure to put in International since otherwise you could get 12 Step), you can also do phone meetings and hob-nob with folks from England and Puerto Rico!

Or, if none of this appeals to you, just mutter this mantra from the poet Auden: "Thou shalt love thy crooked neighbor with thy crooked self." Ha! Ha! You can't say the first part without the second part!

Silence!

24 February 2011

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

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



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

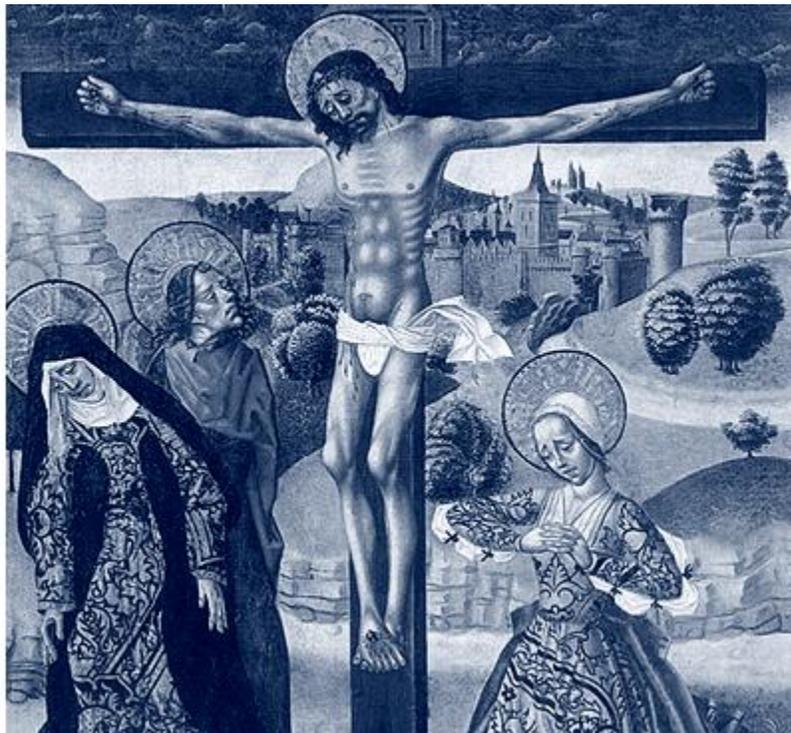
**this blog in silence instead of calling up one more audience for my woes is a step toward greater silence.**

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

### **Hurling Denunciations from the Throne of Truth**

**25 February 2011**

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



**Dietrich Von Hildebrand**

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

**Whenever I see the Passion Christ when Jesus forgives his torturers I say to myself: “If He could forgive them, and they certainly weren’t begging for forgiveness, I can forgive everyone who hurt me.” Legend has it that not only**

**the centurion but even Pilate got the grace to repent. Since forgiveness from the heart can take many years, it's better to start soon.**

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

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

**26 February 2011**

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

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

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

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



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

**Fresh Beauty**

**27 February 2011**

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



**I have a little teaching on types of work in the Church. I divide us into motherly/fatherly, prophetic works, creative works and contemplative contributions. Of course we have bits of all four, but generally there is one we are especially called to. Briefly, motherly/fatherly types will do anything to fill any need from ushering to ironing altar clothes to pro-life telephone ministry, and catechetics. Prophetic people are more interested in removing evils by working with such groups as operation rescue, writing letters to the editor, campaigns. In the parish church prophetic types like to make things better through the parish council or bugging the priest. Contemplative types you will find before daily Mass praying the rosary, at adoration, just sitting in the church when it is empty, loving to just be with the Lord. I make it a point to try to affirm the gifts and help of all these types of builders of our mini-kingdoms of God.**

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

kiddies for after Mass, or spend Saturday morning sorting items from the rummage sale.

I presume that many of you who come to Corpus Christi Watershed are these creative types. Hail, fresh beauty!

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**Ridicule - a sin?**

**28 February 2011**

I just finished writing a book with the Ballards (Lutheran ministers turned Catholic) called *What the Saints Say About Heaven...* one of my co-authors included an old examination of conscience as an appendix. To my amazement it listed under sins ridicule of others, sarcasm, and even enjoying hearing others criticized!

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



While waiting on line for confession I thought of how Kierkegaard wrote that instead of gossiping about the sins of others we should weep for them. Now, by gossip, we don't mean necessary conversations involving the faults of others for the purpose of helping them or dealing with them. What is meant is indulging in

the details of the flaws of others to make oneself feel superior and to almost gloat. At least that's the way I do it.

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

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

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

They say we should not only pray the mercy chaplet but have a whole mercy spirituality. The ideas in this blog could be a start, eh?

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Daring to be Vulnerable

1 March 2011

I have an adorable cat, Felix, who is a mouser. My sleep was interrupted by Felix bringing in a mouse, then losing the mouse, then trying to dislodge the mouse from an open bin with heavy pots blocking the cat's entry to the bin. Lots of fight and flight. I opened the door to the freezing wind and took out the pots, hoping the mouse would dash to safety. No luck because the mouse had the piece of a ball of yarn wound around his neck like a lasso. The cat tore off the yarn but the mouse escaped into the top of the closet. Presently, the mouse is totally hidden and the cat won't go out because he smells the mouse.

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

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



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

Visit Dr. Ronda's new website: [spiritualityrunningtogo.com](http://spiritualityrunningtogo.com)

### A New Way to Decide What to Give up for Lent

2 March 2011 Many years ago I got an inspiration. Instead of deciding myself what to give up for Lent, why not ask the family. I was surprised. Since my main sins involve anger, I was sure they would pick that. Instead they all agreed: Mom, you are such a puddlelum – a character in C.S. Lewis who is always pessimistic. What ever anyone suggests to do, you come up with the worst case prognosis! It's downright depressing!



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

Here's another more subtle one to prime your pump on this spiritual exercise. My marriage was kinda rocky. Once I suddenly asked my husband, "So, what do you hate about me most?" He thought for awhile and came up with this ringer: "Well, you're a teacher. So you are used to grading students. Whatever I do or we do together, you, so to speak, give it a grade afterward, as in 'that was a

great evening or, that evening was awful.' It makes me feel like a little kid in school being judged for everything!"

So, do you dare ask your close ones what they wish you would change for Lent? If you feel like it, you could stick your resolution on comments and we will pray for you as you struggle!

"Beauty is Truth" —  
Keats

3 March 2011 More than 50 years ago I, a militant atheist, stood in front of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, in awe of its beauty. The words of Keat's famous poem came to me "Beauty is truth; truth beauty, that is all ye need to know on earth..." This was one of the highlights in my



conversion to the Catholic faith. (If you are interested in a quick rendition of my whole conversion story go to [www.rondachervin.com](http://www.rondachervin.com) click on books and, then, free e-books and leaflets to the leaflet "Saved.")

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

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

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

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

**5 March 2011**

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

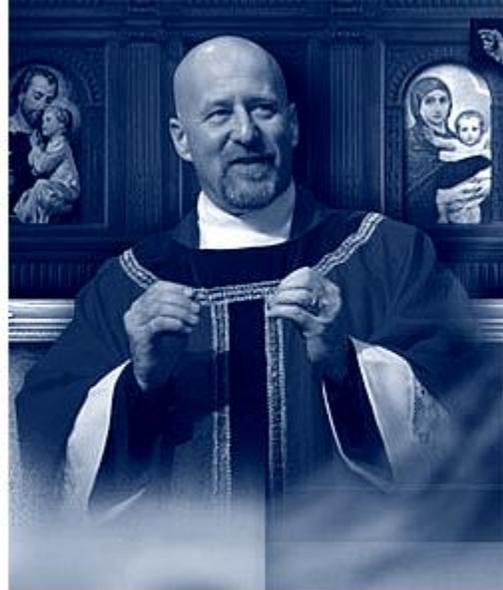
**Once I figured out that my twin sister and I were probably the most “alienated” kids of all in our childhood in the upper West Side of New York. We were atheist anti-Communist Jews. Surrounding us were Catholic gang kids (West Side Story), Orthodox religious Jews in full old country regalia, Communist Jews, and Zionists. Of course, when I became a**

**Catholic, I conformed as much as I could to the circle surrounding Von Hildebrand who brought me into the Church, but this same background made me still culturally quite different.**

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

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

**Fr. Dwight Longenecker, a maverick convert priest, speaker, and writer, now a pastor in Greenville, S.C., whose blog you might greatly enjoy, suggested a remedy for this feeling of insecurity in these words: if you are a free spirit, you**



can't get security from other people. You have to become secure, instead, in God. What way do you pray when you need more security?

## Balance

6 March 2011

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

Such was the buzz-word “you have to have more balance” that became popular in the 1970's. I was brought up by a father who adored music but was forced to study piano instead of the kettle drums he dreamed of playing instead. To

compensate he favored recordings of Ravel's Bolero or Stravinsky's Rite of Spring over harmonious piano concertos. Since, as children, we had music in the background every evening of our lives, I think such rhythms got me into the idea that drama and intensity were the key to joy and the type of balance I might have picked up from listening to, say, Bach was stodgy.

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

I recalled a psychological study of types I learned about in the 70's. The idea was to relate the 4 elements: air, earth, fire and water to your own personality.



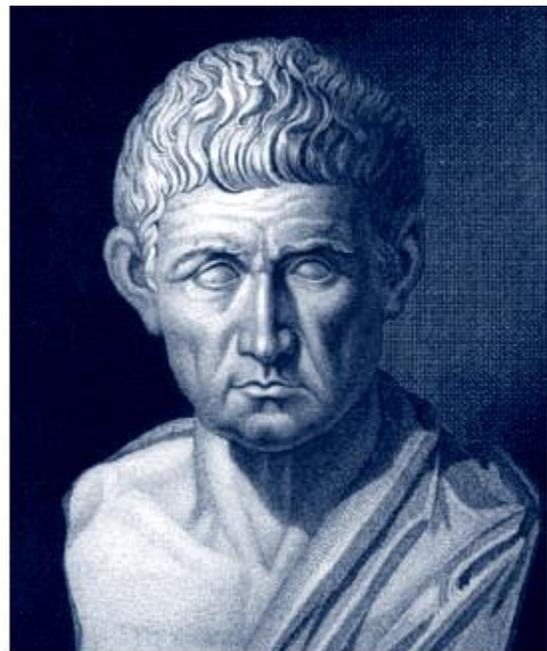
Being airy (spacey and overly seeking transcendence) and fiery (too intense) I could get BALANCE by having some earthy or watery elements in my day. Not an outdoor sort, earthiness probably came with work in the house – down in the dirt; and more water from swimming or even rinsing dishes. I think there's something in it.

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

### Overcoming Disillusionment

7 March 2011

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Taming the Lion Within**

**8 March 2011 In my book, Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace, I explain a concept of Dr. Abraham Low, founder of Recovery, International — self-help groups for emotions out of control. The concept is Symbolic Victory.**



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

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

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

“Sounds good, but I’m too angry to do it,” you might say. If so try Recovery, International for groups near you or phone groups, or go to [rondachervin.com](http://rondachervin.com) and order my book.

Salvation in the Worst of Times: Ash  
Wednesday

9 March 2011 Just before going to bed, I  
clicked on the headlines on my



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

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

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

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

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

### **The Spirit of Gentle Counsel**

**10 March 2011 At a prayer meeting here in Connecticut, our leader did a beautiful meditation about opening to God for a new gift. After kissing a**



**big crucifix that went around the circle, we were to see if the Holy Spirit might be telling us about such a gift. Of course such exercises don't pretend to be infallibly the word from on-high, but when something comes up that fits I take it seriously.**

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

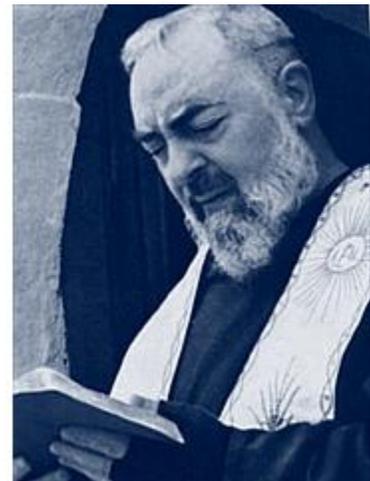
**I filed it in the back of my mind but last night it came alive. I visited a mental help group to see what techniques I might learn from the touted holy priest director of the group. A small group of members sat around a table. Mostly we looked pretty woe-begone on arrival. The elderly priest leader,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

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

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

**12 March 2011 Depression, Anger and Anxiety - All Related**

**I got into dealing with anger this way: at 58 I was teaching at Steubenville. A grad student told me about this great group he wanted me to advertise: Recovery, Inc. (not 12 Step) for anger, anxiety and depression. I read the description and saw it as an answer to my prayers to do better with anger. I would say I had an average of 5 fits a day whenever**



frustrated in any wish to goal. Only after years of group work combined with prayer was my anger enough diminished that I could see the underlying anxiety and the depression (not clinical but more sad feelings) related to the other two.

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

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

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

**Humor is Your Best Friend**

**March, 2011**

One of the "tools" in the Recovery, International group for anger, fear and depression I keep telling you about is "humor



is your best friend.” Light recommended humor is very different from the type of sarcasm I am trying to get away from. As I work on getting away from the bad kind to the good kind I have a wonderful role model in a new friend of mine, also a widow, Marti Armstrong. She drives from Poughkeepsie, NY to our monthly meetings of the Bride of Christ community.

([www.brideofchristcommunity.com](http://www.brideofchristcommunity.com)) When she comes she stays on an air mattress in the little cell I live in at the Seminary.

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

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

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

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

## "Addiction" and Pain

14 March 2011

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



A key factor in observing the “addictions” of others is the phenomenon of denial. How can a hugely overweight person, for instance, be exhorting others to be “detached” in order to be more holy? But it soon becomes a vicious circle since the one who sits in judgment of the obsessions of others is her/himself compulsively exercising contempt instead of hopeful, forgiving, love.

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

I have been reading the contemporary novels of Brian J. Gail. In “Motherless” a key moment is where Jesus says to the priest-hero “If you show me your thirst

for Me, I can show you My thirst for them.” If I turn my thirst for my “addictions” into groaning prayers for help, He can show me also the thirst for Him underlying the addictions of others.

### **The Heart: A Spousal Legacy**

**14 March 2011** Couples reasonably happily married often dread the thought that one might die and leave the other one alone. You can take comfort from the fact that it’s only because of all the natural good and grace in your marriage that you’re not, instead, having fantasies each day that the other one will leave this world and leave you much happier!



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

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

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

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

### **Custom-Made Temptations**

**15 March 2011**

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

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

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

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



## Shifting Paradigms

16 March 2011

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

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

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

In medieval times there was a phenomena called "circle cities." The aging devout moved into huts surrounding the Churches or monasteries. This way they could go to daily Mass in their "celestial living room." I love that paradigm. A priest I know has been planning a monastery/refuge for all vocations in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts. I wrote a novel with him under a pseudonym describing what this dream would be like. If you are interested e-mail me at [rondaview@ccwatershed.org](mailto:rondaview@ccwatershed.org) and I will attach it. Of course it could also be built in a place near you? If you build it I might come!



## Healing of the humiliating vices of envy and competitiveness.

17 March 2011 I do a lot of teaching on Masculine/Feminine Stereotypical Traits. I deal with positive and negative ones for each sex. Positive would be wonderful traits such as the nurturing of women and the drive of men, among others. Negative would include such awful traits as the envy of women of each other and the competitiveness of men with each other.

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



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

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

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

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

19 March 2011

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



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

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

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

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

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

Want to try?

**Foul-Proof Charity**

**March 20, 2011**

**My husband was brought up on the Lower East Side of NYC. He recounts how**



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

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

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

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

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

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

20 March 2011

My family was and is overflowing  
with creativity. My father wrote



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

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

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

### Showing Emotions

22 March 2011 “At Mass I get to see your souls; but tonight I got to see your hearts,” I said to some



of the seminarians who came to a charismatic prayer meeting at Holy Apostles where I teach.

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

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

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

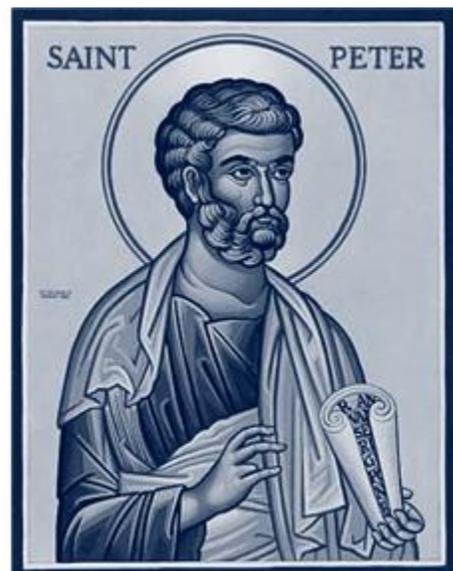
It is reported that in Augustine's time the windows of the Church sometimes cracked from the impact of the praise.

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

How God Brings Good Even Out of Our Faults

22 March 2011

God could have created 500 immaculately conceived leaders for each generation to rule flawlessly like Plato's philosopher kings. We



don't know why He didn't do that, but we do know that God used improbable people to lead his flock generation after generation in the Old and New Testament times. Why pick a stammerer as the greatest leader of the Chosen People besides David, an adulterer? Why Peter, the denier, as the first Pope?

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

How does God use your faults while also trying to lead you to greater virtue?

Why Love is not Loved

24 March 2011



Once I was at adoration gazing at the famous El Greco face of Jesus in his Veronica's Veil Icon and this came to me:

When I stare into your sad eyes, my Jesus, those words "Love is not Loved!" come to me not as a general statement but as directed to me. It seems that you want me to know just how wounding it is for you that I will not trust the love that went to such lengths to prove itself. Staring at the pure whiteness of your presence in the host in the monstrance and, then, down at your face in the painting I try to respond.

I could produce many reasons why I don't love Love enough:

— is it easier for me to love you as truth because truth is strong and love is vulnerable?

— is it easier for me to love you as beauty because beauty is sublime and love is messy?

— is it easier for me to love you as mercy because mercy is balm and love is strenuous?

**When I look into your tragic eyes, my Jesus, I think the reason might be deeper still. Terror of surrender to your Divine heart whose beat is so loud I could no longer hear my own? Fear that after diving into the your waves you might cast me out on the shore even more helpless to survive?**

**Or, still more simply, that I could refuse you nothing, no matter how painful, if I was close enough to know you wanted it!**

**I hear you telling me that I cannot experience the fullness of your love for me if I am afraid to come closer. 'Perfect love casts out fear.' Surrender!**

**Yet a perfect unison of heartbeat with Jesus would be you, Mother Mary. You certainly did not emerge from your surrender to the Holy Spirit as a dead fish. No! Rather as Queen of Apostles!**

**(This reflection and many others can be found in my Journal Face to Face on my web site [rondachervin.com](http://rondachervin.com) under free e-books)**

**Don't Box Mary In**

**25 March 2011**

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Loneliness vs. Too Close for Comfort

27 March 2011

I live on the grounds of the seminary where I teach in a little cell-like dorm room. I barter room and board for teaching. It is a great life for a devout widow – closeness to so many wonderful seminarians and no house work or cooking! But between classes and Masses and Liturgy of the Hours and meals, I feel lonely. Especially lonely for my adult children and grandchildren who are far away. I consider that



these feelings of loneliness put me in solidarity with seminarians and priests who have plenty of people around them and many friends, too, but still lead a solitary life compared to living with family. Yes, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and all the saints are our spiritual family, but still.....

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

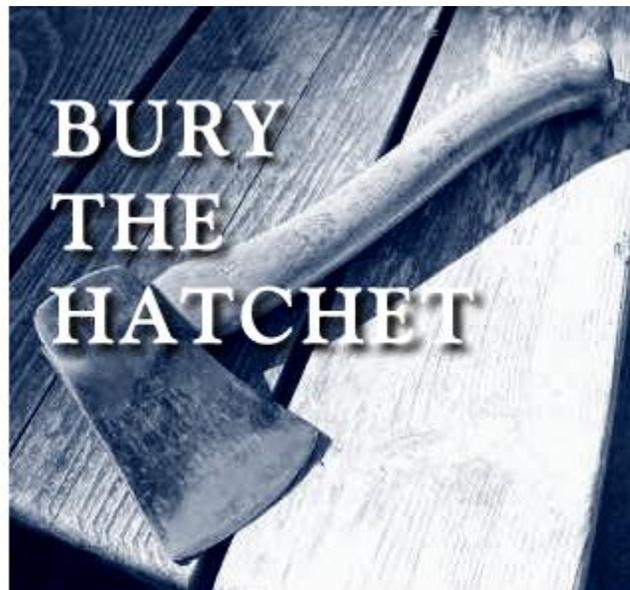
How I long for heaven...can you imagine what it will be like with the greatest closeness to everyone we love and none of the quarrels! In his wonderful short book "Jaws of Death, Gate of Heaven," Dietrich Von Hildebrand explains that fear of the unknown keeps us from simply longing for heaven night and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

How God's Providence Can Test Friendships

published 28 March 2011 by [Dr. Ronda Chervin](#)

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

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



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

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

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

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

## The Four Temperaments

29 March 2011

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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## **Life is more like a Story than a Syllogism.**

30 March 2011

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

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



ever again! It would be that quick from maxim to practice.

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

Surrender?

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published 30 March 2011 by [Dr. Ronda Chervin](#)

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

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Surrender?

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## Diverse Ways of Bringing up Kids

31 March 2011

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

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

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

Both sets of kids turned out great. I like to say that being militaristic or totally laid back both work and, probably, in the long run, they work better than my way which was to let them be free but then yell and scream because things were chaotic. My kids quickly picked up that even though I love order, I wasn't



willing to discipline them. I was a softy underneath the scowls. Tough love came when the youngest was already a teen. Too late. However, they turned out to be total love-bugs and also creative geniuses, and more so than their parents. Praise the Lord!

If you are a mother or father, how about putting in Comments what your way was or is like, or, if you are, by chance, the parents of a new-born first born, what your plans are?

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

**1 April 2011**

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



At a prayer meeting the leader was teaching us a method of lectio divina using the Scripture "put out into deep waters and lower your nets for the catch." While pondering the application of this famous passage to my teaching in the present that I should let the Holy Spirit tap deeper areas of me, directed to deeper areas of my students or audiences (at talks).

Jesus tells his disciples not to be afraid of the deep waters. For me, the fear is of the femininely vulnerable in me and in others, male or female; that as they reject the feminine in themselves they will have to reject me also.

**But when I take the risk of letting the Holy Spirit lead me into the deeper waters, my students and audiences are moved. The truth can get in better because they have become more emotionally open. (Male teachers and speakers do this when they go further than conveying truths by adding witness stories of how they got there. In this way the heart joins the head.)**

**Try it. The fish could be more tasty!**

### **Hilarious "Franciscan" Story**

**3 April 2011**

**I moved to Connecticut 2 years ago to work at a parish named after St. Francis, with a priest who seemed to combine everything I love: magisterial, charismatic, Marion, heart for the poor, and simplicity of life. I lived a block from the Church and spent the day at the rectory work.**



**A contradiction began to bother me. There was lots of talk of the small parish being in debt, but we ate off gold rimmed plates and fancy gold cutlery. On the Feast of St. Francis, I thought I got a great “prophetic word,” for the priest.**

**“Father, St. Francis has given me the answer to the parish debt! He “says” we should sell all the gold in the pantry to pay off the debt. Each fork could bring in hundreds of dollars!”**

**I thought the priest would be mad, but instead he laughed til the tears came into his eyes. “Ronda, I bought that junk for \$25 at Wal-Mart. It’s all fake!**

**What a lesson in distrusting “fantastic” messages straight from heaven!**

## **An Extraordinary Concert**

**3 April 2011 At our Late Vocation Seminary where I teach, we have concerts to celebrate the first year of our lovely new chapel. Imagine at this time of shortage of priests, over seminary overflowed to such an extend we had to build a new chapel for them!**

**The soloist was a world class violinist, Charles Rex. Maybe some of you know him. He played a concerto of Beethoven I didn't know but most of you Watershedders probably know — #7 in C Minor. He did it with such perfection that we all felt as if we had entered heaven. I, who always spout that maxim that “the perfect is the enemy of the good” to excuse my lack of willingness to edit my work, had to realize that the really perfect is much, much, much better than the merely good!**



**While I am on music I am remembering how my late son, Charlie, when asked why he wanted to study cello, hard for him because he had poor eye hand coordination, when he could have majored in English which was a snap, he replied “because music is more beautiful!”**

**And, I thought of my sister, the dancer, who has a finer ear for music than I do, once amazed me. We were rushing somewhere and I yelled, “turn off the phonograph, we gotta get out of here.” She replied, “well, we still have 5 minutes, why not five minutes more of beauty!”**

**Oh, dear God, thank you for the gift of sublime music, such a foretaste of heaven!”**

**Poetry of John Paul II**

**4 April 2011**

Even though I am not very good at understanding any poetry more complex than, say, Tagore's, when a book came out of John Paul II's poetry shortly after his ascent to the Papacy, I grabbed it. Well, truth to tell, he was a rather avant garde poet, not the kind easily understood by anyone, however, one line reached me permanently.



As you probably know, he did many different things from playwright, actor, rock quarry work, philosopher, and finally Bishop and then Pope. This poem comes from balancing rocks during that quarry time:

“When I have borne an equal weight of horror and hope,  
no one will accuse me of simplicity.”

I take it that he means by simplicity here, naivete. And probably a young man of his consummate purity of soul and body would have been considered to be a naive simpleton.

In my own experience as a philosophy professor and a speaker, I did find that when the horrible tragedies of life came upon me, as well as horror at things I was capable of, that my words took on a different tone – no longer beautiful sayings of Catholic truth, but hard won survival witnesses of hope coming only from grace.

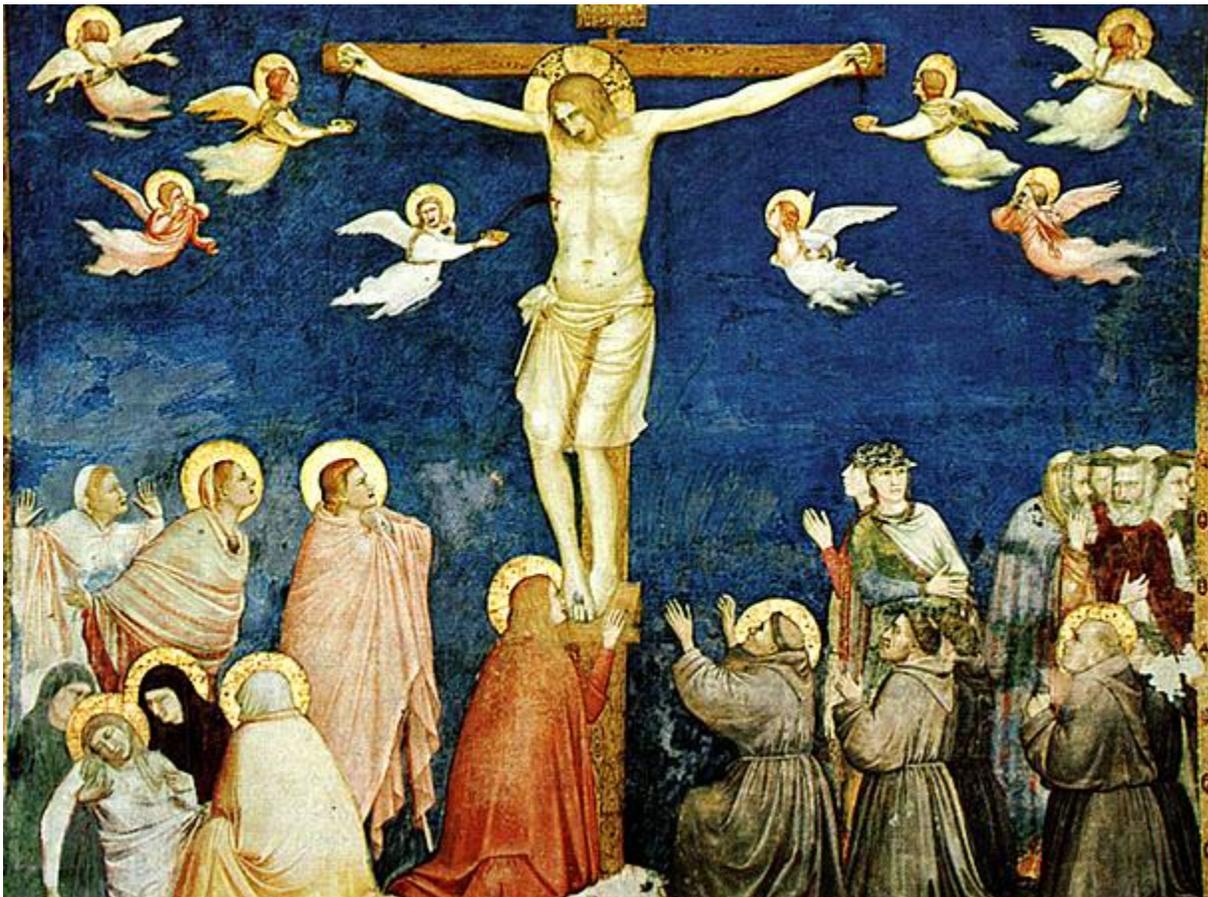
As we come closer to John Paul II's canonization, let us never forget the price he paid for his truths.

How Jesus is present when we Suffer

5 April 2011 Tonight I did my radio blog with Bob and Evelyn Olson, lay evangelists. We are talking together about themes in my upcoming book: *The Way of Love*. Or you can hear these conversations posted on [spiritualityrunningtogo.com](http://spiritualityrunningtogo.com) under the title *The Open Door*.

**Our topic was meeting Jesus in extreme sufferings. Both of the Olsons told about healing prayers during which Jesus told them in their hearts how He was there when they suffered childhood sexual abuse. I told about a woman I knew who had been raped at knife point on a kitchen table by her father when still a toddler. This was confirmed by an older sister. Decades afterwards on a retreat she got comfort from meditating long hours on the moment when Jesus was stripped of His clothing.**

**Horrible memories are not to be filling us with dread and bitterness. Instead we must run to Jesus and let Him find us analogies in His life. For example, He was not rejected by a wife, but He certainly knew rejection, including the rejection we sometimes give Him by fleeing into addictions vs. running to Him.**



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**A Yes to Prayer after a Long, Long Time**

**7 April 2011**

**When something very good happens and one of my daughters sees that I am already worrying about something else, she calls out "Take the Joy!"**

**After my husband died 18 years ago, I have tried 16 different communal ventures. Now I am on to a new one that looks like the best. I found a wonderful widow, a pastoral counselor, who wants to co-found with me a specific kind of Dedicated Widow Community. The apostolate will be to intercede for seminarians, be spiritual "mothers" to them, and volunteer at the seminary.**



**Lots of people pray for vocations and for priests, but not so many for seminarians. Most of them have to go through a 6 year process before ordination. Many of them leave pleasant homes and/or good jobs, to live in a room about 15×15 and enter into a routine, glorious in some ways, but very hard in others. They miss being around families, women and children. It is good for them to have some friendly women professors, staff, Sisters, around them. I think of us as cheerleaders.**

**Pray for them and pray for our tiny group of widows trying to become consecrated at a late age!**

**Seminarians**

**7 April 2011**

**I am working on the way of life for the Dedicated Widows of the Holy**



**Eucharist I am in the process of co-founding. We have to write a section on the Eucharist.**

**My take, as a daily communicant, is that Jesus, the Bridegroom, is leaping down from heaven, to come right inside me. And, perhaps, even more dramatically – if the seminarians don't persevere, we will starve.**

**Already some parishes in the US have a priest once a month and Communion Services the rest of the month. Some parishes no longer have daily Mass. Fr. Tony Anderson, SOLT, is pastor of 90,000 Mexicans.**

**Priests are an endangered species. Pray for vocations. Within the next month you will be hearing from me about a book I edited of Late Vocation stories. It will be called: "Last Call: 14 Men who Dared Answer." These stories range from former night club managers to international bankers, to a Peruvian considered late vocation at 21 because in his time they took in boys of 7!**

**The hound of heaven isn't dead yet!**

**Disappointment in Friendships doesn't need to be Total Loss**

**8 April 2011**

**Sometimes we think that a particular admired person will be a great friend forever. Then something happens that hurts or disillusion us. I am not writing about severe tragic betrayals, but more about personality conflict. We have to give up that dream of life-long closeness. When we think of him or her it is with sadness and even distaste.**



**But then a new situation arises where we find ourselves collaborating with that lost friend. Suddenly, we see again the other at his/her best, and the original bond is strengthened, not necessary forever, but for this God-given common task or ministry.**

**This happened to me today with several people who had disappointed me and whom I disappointed. Out of love for a new very hurting person we all gathered around and grace flowed toward the one we were praying with who had no idea of all the past problems between us. Besides the grace to our new mutual friend, there was a flow of appreciative love in the whole circle.**

**What will it be like in heaven when all is really forgiven?**

**Of Gods and Men - about the French Martyr Cisterian monks in Algeria**

**9 April 2011**

**Go see this remarkable French movie that won such prizes. There's an old phrase that France is the eldest daughter of the Church – and the remnants of the old French spirituality are amply manifested in this film about these monks who decided to stay with their Algerian villagers when threatened by terrorists.**

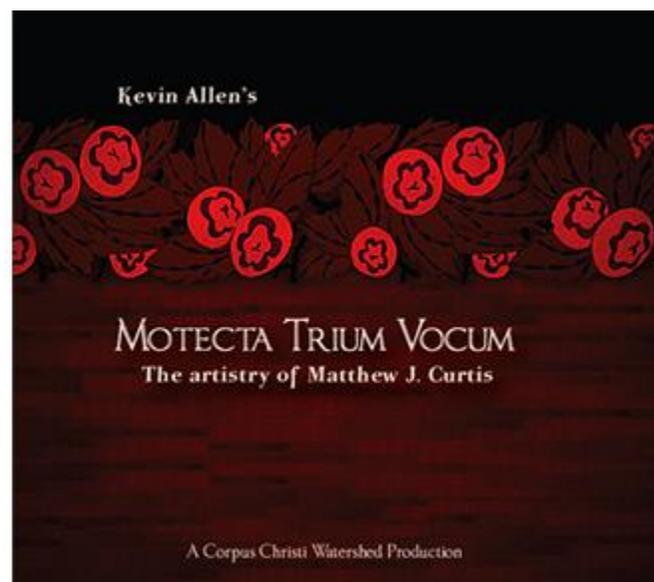


**In a wonderful way it shows the contrast between the fear of the monks that is redeemed in Christ and the fear in the terrorists, so unredeemed and the consummate forgiveness of the monks for their enemies.**

**Kevin Allen's Motets**

**11 April 2011**

**A busy Sunday. It turned out to be one with deadlines on 2 writing projects coming at once. Actually not true. A long time ago I recognized that workaholic types like me tend to create artificial deadlines. In other words, in our**



own heads we decide that such and such project must be done by this date even though there is no such necessity. Then we work a mile a minute to succeed in reaching the deadline, meanwhile, of course, also cudgeling co-workers to keep up with the pace! Forgive me any co-workers who are reading this.

In any case, after this hectic day with 2 artificial deadlines I decided to squeeze in a prayer time and to waft me out of projectitis I pulled out [Kevin Allen's \*Motecta Trium Vocum\*](#). AAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH! Blissful escape from my frenzied brain into the rhythms of the angels.

I had another motive. I have not seen my friends at Watershed for many, many years. Now we are arranging a get together of Watershed people in early July. Check with Jeff for more details as this unfolds. And I hope also to see Watershedders I have not yet met, such as Kevin Allen.

May God bless us all, and moderate our creative talents so that we may not be workaholics but....grace-aholics?

### Abby Johnson's Unplanned

11 April 2011

When everyone on your side starts praising a book, do you ever kind of resist and think, maybe if everyone loves it, I won't love it? Most of the time, when I get around to reading the book I love it. This is certainly the case with Unplanned. As most of you know, it is the story of a woman who ran an abortion mill and turned around and joined our side. I understand she has recently even become a Catholic.

I have been teaching an ethics book on abortion called *Mixed Feelings: The Ethics of Abortion* by Dr. Stephen Schwarz and Kiki Lattimer. The idea was to write a pro-life book that really explained why pro-choicers think the way they do. It is a book you can give to family and friends who are sitting on the fence. Look for it to come out in the Fall. It is terrific.



Nothing could better illustrate the points in *Mixed Feelings* than this book by Abby Johnson. Even though she was a Christian attending pro-life Churches she was still convinced that the services of

Planned Parenthood in the area of contraception would make abortion rare! She managed to hide from herself her guilt about her own two abortions.

Working in the office counseling woman, It was only after 8 years that she saw an actual abortion and realized that this innocent baby was real and had the right to life.

The most hopeful and touching thing about Abby's story is how the love shown by the Coalition for Life members praying outside her clinic contributed to her decision to come over to the right side.

Read it, you'll be as moved to hope as I was.

## "God Alone" Reflections

12 April 2011

In the year 2008, having written more than 60 books, the Holy Spirit seemed to lead me away from my own insights into a different space where words much better than my own thoughts could penetrate my soul. Each night I wrote these down, under the title of "God Alone!" God alone is part of the famous words of St. Teresa of Avila: "Let nothing disturb you, God alone is enough."



Every now and then I run out of insights. I pull out my print out of God Alone, and let these seemingly uninventable higher thoughts bathe my soul. Tonight, when I realized I didn't have any insight to share with the readers of this blog, I decided I would share with you, instead, some of those lines from God Alone. If you indicate that you "liked" these two excerpts, I will give you more of them.

"To prepare for eternity We (I interpret this plural as the Holy Spirit speaking for the Trinity in some mysterious sense) want you to appreciate the beauty of creation and life even more, but also to relax your grip on it. Let yourself be wafted a little bit above everything, as if you were levitating."

**“Pace and Openness: Imagine a sight-seeing procession. Ideally it is timed for the right amount of contact with what is to be viewed. The tourists are not jostled quickly past the most important sites.**

**Rural life was paced by nature: dawn, midday sun, twilight, nightfall, seasons. There was ample time to absorb the nature of trees and animals and weather in the midst of the work cycle. Think of cooking (as an example of absorbing the nature of each food). Think also of the pace of monastic hours of prayer.**

**In your era, you think instead of spirituality as leaping out of time, out of nature, into the eternal. You think of being saved from the realities you have made, into our eternal now.**

**More Catholic is it open to Us in prayer. We fill you and then send you back into your world to be open to it and transform it. The pace is liturgical, not rushed.”**

**(The whole of “God Alone” can be found on [www.rondachervin.com](http://www.rondachervin.com) under free e-books.)**

## **C.S. Lewis and his Revision of the Problem of Pain**

**13 April 2011**

**C.S. Lewis’ book the Problem of Pain is probably the best philosophical and theological answer of the 20th century to the question of how a God of love can allow terrible pain. Just the same, when he went through his worst agony over the death of his wife, Joy, described in A Grief Observed, he was honest enough to admit that his answers in the Problem of Pain didn’t help him at all! He still started thinking, “Maybe there is no God? or God is a sadist!” What finally brought him through was giving up trying to figure it out and just letting God reassure him on an experiential level.**

**Just now I have 3 close friends going through unbearable agony for different reasons – one is circumstances where he cannot protect a child from an abusive father. The other is watching a beloved wife suffering physical and emotional pain no amount of medicine can remove.**



All my feeble efforts to give fix-it advice failed. What I am saying to them instead now is my last ditch remedy: I lie on the floor in a cruciform position and tell God, "I'm not getting up until you reassure me that it is going to be all right somehow in some way soon."

When I do that, usually the situation that I find unbearable doesn't change, but I feel God's personal love for me enough to make it bearable after all.

Rudolf Otto, a Protestant theologian of the 20th century in his famous book *The Idea of the Holy* points out in his commentary on the Book of Job that the answers God gives Job are not that different from what the false friends said! What brings Job around is that is the experience of God's Holy Presence.

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## Signs of the New Springtime in the Church

15 April 2011

Sometimes Church news is so grim we think we are in the Dark Ages. But soon to be Blessed John Paul the Great predicted a new springtime for the Church.

I thought of this tonight hearing good news from Michael Cumbie. Michael is a late vocation seminarian at Holy Apostles where I teach. He has a fascinating background. He was a Southern Baptist, then a Pentecostal preacher, then an Episcopalian priest. He converted to the Catholic faith and hopes to become a Roman Catholic priest.

Michael is helping support his family and his seminary studies by doing Missions. Here is how he described a recent mission. It was to a small Catholic Church that had left behind lots of doctrine and practice. Now under a magisterial priest, Cumbie was invited to stir the people up to renewed fervor. The congregation was so delighted with Cumbie's conversion that they became wide open to what he said on subsequent nights about the glory of the perennial Church with its traditions and art and music. After 4 nights of this they were ready to renew their Church.

The new springtime of the Church!!!! Check out Cumbie's web-site where you can order terrific videos and audios of his spectacular conversion.



## **Sincerity Check-mates Cynicism**

**16 April 2011**

**Someone said that if you look around you it makes you depressed. If you look inward you get distracted. To be hopeful you have to look up. Of course we realize God is everywhere and not a sky deity, but the analogy of “up” meaning transcendence works.**

**I experienced this today in a beautiful fashion. I am a co-host on a little TV access show with interviews of Catholic leaders. Today, Fr. Martin Jones, newly appointed minister for hispanic evangelization in the Norwich, Connecticut diocese, and I interviewed an elderly hispanic woman who is a parish leader. Aurora was telling stories of the piety of her parents. She spoke of how on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe her family would ride from their ranch in New Mexico in a carriage drawn by horses 18 miles to the Church. She said the priest never started the Mass until they arrived. As she spoke, first in Spanish, and then in English, her eyes were cast upward with an expression of luminous sincerity.**

**The sincerity of her faith seemed like such a check-mate to a kind of mildly cynical sophistication we can fall into out of a kind of intellectualization of the faith.**

**On the verge of falling asleep tonight it was Aurora’s upward glance that remained in my mind as the most significant reality to share with you.**

## **Pride in Children and Grandchildren**

**16 April 2011 Most of us should and do love our children and grandchildren whether we are proud of them or not, but then sometimes come those delicious moments of happy and not to be blamed pride. In Yiddish such**



parents and grandparents are said to “kvell” which is a word just for that kind of joy.

My oldest grandson (21 years old) passed through Connecticut and visited me over night. Probably because of half Jewish ancestry from my side, he happens to look almost exactly like Jim Carveziel in the Passion! So much is this the case that in High School everyone called him “Jesus” as a nickname. It is not just the features, it is a look of eager compassion in his face that I love.

Now, he likes to wear grundgies, and I was afraid that at our formal seminary they might not be able to see the man for the clothes, but they did! And I kvelled thinking “Heh, without me, he wouldn’t exist.” I remember the first time I heard about the biological fact that because of the body/soul togetherness we believe to be God’s plan, it is not like he creates first a soul and then dumps it anywhere, but the soul and body are created simultaneously in such a way that the baby that my husband and I would procreate a month after would not be the same unique self as the one we procreated exactly on that date. Awesome, eh?

Best of all was a deeply Christian thing my non-practicing grandson told me about. He is a fiction writer who works as a cashier to support himself. I kvell a lot about his writings. Recently he decided to take a crash course to become a nursing aid. After months of practice, mostly on Alzheimer patients, he said this: “It’s probably the worst job in the world in terms of the awful pace and the sometimes disgusting jobs, but I love it because the patients need my help so much.”

Pray for dear ones fallen away from the Faith: that they come back to the sacraments. And try practicing kvelling openly with your kids, grandkiddies, or relatives and younger friends.

## How much can we Expect from Others?

17 April 2011 A favorite line from a novel whose name and author slips my mind was enunciated by a bachelor to answer the question of why he had never married: “With women, everything is either not enough or too much!” I laughed and laughed when I read this. It explained a lot to me about my general state of dissatisfaction fluctuating with feeling overwhelmed.

In heaven nothing will be not enough or too much. On earth, maybe that is a universal plight. Because we are made for God who is infinite perfection, we can’t help wishing for paradise now. That is good in that it keeps us trying to improve things, relationships, creative work, the Church. On the other hand, the restlessness of our hearts has to be balanced by gratitude for everything wonderful, especially gratitude for what others are trying to do for us. How wretched it is to see, for instance, a spouse, trying and trying to please the

**beloved and meeting only with captious criticism! But then, also, how wretched it is when someone can easily meet the need of another but is simply too selfish to even try!**

**“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”**



## **Unusually Terrific Sermon I Heard Today**

**18 April 2011**

**A deacon almost priest seminarian today gave such a great sermon I have to share it with you. He started with saying how if you were in Jerusalem this week and didn't know this story had a glorious ending, wouldn't you think that the life of Jesus was totally out of control? His disciple is stealing the money; the Jewish leaders are plotting to kill Him...doesn't He seem helpless and hopeless? But he really was in control.**

**And how about our lives? Some of us at the seminary, he went on to say, feel out of control. Finals, papers, even maybe a crisis about your vocation? Do we really believe that Jesus is in control?**



The sermon reminded me of a chapter in a book of mine that is out of print but now a free e-book called *Mary, Teach us how to Live*. This book goes through the 15 Mysteries of the Rosary relating themes to every day life. For the Sorrowful Mysteries the theme I chose was "Fight, Flight, or....stand under the Cross and suffer." Many times when we are overwhelmed by conflicts or just exhausted from the basic struggle of daily life, we can feel tempted to fight in vengeful ways or to flee. Sometimes those choices are good. But sometimes we can't win and we can't flee because of our commitments. Then we have to imitate Our Lady and just stand under our own crosses and suffer until God chooses to bring us something better.

Going into Holy Week what is the cross you need to stand under?

You can find my Mary book at [rondachervin.com](http://rondachervin.com) — click on free e-books for *Mary, Teach us how to Live!*

## Sacred Time and Space

20 April 2011

Brought up as a total atheist, I had no sense whatsoever of tradition, ritual or ceremony. When I became a Catholic at 21, ushered in through such lovers of traditional liturgy as the Von Hildebrand's, I lived with daily Mass and liturgy of the hours more out of blind faith than understanding.

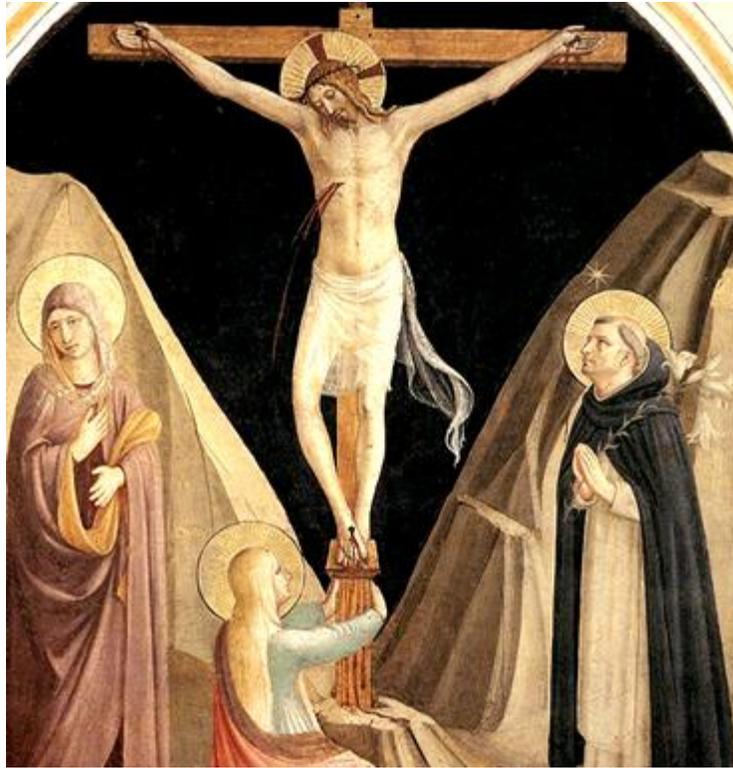
The key to understanding came with a course given by my godfather, Balduin Schwarz, on philosophy of religion. We read a book by Mircea Eliade on the nature of the sacred as expressed in all religions. The concept was that it is part of the experience of the divine to set aside sacred spaces and sacred times. In terms of Catholic worship I learned that in the incarnation, Christ, the God-man, enters our "conveyor belt" of human time. Because He was divine as well as human, when, through the priest, His death on the cross is re-presented we truly enter into the eternal where all time is unified. That sacred time participates in eternity and when we enter it we are caught up into His Real Presence in a way different from the way He is present to us when we pray at any time of day or year in any space other than the sacred space of the Church.

Presently, graced to live at a seminary where high liturgy is valued above all, I am caught up even more in the solemnity of that sacred time and space each day, but to the maximum as we come to the Triduum.

If I get sufficiently caught up you won't hear from me on this blog until Easter Monday.



**The Passion Revisited**



21 April 2011

It was very different seeing the Passion for the 4th time at the seminary on a huge screen instead of in a home with many distractions. The context of these reflections is a previous conversation where I was insisting that I didn't have to adopt the kind of spirituality where you "pretend" not to want consolations in order to be in union with God. My holier friends insisted, instead, that if you want consolations then you don't really want only God's will. I wound up just saying that if Jesus wanted me to be more like them in this respect, I would pray for Him to show me.

Watching The Passion led to these new graces:

As I watched the violent scenes of the scourging, I felt a deep desire to suffer for Him more. I wanted to suffer more for my sins and those of others, and at the same time to rejoice even more with Him because He is in heaven and He will bring me there one day.

That is the paradox for me, not so much to want only God's "will," in some abstract sense but to want only Jesus, both the Jesus on the Cross and the Jesus who is in heaven.

**I thought I want to say the Jesus prayer and the Hail Mary all day long – in my heart as I go through my day.**

**It is not so much that I want only His will, but just that I want Him, His heart in my heart making it into love.**

**I felt I wanted to count up the sufferings of each day, small and large and rejoice that I am worthy to suffer for Him, my Bridegroom. To offer these sufferings for my family, seminarians, and all those friends and others who ask for my prayers.**

**Some think The Passion is too gratuitously violent. I think only such realism can break through the defenses of people like me.**

**I said to a seminarian sitting next to me during the Eucharist scenes “If you are willing to suffer ANYTHING WHATSOEVER for Him, you can be a priest.” (Many seminarians start thinking the sacrifice of 6 or so years of seminary is unbearable.)**

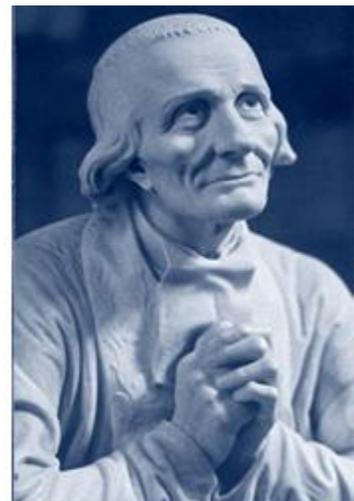
**As usual, the horrible scenes reminded me of how we say a proof of the Resurrection is that if these men who knew what a crucifixion was really like, were willing to risk death by following Jesus as Christians, they must have seen the Resurrection.**

**Of course, this exalted mood will pass, but please pray that it leaves an impress on my frantic little soul.**

### **A Christian Way to Respond to Annoyance**

**22 April 2011 I don't know if you have the same thing, but when I am upset about something and, therefore, in a bad mood to begin with, every single sin or defect I observe became a reason for a highly critical interior analysis of same.**

**Today, Good Friday, the Lord seemed to tell me:  
“whenever you see something virtuous or beautiful**



rejoice in this way My kingdom is here, but when you see something sinful or defective first endure it, and then IMMEDIATELY do penance in reparation for it.”

I thought that by penance he didn't mean flagellation or any other dramatic thing, though there is a long tradition of that among the saints, but, for weakling me, something tiny such as instead of waiting to do some chore until manana, to do it immediately. Or clear off the dishes on the table instead of waiting for someone else to do it.

Try it! You won't like it, but it will distract you from useless fulmination.

Dedicated Widows of the Holy Eucharist

25 April 2011

After my husband died in 1993 I thought I would become an instant saint. But, as he feared, I became, instead a dingbat floating around on the ceiling without the ballast of his heavy domineering hand! Recently I counted up 16 different ways of life I tried. A wonderful charismatic Catholic therapist told me not to look upon these as failures but to make a list and next to each one think of how I helped others at that time and how others helped me. So now I try to think of them as stepping stones instead of failures.



Anyhow many of these rotated around trying to find a way of life for ardent Catholic widows who don't want to get stuck some day in a Catholic retirement home where after daily Mass the main activity is watching big screen game shows. I will not make you laugh by describing reasons why seemingly perfect solutions didn't work both because of my defects and theirs, but instead tell you about my latest venture which fits with one mentor's advice "dream not the impossible dream, but the possible dream."

**Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family will be a group of widows who promise not to re-marry with Jesus as our Second Bridegroom, to dedicate ourselves to Christ and the Church but in the specific form of living close to seminaries and volunteering in service for whatever needs we can help with, as well as participating in the Mass and Liturgy of the Hours with them as more or less “spiritual mothers.” In effect, bartering 3 delicious meals a day for fostering vocations! Yum! Yum! I am already doing this, but now I have 3 more interested who may come all the way from Colorado and Maryland. No money is involved. We live simply but keep our own funds for visits to family, etc.**

**If anyone reads this who is either a widow or a potential widow, or a single who could live with a widow paradigm rule, check out the Statutes on [rondachervin.com](http://rondachervin.com) click on Widow Options.**

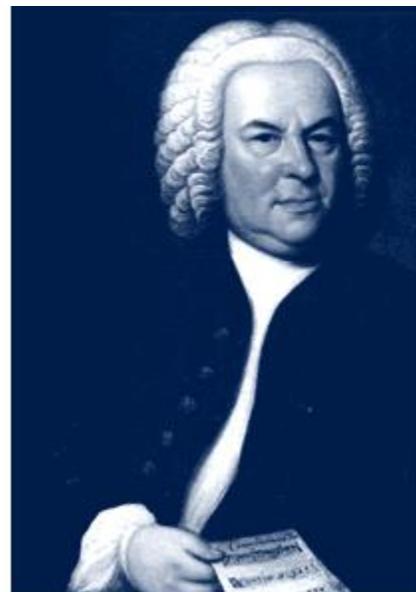
**If you fit into none of these categories, say a prayer for us to Mary, Exalted Widow (that is her name in a Spanish novena).**

## **Memories**

**26 April 2011**

**When I was 60 I wrote a book called Meeting Christ in the Joys and Sufferings of Aging. I thought it would be hard to find joys but asking around I came up with lots. Senior discounts rated high. One of them I never thought of was that because we are less busy, even though busier than we thought we'd be, we have more time for musing. Something in the present, triggers some delicious memory of the past, and now we have time to savor it.**

**Reading Jeff Ostrowski's blog about piano vs. organ triggered this fantastic memory. I was around 12 years old strolling along Riverside Drive in NYC when, even though I was brought up atheist, I suddenly got this impulse to walk into Riverside Church. I had never been inside a Church. It was during the week. No one was inside this grand edifice**



but cascading down from the choir loft was Bach's Toccata and Fugue! I was transfixed not only by the beauty but by the power of it. I think it was the very first time God reached out to me through beauty, and perhaps paved the way for another graced moment when a college boyfriend, a non-practicing Episcopalian, played Bach's Wachtel Auf on a tiny tape recorder. Mind you, I didn't have the faintest idea who Jesus even was, but the music carried Him to me.

After you read this, take a little trip "down memory lane" to when the BEAUTY of Christ came into you for the first time.

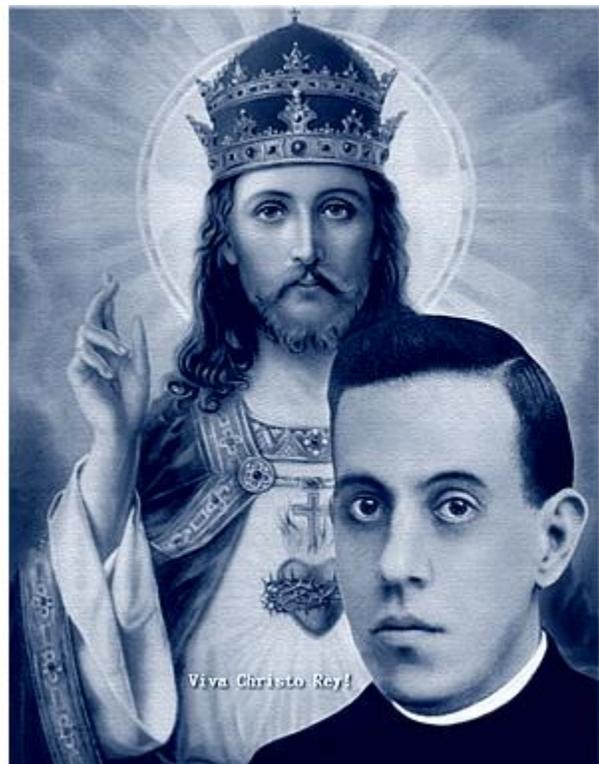
You can find my book by going to [rondachervin.com](http://rondachervin.com) and clicking on books for sale and scrolling down to the above title.

## Hispanic Masses

28 April 2011 On Tuesday evenings we have a special table for learning to speak Spanish by chatting. It is attended by the Spanish teacher, anglos learning Spanish, and sometimes a few native speakers. I go because I plan to do door to door evangelization soon. It would be good to brush up on my weak Spanish skills first.

Tonight, maybe because it was Easter and also the last week of classes, many hispanic seminarians came to the table. They hail from Columbia, Peru, Mexico, Puerto Rico, etc. They began singing hispanic songs most of them knew but few of us anglos knew.

These men, who usually look serious, and some even morose, were filled with joy to be singing in their own language, not as part of some program at the



**school, but spontaneously! I thought, that is why I think it is so important that we have hispanic Masses in this country. Of course, every immigrant should learn English. The next generation usually only wants to speak English. But for those brought up to pray in Spanish, out of love, we should want them to have this joy.**

**I usually put this point in a “nastier” way: since we anglos are contracepting and aborting ourselves out of existence, we better learn Spanish! Adios, amigos!**

## **Healing the Emotions**

**April, 2011**

**A very popular book in the 70’s was entitled The Wounded Healer. It was written by Henri Nouwen, a priest psychotherapist. The book was about how most of us suffer different emotional wounds in childhood but, then, through prayer and counseling or spiritual direction, we need to become not Wounded Wounders but Wounded Healers.**



**Let me give you a simple example. A little boy of five is jumping around the house playing noisily with his brother. Whenever they make noise, if his alcoholic father is around, he runs into the room where they are playing and whacks them yelling “I deserve a little peace and quiet in my own home.”**

**In effect the father is being what we used to call “a kill-joy.” He could have calmly insisted the boys to go out in the yard or down to the basement to play,**

but instead he lashes out in anger. This could give the little boy the feeling that his father only wants him around if he is quiet, “seen and not heard.”

The father thinks that he is a very loving father because he works hard to “bring home the bacon,” but when the son grows up he may truthfully say that he can’t remember his father ever smiling at him or saying “I love you.”

Now let’s take our example a little further. Because he hated being yelled at and hit by his father, the boy, when he becomes a father, may never hit or yell at his kids, but he becomes a wounded wounder just the same.

How so? He may respond to annoyance and frustration by means of sarcasm as in “heh, kids, you think everyone’s deaf so you have to yell when you play.” Let’s say that he is sarcastic not only to his kids but also to his wife and to his employees.

Let’s step back now. As Christians we are taught that the highest value is love. We are all called to holiness, which I define as having nothing but love in our hearts. Clearly, being chronically angry in the form of yelling, hitting others, or sarcasm, is not loving.

Besides not being loving to others, it is also harmful to ourselves, because anger is the opposite of peace.

In the course of this presentation and the optional workshop after this on healing of masculine and feminine, I am going to offer opportunities for healing of toxic emotions that are obstacles to experiencing love and peace in our hearts.

Some of us think of being emotional as in itself negative. We think of sometimes out-of-control negative emotions such as fear, anger and sadness. We wish we had less of them and we wish we didn’t have to be the victims of those emotions when others experience them in an out of control manner.

Others of us think of emotions are largely positive. We think of emotional persons as free, not repressed, and “real.” We compare them to others we think of as “locked up,” cold, Stoical, distant and distancing.

The great Catholic philosopher, Dietrich Von Hildebrand in his book *The Heart*, distinguishes between different types of emotions. Emotions such as feeling miserable because too hot or cold due to the weather, or tired because of a sleepless night, are not within our control .

Other emotions such as anxiety attacks, rage, and melancholy can involve over-reactions. In themselves, it is not irrational to feel fear if there is an serial killer in your neighborhood, to feel angry about grave injustices, or to feel grief if a beloved person dies. But it is irrational to be so frightened of the serial killer that you hide you your house for years or to be so angry about the actions of a spouse that you kill him or her, or to be so grieved that you never get close to anyone again after the death of a loved one.

A lot of these negative emotions come from childhood. Anxiety can come from being neglected as a kid as in often left home alone when too young to cope. Anger can come from deprivation of basic needs in childhood such as being passed over because a parent preferred a sibling, or, worst case, being abused sexually or being battered, or being verbally demeaned. Melancholy can result from many deaths in the family. Counsellors know how to bring a person back to these painful experiences, offering healing insight and love, to break patterns coming from such wounds. Your own parish may have such counselors available without cost. My experience is that small daily frustrations trigger the over-reaction. For example, if a meal is delayed, I can feel irrational anxiety. A therapist taught me that this was probably due to being bottle-fed by a nurse as a child rather than with mother's milk or mother's close embrace.

Some emotions, however, are always rational and good. Von Hildebrand gives such examples as love, peace, and joy when these are responses to such realities as returning God's love, having peace because of faith in the proved virtues of others, being joyful to see a member of the family after a long absence.

To return to the Wounded Healer image – when we speak of healing of the emotions what we hope for is that we may move from being dominated by negative out of control emotions into the positive rational emotions of love,

peace and joy. When we are feeling such emotions our relationships to others become healing to them. We become soothing, comforting, delightful to others instead of being Wounded Wounders of them. A poster says, “no one heals himself by wounding another.”

Two main remedies for out of control emotions are psychological insight and deep prayer.

The insights that helped me the most had to do with chronic anger starting in childhood. Until I studied and participated in the system of Abraham Low, founder of Recovery, International (not 12 Step), I used to have 5 public fits a day. This is a free self-help group started in the 1940's and now all over the world.

Here is the way Abraham Low would describe the angry father's sarcasm. This man is a perfectionist. He thinks that life could be beautiful if only everyone else fell in line with his directives. But, according to Low, only realists are happy. Realists “expect frustrations every five minutes” and peacefully work around them. They expect the average instead of the perfect. Instead of wishing his kids were obedience robots, this father, knowing that kids are noisy, fixes up a room or a basement just for the kids to play in.

Here's how I describe my own chronic anger, greatly diminished because of going to Recovery, International for many years. I think of myself as the heroine of a drama called life. I want everyone else to be either secondary characters or walk-ons who do and say what will enhance my ideal day. Since they refuse to accept these roles, I try to coerce them into doing so by yelling at them. That rarely works. So I feel weak, impotent, and miserable. To overcome those awful feelings, I try to get a “symbolic victory” by talking with my friends about how awful my family is. “Symbolic victory” is a term Low devised to explain why people like to be angry even though it makes them miserable and doesn't work. We hate to feel weak. When we can't get a real victory, we try to feel strong and victorious by putting others down, lower than us, through anger or sarcasm.

To express this idea, I entitled my Catholic book on anger: **Taming the Lion Within: Five Steps from Anger to Peace**. Now, often, if not always, when I feel angry, I ask myself whether it is because I want to be the heroine of my day and feel frustrated, and why I feel weak. I try to accept that others won't go along with my plan and that it's okay to be weak because that is REAL. I am weak in many respects.

Then, bolstered by my weekly Recovery, International meetings, I combine these insights with my spirituality centered in daily Mass, and prayer.

How does prayer help? Let's look at the father's sarcasm in terms of healing prayer. On the way home from work, the father says a rosary in thanksgiving for his family and asking Mother Mary to intercede for him about what he can realistically expect to find when he walks through the door of his house: that is, the average behavior of his kids and wife. Once a week he goes to an Adoration chapel at his parish. He lays on God everything in his life that bothers him. He sits quietly and begins to bask in God's love. He hears in His heart Jesus telling him how grateful He, God, is for the many sacrifices made out of love for spouse and kids. When his sarcastic anger gets the best of him, instead of justifying his anger on the basis that "I'm angry because everyone else is obnoxious, so they are the problem, not me, he brings that out of control anger to Confession. When the problems become major crosses, the father identifies himself with Jesus on the Crucifix. He begs Jesus to bear those crosses with him, lest he fall into anger, anxiety, of despair.

The worst pain I ever experienced was when my son committed suicide 19 years ago. Over time healing came with a combination of insight and the healing love of Jesus.

When I asked how could a God of Love let my son do this, I thought of C.S. Lewis' book the *Problem of Pain*. Basically his answer is that if God wanted free human beings vs. robots or dolls, he had to allow us to do things that cause others unbearable agony. If I could have stopped my son by coercing him, he would not have been free. Just the same, when C.S. Lewis went through his worst agony over the death of his wife, Joy, described in *A Grief Observed*, he

was honest enough to admit that his answers in the *Problem of Pain* didn't help him at all! He still started thinking, "Maybe there is no God or God is a sadist!" What finally brought him through was giving up trying to figure it out and just letting God reassure him on an experiential level.

So, when these philosophical answers don't suffice, I lie on the floor in a cruciform position and tell God, "I'm not getting up until you reassure me that it is going to be all right somehow in some way soon."

When I do that, usually the situation that I find unbearable doesn't change, but I feel God's personal love for me enough to make it bearable after all. After my son's death, when I was feeling such agony, these words from Jesus came into my heart and reassured me: "You son had his foretastes of heaven in the joys he had. You will find him in my Sacred Heart."

Rudolf Otto, a Protestant theologian of the 20th century in his famous book *The Idea of the Holy* points out in his commentary on the Book of Job that the answers God gives Job are not that different from what the false friends said! What brings Job around is the experience of God's Holy Presence.

In conclusion, to become Wounded Healers instead of Wounded Wounders, we need to seek insight into our negative emotions, through reading, spiritual director, and/or professional counseling, and we also need to pray in a deep way to give God a chance to heal us.

Between sessions I will be happy to pray over you for healing of your negative emotions or for your worst sufferings. Now I would like to read from a healing service. It is mostly from Fr. De Grandis, but slightly modified by me. You can more of this on his web.

Read from *Taming the Lion*

Blessed John Paul II the Great's Letter to Artists

15 May 2011

During the beatification, everyone here at the seminary was exchanging stories of what they loved best about our new saint. For me, one of the most exciting things about John Paul II was that he had such different works: rock quarry during the war, actor, playwright, philosopher, theologian, bishop, Pope, and even skier! One of our seminarians who was born in Poland said that when JPII was still only Archbishop, he was in shorts taking a group of young people on a hike and on the mostly empty train, his car was full of people who had rushed from their cars on the train, to greet this so popular bishop!



I teach his wonderful Letter to Artists. Here is the opening in case some Watershed readers never read this letter.

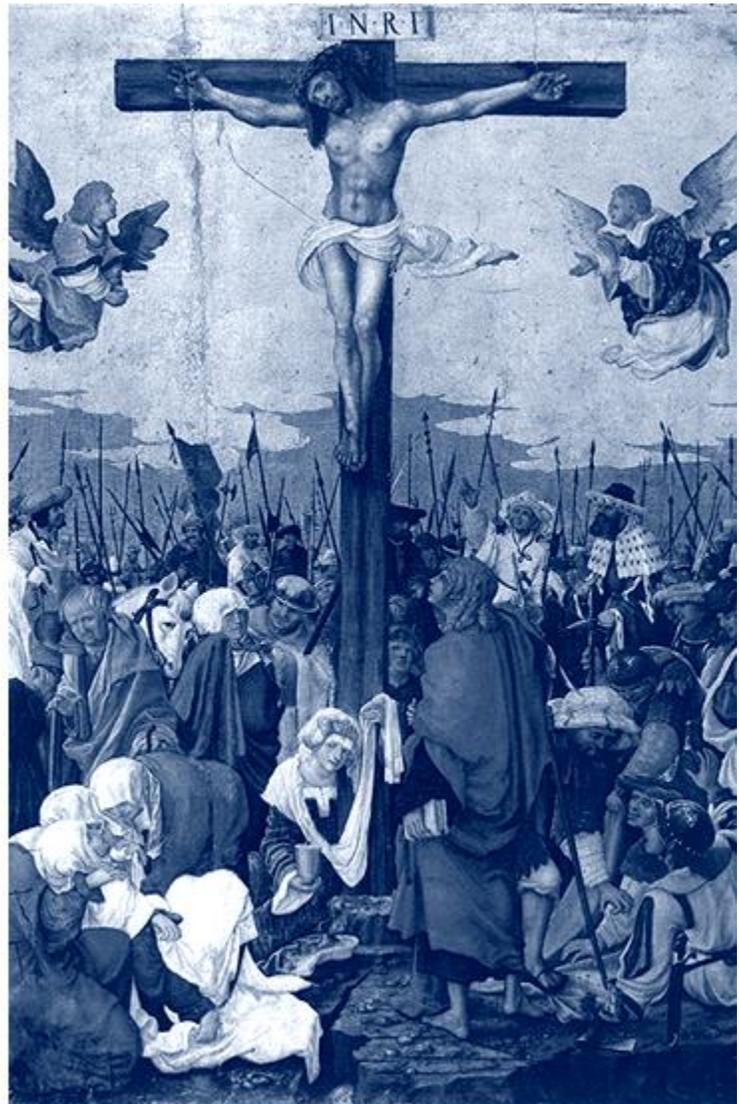
“None can sense more deeply than you artists, ingenious creators of beauty that you are, something of the pathos with which God at the dawn of creation looked upon the work of his hands. A glimmer of that feeling has shone so often in your eyes when—like the artists of every age—captivated by the hidden power of sounds and words, colours and shapes, you have admired the work of your inspiration, sensing in it some echo of the mystery of creation with which God, the sole creator of all things, has wished in some way to associate you.”

Read the whole thing by google search.

## Healing of Rejection

15 May 2011

I am working on a talk for a series in Los Angeles this summer on



**Meeting Jesus in the Crises of Life. One is on rejection. The focus is on a particular but common type of rejection that comes with over-estimating what others can do and be for us. This is different than the rejection that Jesus experienced with the Jewish leaders where he in no way over-estimated them.**

**I use two little scenarios. One is about a divorced woman who falls in love with her boss, a married man. The other involves a father who wants his son to be the baseball star he couldn't be. I take these characters through stages of fantasy, anxiety, rejection, surrender, forgiveness, to the right kind of love.**

**One of my chief insights, from lots of sorrowful experiences, is that when we approach others with thirst rather than tenderness they almost have to reject us. In our thirst for whatever their virtues and talents seem to promise, we demand of them more than they can possibly deliver. We make them into little gods and goddesses. Then, they fail us and we feel rejected.**

**When we bring our pain to Jesus, He can gradually bring His love into our wounds. Then, after forgiveness, we can reach out to others more tenderly instead of with a desperate thirst which usually leads to rejection.**

**If you are interested in more about this, ask Watershed to pass along your contact information and I can e-mail you the whole book.**

## **Home and Homelessness**

**15 May 2011**

**A marvellous quotation from a saint whose name I have, alas, senior moment, forgotten goes like this:**

**“Happy are they who have a home. Happier they for whom every place is home. Happiest they whose only home is heaven.”**

**I think of this spiritual adage whenever I have to leave a beloved place to go on, and even when my stay in one place is interrupted, for the summer for example.**

**You might lift up a prayer of gratitude for your present home, if you have one. And then a prayer of gratitude for each place that has temporarily been a home for you.**



And, then...how glorious to anticipate our final home in heaven – really there's for the asking provided we repent of all the sins that have made those in our "homes" on earth less than heavenly!

## Lebensraum

16 May 2011

Lebensraum is an intriguing reality crystallized in this word which literally translates as Living Room, but not in the sense of a living room. Rather it means the "room" a person takes in social situations. It is a derogatory expression referring to those who walk into a room and take over. The vehemence of such a one's personality crowds others into the margins of the "room." I "strut my stuff" oblivious to the need others might have to express themselves.

Mea culpa! Excuse? Well, if I don't talk, we have to sit around in silence. I forget that I might break the silence by asking questions of others so that they can share and shine!

If you know me, or plan to see me in the future, be sure to kick me under the table if I start to do this. Whisper "lebensraum," and you will shut me up fast.

## Letter to be read at a funeral

17 May 2011

One of my daughters, a poet, wrote this letter to her mother-in-law for the funeral of her father-in-law, Richard, who was a military caterer in England. This daughter of mine is slowly inching her way back to the Church. I thought you aesthetes would love some of these lines:

I saw a picture of Richard when he was young: a gloomy Heathcliff sitting on a beach, handsome as the devil. When I met him, illness had worn him down to a charming elf instead of a lonely devil: well, time and illness can do that and sometimes it is a kindness and sometimes it isn't. No one can know at what cost another person has earned their face...



I knew he knew he was dying when we last met. I do not think either of us knew how long or how painful it would be. I tried to pray but I don't know how to pray. There was a channel of pain traveling all the way from England to North Carolina and I sent what little I possess of faith and hope along it, feeling it was useless.

The day before he died, Richard visited me, stood behind my shoulder in the kitchen and commented on a meal I was making, wanted to try some. It was a whimsical moment full of warmth and it felt real. I have no right to speak of faith, but maybe this IS what it is made of: a few sunny moments strung up like rosary beads, a leap of faith, a skip of hope and finally a giant hop off the crucifixes that are prepared for us at the end of our lives. Believe in these moments because what else can you do?

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Dr. Ronda Chervin has many free e-books and audios on her website [rond](#)

## Ridicule of Therapists

18 May 2011 Over dinner here at the seminary someone used the word "shrinks" to describe psychotherapists. I cringed and then remarked provocatively, "I happen to have benefited greatly from psychotherapy throughout my long life, so I don't like to hear that ridiculing word: shrink."

The group at the table were startled. None of them had ever thought of the matter this way. As our conversation developed I developed the theory that because of the stigma of needing therapy or even the less stigmatized "counseling" some who go or have gone express their sometimes unconscious feelings of shame by making fun of their benefactors.

Presumably the ridiculing word, shrink, came out of the theory that the problem of many clients comes from being "swell-headed" and, therefore, needing their heads to be shrunk. An example would be someone who thinks everyone is watching and judging them in neutral situations. It could



take a lot of pride to think that most people are even noticing oneself so much that they would be making judgments.

To end these reflections on a more serious note, I realize that some Catholics have been misled by counselors and therapists who were either half-baked or anti-religious. But, for all of these sad outcomes, I have known many more troubled people who have been brought from dark misery to greater tranquility through good professionals. I have gotten much help from Catholic therapists, but also from an atheist and, even, a Jewish New Ager.

The last one, coming from a similar New York Jewish background to mine, had this explanation of an anxiety I could not understand by myself. I was telling him about how nervous I feel in Catholic work situations because I never know what the bosses really think. Here was his insightful and somewhat funny answer. "Ronda, because Jews lived in Europe mostly in ghettos close in together in apartments, they talked about everything all the time. Irish Catholics, however, came from a country where everything had to be hidden from the English. They talked behind the bushes. If your administrators are mostly Irish Catholics, that is in their bones. So, you're right to fear that you have no idea what they are really thinking. Maybe you have to trust in God instead of in them?????"

## **Priestly Ordination at Hartford, Connecticut**

**18 May 2011**

I have mentioned before that I have trouble with ceremonies, especially longer ones, but Ordinations are different. The first one I saw was in 1960. I was on a tour in Switzerland and going to daily Mass as usual came upon an ordination. Being a convert made it even more stunning.

After teaching at the seminary in Los Angeles, it was different. I actually knew these men. Some of these heroes I had helped pray through their worst moments of doubt about their vocations. The first time it was my late vocation seminarians being ordained I stood in the parking lot tears in my eyes pledging that because these wonderful holy men had gotten through the gauntlet of seminary I would never complain again in my whole life. Well, of course, I didn't live up to my pledge but, to my joy, coming back to Los Angeles years later, I found those heroes were now the priestly pillars of the archdiocese. They kept their pledge.



Now, when I go to an ordination of seminarians from Holy Apostles, where I teach, I always murmur the same words as I see the throngs of lay people taking their seats and the long procession of bishops, priests, about to be ordained, and seminarians coming up the aisle to the loud organ music and choir. The words I murmur as, 'AND THE GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PREVAIL.'

The seminarian who invited me was a medical researcher born in South Africa, a huge black man, who migrated to the US and then to our seminary, primarily, for late vocations. The choir learned a song in African for part of the ceremony. There were also 2 songs in Spanish for the hispanic ordinand. Most of the music, however, was traditional chant, some in Latin.

The traditional ceremonial of such extraordinary supernatural meaning, reminded me, however, of something else I love: surprise. I recalled a Mass in Corpus Christi, Texas, for the ordination of Society of Our Lady of the Trinity priests. The vocations director, Fr. Tony Anderson, a thin man in his 40's, was in the customary line up of all the priests who greet each newly ordained with a hug of peace. One of those just ordained was a large, large, man about 6'4" weighing no one could imagine how much. When Fr. Tony was in High School he was a wrestling champ. But, of course, this was the last thing on anyone's mind until suddenly at the hug of peace we saw the huge newly ordained priest lifted up into the air into a horizontal position by our thin priest. It was too quick for anyone to clap, but I clapped in my heart because reverential tradition is magnificent but the freedom of the Spirit in surprise is also...delightful!

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## A Visit to a Convalescent Home

19 May 2011

Today I gave a talk based on my forthcoming co-authored book: *What the Saints Say About Heaven*. The talk was to the elderly in a Catholic convalescent home here in Connecticut. I did it with Fr. Martin Jones who celebrates Mass at this place once a week. The Home is in a lovely woodsy area with beautiful



views and lovely decor.

Before lunch I noticed that in the rec room the elderly were watching what seemed like a sappy old musical. It turned out to be a old Lawrence Welk re-run.

I was muttering in my mind that if I were running the place I would have EWTN on instead. Since the old folks watching the show were neatly attired, most of the women with perms, I felt the usual alienation since, as a Dedicated Widow, I dress in denim jumpers with hair I cut from long to shoulder length with an old scissor. I remembered an old cartoon I saw in the 60's. It showed a party full of far-out looking hippies with one conventional couple dressed in suit and tie and pretty party dress. One bedraggled hippie is asking "where did they come from?" The other responds, "Oh, we got them from Rent a Square."

Later, however, watching the elderly being wheeled into the Mass by the kindly volunteer attendants, the Lord chided me. "Do you see that in old age, these Catholics get to become like lambs, whereas you, also very old, are still either a lion or a viper?"

"Well this lovely place is very expensive," I thought. "People, like me, who love simplicity of life and give their money to the poor, of course, could never come here." I asked the pastoral counselor who invited me what it cost to live there. "Oh," she said, "well it costs a lot, but we're Catholic. Anyone who can't afford more than Medicare or Medicaid, we take in anyhow."

So much for sarcastic judgments from the Rondaview! Thank God for confession!

## Redeemed Schmoozing

19 May 2011

"I'm schmoozing you, silly," said a friend to me. It sounded like a Yiddish expression, but I didn't really know the meaning. I was told that it is like



manipulating another through flattery to get you to agree to something you might not otherwise agree to.

Let me put this word together with an intriguing statement on forgiveness by a famous Asian guru, Hanh. He said if you are trying to make peace with someone who is offended by you for any reason, trying giving a little gift.

Generally, I am loathe to try such ploys, but recently I was in a situation where there was lots of misunderstanding and some bitterness. Eager to come to peace, I prayed and prayed to say the right things at a meeting. These were all true, but not what I would usually have said, because I would have preferred to nurture my side of the grievance.

I got the grace to say these good things and more and it resulted in renewed good feelings. I was stunned. It reminded me of a phrase a friend liked to trot out when asked for advice: "how about trying a new move?"

I am asking myself, how in the world can we be begging God to make us more loving if we dig our heels into our usual patterns that haven't worked, instead of trying, to use another Yiddish-English expression, to "make nice."

## Many thoughts

21 May 2011

I am going to be away for a week with possible cold turkey from my computer so I want to put up a whole bunch of stuff tonight. Could be the last one for a few days if I really can't get on the e-mail somehow.

Did everyone else in the world but me know about Alpaca – a warm but light fabric from Ecuador and Peru for ponchos, shawls and cloaks? One of my daughters gave me a certificate for Amazon clothing. After 6 weeks because of customs arrived this glorious navy blue poncho. It is the solution to a 15 year problem of being cold in Church but hating to wear huge heavy garments which weigh me down. Alpaca looks heavy but is light. If you don't know it, and you have similar problems, find out.



Great quote from Pope Benedict: "A constant temptation of Christian and of the Church is to seek victory without the Cross." Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea culpa. Apply that to yourself as you can!

A word that came to me from, hopefully, the Holy Spirit, when you feel anxious, pray and watch to see how God gets you through."

These two I can't remember if I quoted before but they are so powerful you can certainly benefit from reading them again:

"If you talk more about the bad than the good it shows you prefer Satan's work to God's!"  
St. Ignatius Loyola

"If you are looking for justice you will find it in Hell; mercy is in heaven, and on earth is the Cross." Gertrud Von Le Fort

### Look at Everyone with Mary's Merciful Eyes!

24 May 2011

Back in the 50's there was a TV ad for floor cleaner that showed a cowed housewife accosted by the judging eyes of a woman guest. The voice over was a man's voice saying: "Eyes are on your floors."

Not much for house-cleaning myself, when I occasionally have guests who are better housewives than myself, I remember that judgmental line and scurry around cleaning the floors.

Just to amuse you some old book about making life as a housewife easier suggested that if you clean only your kitchen counter and offer the guests a drink immediately no one will notice the rest of the mess!

Here is the spiritual analogy. When I went to confession about my harsh judgments about conventional retirement homes (you may remember this from a blog last week) – Fr. Martin Jones, my friend-priest, suggested as a penance that I try looking at everyone with Mary's merciful eyes. It's a great image. Can you imagine Mary looking at anyone with harsh judgment about small things of daily life?



A related concept I heard a few days ago was this: the sins of others require our forgiveness, but the faults and defects should be overlooked. Not, of course, if you are in authority as a parent or boss, but in other situations.

If asked, do you think that those you encounter would vote you in as having the most merciful eyes they ever saw?

## Do Leaders get along well with other Leaders?

25 May 2011

Recently someone said “You can’t have two leaders, it’s like two heads on one body.” I have been thinking about this because sometimes I don’t get along with someone I think I will do great with. I have all kinds of theories. But now I think in many cases it is because leaders both attract and repel each other.

We all know that, typically, in religious communities the founder is a flamboyant obvious leader, but then is, eventually, and often painfully, deposed to be replaced by a leader who is more quiet and prudent. A professor asked his class if they thought if two people were both saints that they would get along. They all said “yes.” But he said “no!” Why not? Because you can be full of heroic virtue but still have personality conflicts. If both are leader types, then neither one wants to give up his/her vision to simply bow before the vision of the other.

Sometimes we think we are not leaders because we don’t fit the stereotype of leaders we admire. At a workshop on leadership by a psychologist, she asked us to offer definitions of what a leader was. Socratic style, she finally led us to her definition which was surprising: “A leader is anyone who others will follow.” Duh!

So what Christian remedy do I see for leaders who clash? Look at Scripture! Eventually Saul and David had to split even though David thought he just wanted to be Saul’s soldier. After making up on major issues, it still seemed good that Paul went off from Peter’s domain to “do his own thing.” By the time they were both being crucified they probably had more in



common than different.

You might check this out in your own situations. Without one or the other being a formal leader, if both are leaders by individual call, chances are they may have friction in spite of lots of admiration. When I first came the seminary, finding myself surrounded by genius professors in related fields, I thought it would be nifty to persuade them to cooperate in my dream of panel style inter-disciplinary courses. No takers. I was disappointed until I noticed that in our large dining room, typically professors fan out rather than compete for “head” of the table of seminarians and lay students.

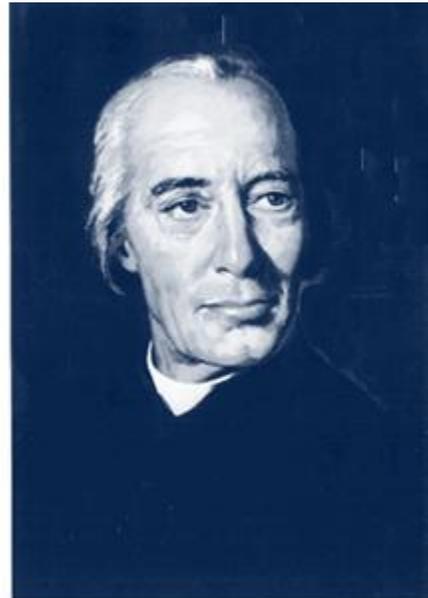
My prayer should be “Jesus, not my way, your way. Thank you for wonderful people to admire. Let me let go, however, of dreams of team work that can’t work because of friction of leaders. Let me put loving forbearance above grandiose schemes.”

## Fr. Gallitzin - missionary to the Alleghenies

25 May 2011

Well, my dear blog friends, I have now reached the point where I can’t remember what I wrote in former blogs. I am hoping that when Jeff Ostrowski puts them up he will notice and send them back if I am becoming an old repetitious bore...sigh!

What I don’t remember is if I told you that after my husband died in 1993 I tried 16 different ventures. As a result, when I come upon a new Catholic library, I start reading the lives of the saints I am not familiar with A-Z. But sometimes I glance at the nearby shelf that contains the lives of those others thought should be canonized but have not yet made it. These biographies detail everything the Congregation for Canonization would have to know in case the miracles piled up so that they would have to take notice. They are usually written by authors who knew the saint personally and if said writer was a good narrator they can be almost as wonderful as reading the lives of canonized saints, sometimes written by less gifted authors.



In this way I came upon one Fr. Gallitzin. The name always intrigued me. How did a Russian prince wind up as a key figure in American Catholic Church history? Oh, my, what an amazing

figure, not only in terms of his holiness but of a psychological feature rather rare. Prince Gallitzin was the 18th century son of a German noblewoman married to a Russian prince who was a representative of the Czar living in Germany. The mother was a beautiful, adored society woman who became more and more devout to the point that when her children were old enough to be handed over to fancy tutors she decided instead to, in effect, home-school them making use of progressive ideas of educational experts.

This worked well with the daughter, but the little prince turned out to be less than scholarly of temperament. The holy mother wept and scolded, wept and scolded, and even wrote the little prince letters of admonition about why he was so lazy and absolutely without any drive to learn anything.

This went on until he was 19. Because of the French Revolution they couldn't send prince charming on the usual Wanderjahre to Parish. Instead they packed him off to visit an uncle-missionary-priest in the United States. To the total surprise of the parents and the prince, early on he had a miraculous conversion through the Jesuits and risked losing his entire inheritance to become a missionary to the poor in the wilds of Pennsylvania. At the seminary he became so studious when it was theology he had to learn instead of the other liberal arts, that he had to be ordered to go to sleep. He became a holy missionary beloved for giving everything to the poor. Eventually the Russians, who never let anyone inherit their legacy who was Catholic no less a priest, gave all his money to other family members and Prince Father Gallitzin lived in real poverty with heroic virtue. It particularly wrung my heart hearing of him riding days and nights on horseback through snow and rain to far-off mission stations, and then having to eat hard meats and several day old biscuits with his dentures!

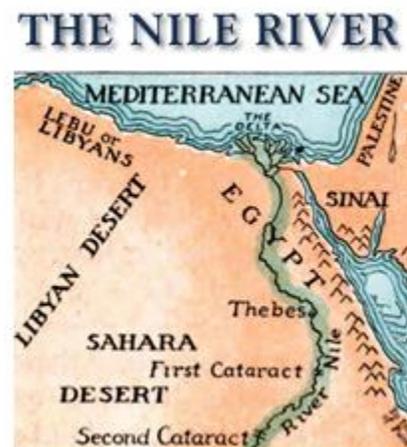
The bio I read was by a wonderful writer, an Austrian missionary priest, Fr. Lemcke. If you can't find that, look for another.

## Why isn't insight and grace enough to overcome denial?

27 May 2011

The Rector of my seminary is making long term plans for the curriculum. After jotting down everything I said I liked to teach, he smiled and asked, and what is your real passion presently?

"Hmmm! I know! It's denial. I hate denial in myself and others. As a philosopher I tend to think that denial comes



from lack of insight. Plato thought that knowledge led to virtue, but we know that we need grace. But some of us have insight into our worst traits and grace, and we still aren't much better at virtue. Why?"

"Okay, why not work up a course called 'Denial: Insight and Grace,' my genial rector asked. So, now I am picking everyone's brain on what are the elements besides insight and grace that have to enter the picture to produce virtue?"

Here are some candidates:

Unless we are willing to suffer in whatever way would be necessary when we want to choose our vice, fault, defect, or flaw, we won't change. Example: I talk too much. Unless I am willing to accept the suffering of biting my tongue when what I want to say is neither edifying or charitable but just frisky anecdotal one-up-manship (one-upwomanship?) then I will not be able to talk less.

Another suggested candidate is to recognize that the devil wants us to do the evil, wrong, or inappropriate thing. So we need spiritual warfare prayers to move from denial to insight, to actually receiving the grace God is offering us and the devil is trying to deflect. Example: When I am dying to say this sarcastic, juicy, uncharitable thing, I could pray this way instead – "Guardian angel, protect me against the devil's wiles right now."

Your challenge! Can you flood my comments section with good ideas from your own experience of victory over denial? This could make my course someday be an interdisciplinary Watershed virtual offering! Hurrah!

## Evils admitted to be real have to be fought

28 May 2011

On my summer travels I trust that my family and friends will always have plenty of books for me to select from. At the home of one of the our group of Dedicated Widows of the Holy Eucharist, I came upon a novel written in the 80's by a writer named Giggon. It was about a former English teacher, a good man, a liberal, and a bit naive, whose wife and child are murdered by a serial killer. This is so devastating that he leaves his university, and the Church, and roams about, and winds up working as a security guard. The plot thickens



when the janitor engages our hero in long conversations during the night hours claiming that he, the janitor, is also a serial killer.

Since the English teacher hates violence, since the police have no proof that this guy really is a killer vs. maybe just a man with a sadistic imagination, his problem is to decide whether he should himself kill the serial killer before he strikes again.

He winds up almost killing the killer and then, risking his own life, as a human shield, for the child victim of the killer.

The line that impressed me the most was where the serial killer, admittedly under the possession of Satan, tells the hero that all his life he has been trying to deny that the worst evils are real and happening all over, because "If you would admit that so much evil is real, you would have to come against it, instead of being a spectator."

The killer relates this to the whole media syndrome where people watch on TV all these horrors with no sense that they have to do anything.

Of course, even if we were the most militant of pro-lifers, which many of us are, we couldn't get rid of all evil through action, but let us at least pray every time we see or read about evil, and be truly willing, to die to save the innocent, if the opportunity arises, should we know it is God's will for us, in this moment.

## **The Good Things about People with Opposite Traits**

**29 May 2011**

I am visiting the house of one of my dear Dedicated Widows. She is divesting the house to become more like me, all of whose possessions fit in one little cell at the seminary. What is hitting me between the eyes is how people like her and like everyone else in my family, who love to have wonderful colorful things of all types around them, actually enjoy life a lot more than I do. The absence of the annoyance of clutter is good, but absence of annoyance is not joy!



How do we get balance on this? Is the only choice between clutter and sterile order? Here is what I think. To have the simplicity of life recommended by our Church we need to periodically go through our whole households and give away everything that doesn't actually give us joy. What gives us joy can be a gift of God. But, I never met anyone who actually got

joy out of looking at stacks of old newspapers or bills paid ten years ago! Why would anyone save this stuff? My theory is that it is because it is more enjoyable to pursue other activities than to sort through old stuff! I recommend always thinking of the joy of the person walking into the thrift shop and finding a whole set of dishes (your 3rd set) for \$5. Ask family and friends when they visit to look over your whole house and take anything they want – telling them beforehand that if it is something that still gives you joy you will be an Indian giver. Of course having a yearly thorough garage sale will also produce perhaps needed income. Even in a recession \$100 for old stuff that we don't need is \$100 more than we had before.

From the other side, even though I adore simplicity of life, I don't need to beat myself up over \$1 more on an item in a restaurant that I prefer to the one that is \$1 cheaper. This is just Scroogeville! I need to totally relax my old bones in my widow friend's swimming pool without once thinking of the starving in India. God wants me to relax. There will still be starving in India even if I gave even more of my large percentage of pension and s.s. to them. But also, God wants me to swim, because being a crabby witch because I never relax is NOT His will!

Are you having fun yet reading this???

## Finding The Right People To Talk To

31 May 2011

I am fascinated by buzz words. "To Vent" is an oldie, indeed. As usual, at first I found the expression distasteful compared to "talk" or "communicate." But it has it's utility because it indirectly admonishes us not to live in the stuffy world of our own ideas, which sometimes, become a vicious circle.

What is the difference between venting and gossip?

Sometimes they are synonymous, but not always. Gossip has several meanings, of course. Some people consider

any relating of stories about others to be bad gossip. Others think that talking about people is simply a necessary form of communication. One psychologist said that in business it is the only way to find out what is happening. The bad kind of gossip, that the devil loves, should really better be called detraction – that is where what you say is true but it is divulging what others have a right to have private about themselves. Such gossip is designed to put others down and gloat over their shortcomings. The devil loves to encourage that kind of gossip.



Since I tend toward bad and good gossip, I am usually thinking I would do much better to be silent most of the time. During the summer the kitchen closes at the seminary. I have much more time to be silent if I wish. But then I come upon the not- enough – “venting”- problem. I talk to myself all day and my thoughts are repetitive and often anxious and even dismal. Exactly what venting is supposed to overcome!

So, how can we talk about ourselves and others in a Christian way? Of course, talking to Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the saints, in prayers is always good. Besides, we need to surround ourselves with friends who use conversation as means of either humor or good counsel. Then, even if we start venting out of chagrin, the tables are turned on us, and we wind up with good ideas about how to love ourselves and others better.

## Jesus of Nazareth by Pope Benedict

1 June 2011

I bet there are more people out there than admit it who when someone suggests you read a book by the Pope, whether past or present, you think “Well, of course, it will be beautiful, but probably it’s the same thing all over again.”

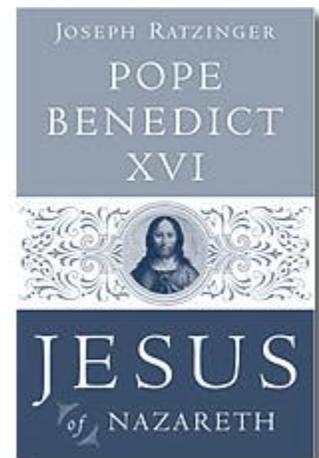
They always fool me! I picked up *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, the Scripture study by Pope Benedict for Lenten reading. It is “lite” in the sense that it’s not like reading Von Balthasar’s heavier tomes. But it’s deep, like reading the thoughts of the saints.

What I found is that we have unconscious uncertainties about certain passages we have heard over and over again. We have gotten clues through the years, but still not a definitive answer. For example, “my God, my God, why have You forsaken me.” I recall years ago reading that it was Jesus’ way of alerting the crowds that he was going to fulfill Psalm 22 with his sufferings and death. Benedict’s style is so warm as well as deep that I had the feeling I was inside his heart as it beat with love for the heart of Jesus.

Here is a sample of such writing:

“Christ, at the Father’s right hand, is not far away from us. At most we are far from him, but the path that joins us to one another is open. And this path is a not a matter of space travel of a cosmic-geographical nature: it is the “space travel” of the heart, from the dimension of self-enclosed isolation to the new dimension of world-embracing divine love.”

—Pope Benedict, XVI.



Want to read the longer explanation of this? Buy or borrow the book.

## Arrogance - Remedies

2 June 2011

The dictionary described arrogance as “offensive display of superiority or self-importance; overbearing pride.”

Of course, if you accuse yourself of arrogance in conversation or in confession, you probably are not arrogant! It goes along with the denial I have been writing about, for sure.

Psychologists would agree that those who display arrogance are almost always covering insecurity. Typical examples would be a man who feels insecure about his masculine image because he doesn't fit the preferred height and muscles, may, unconsciously, deflect attention from his “defects” by a barrage of many syllable words. A woman who feels insecure about her intellectual abilities might enter a room full of savants dressed sexy for similar reasons.



Does that mean that it is arrogant to speak with pungent vocabulary or haughty to dress attractively? How might these traits be displayed in a way that isn't arrogant? On the word question, a person with a genius for great words and phrases, would only need to define each of these while speaking to avoid seeming pompous and over-bearing. A lovely woman could dress well but modestly and glide into the kitchen to help with the eats instead of taking a chair in the middle of the living room and swinging her legs.

Jesus tells us to be like Him: “meek and humble of heart.” People who aren't arrogant may seem superior but they compensate for it so well by affirming others and by laughing off praise of themselves, or attributing all their gifts to God, that anyone who bristles with envy in their presence is displaying their own fault of inferiority feelings.

## Overcoming Denial with Insight, Grace and ??????

2 June 2011

Some of you may have read a previous blog about this topic. I am now at a new stage. What I feel called to do is to test out a method on myself, one friend, and any of you who want to try at any level. Here is the plan:

### **New Way**

1. Pick out one negative trait you would like to improve on such as talking less, being less upset about trivial annoyances, smiling more at family, friends and people at work and Church. If you think you are perfect, ask those closest to you what little thing they wish you would do differently.

2. Collect general and personal insights about the negative and positive of this trait such as

- a. talking too much vs. listening better;
- b. upset about trivia vs. overlooking it or working around it;
- c. grouchy or withdrawn vs. smiling and friendly.

3. Consider what is the pain from past and present that you compensate for through your negative trait. For example,

a. About talking too much the pain from the past could be feeling inferior when others dominated conversations in the past, so I want to be the speaker even when it is inappropriate. The present pain would be feeling that if I don't make the conversation interesting to me I will be slightly bored or feel that everything is meaningless unless discussions of important things take place.

b. On upset about trivial annoyances – a past pain would be feeling out of control as a child when parents or siblings did annoying and hurtful things to me. A present pain would be not being able to coerce others to act better concerning daily trivial matters.



c. On grouchy or withdrawn vs. smiling, friendly – the past pain would be parental role models of these negative traits. The present pain would be wanting to withdraw after a hard day or before the day gets harder – being grouchy or withdrawn usually keeps others away.

4. Make a promise such as this: God, I truly want to change, not just to please others, but to get closer to you by becoming a more loving person. I realize that Your grace cannot penetrate my denial mechanisms if I justify every negative trait by excuses. (In my, Ronda's case, well, if I don't dominate the conversation no one will learn my God-given wisdom!) I accept the sufferings, small and large, that I will have endure in order let your grace operate more in my life with respect to this trait.

5. Write a personal prayer to Jesus to say whenever you are tempted to exercise the specific negative trait you are working on now such as:

a. Jesus, please pour your love into my heart so that feeling happy about myself I can listen to others instead of trying to dominate all conversations.

b. Father God, thank you for all the blessings of this day. Help me laugh at this trivial annoyance and get on with the rest of my day without over-reacting .

c. Holy Spirit, spouse of the Virgin Mary, show me how to be friendly so that everyone I meet today feel better because they met me, just as I believe people must have felt who met Mary in Nazareth.

6. (Optional but best) Choose a person who sees you often or whom you can call at a set time each day or evening to share victories of grace. One victory a day is a lot if you multiply by 365 days a year! This call should not be analytic, but rather prayerful as in:

“Heh, pal, guess what? Today I had lunch with friends and I let someone else dominate the conversation, by asking friendly questions instead of delivering long speeches myself. “

“Gee, Ronda, praise the Lord. Today I smiled at the kids as they went out the door to school instead of muttering – stay out of trouble kids.”

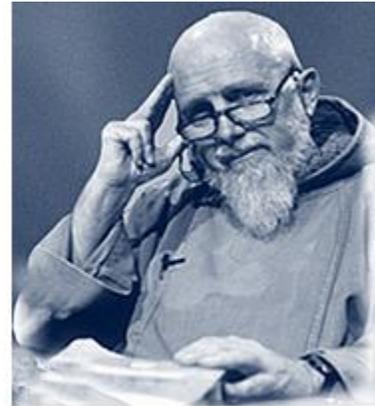
“Have a blessed day tomorrow being not Grouchy Dad but Friendly Dad. I'll be praying for you.”

It may seem tiny but could it be worse than being stuck with traits everyone finds difficult but puts up with because they have given up hope we will ever change, grace or not????? If you decide to do and feel like posting comments about your progress go ahead, or e-mail me at [rondaview@ccwatershed.org](mailto:rondaview@ccwatershed.org)

## Judging with the Church but still maybe Harshly?

3 June 2011

I came upon one of the latest books by Fr. Benedict Groeschel, one of my all time favorite priests. I met him a few times at conferences where we were both speakers. My favorite memory is one at Franciscan University of Steubenville where he came to speak at a Defending the Faith Conference after recovering from his huge nearly fatal accident. When the audience saw him walking up the path in the speaker's line up to the podium they rose to their feet and applauded. Arriving at podium he remarked wryly "It's kind of funny. An old man walks in front of a bus and he is treated like a martyr!"



His new book is called "Travelers Along the Way" and is an account of his personal encounters with some saints and others he met only once or twice but who changed his life. One of the chapters is about a transgender person. The key point he makes is that even though we are obliged to think with the Church about such wrong acts, including also those in unblessed marriages or active homosexual relationships, we must never forget that Jesus looked at such sinners with love. We should always hope for their conversion.

Reading this, I challenged myself – when I hear or see someone committing sins is my primary emotion love or is it anger? Righteous anger is correct but when there is no love in it? A priest once said to me, "Ronda, I am glad it is not you, but Jesus, who will be judging me when I die."

Someone once said we are supposed to image all of God's attributes but one. Final judgments on the souls of others we must leave to Him alone. Jesus, cleanse my heart of all such judgments to look on others with the merciful love our hero, Fr. Benedict, recommends.

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## Dietrich Von Hildebrand's book, The Nature of Love

4 June 2011

Many of the readers of CCWatershed know Alice Von Hildebrand through her articles, books, and appearances on



**EWTN. I was the student of her husband, Dietrich, one of the foremost Catholic philosophers of all times. I am teaching his book, *The Heart*, this summer in Los Angeles. I am thinking you'all might like occasional blogs of his most significant ideas as I go along.**

**Many people think that to want the love of others is selfish and that real love is only the kind where you "give without expecting anything in return" as in working at the soup kitchen.**

**Here is the fascinating and inspiring way Von Hildebrand thinks about wanting love. Not to want the love of a spouse, a child, or of God, is actually less love rather than more love. Why? Because if we are truly moved with love for the unique preciousness of another person, human or divine, we must want to be united to him or her. We want to be united, not for the satisfaction of benefits for ourselves, but precisely because the goodness in the other draws us. When we love we want the goodness we see in the beloved to flow into us because we see and experience that goodness. This is why admiration is fine, but it is not the same as love. When we admire someone we can be happy to be far from them, but when we love them we precisely want their love to come into us either in romantic love, family love, or love for God.**

**Was it selfish of Mother Teresa of Calcutta to yearn for the love of Jesus she experienced in the first half of her life as a Sister but lacked the joy of in the latter part of her life?**

**That doesn't mean that we can demand that the love of another be expressed with a particular flavor, as in, "if you really loved me you couldn't possibly forget our wedding anniversary!" (In the rare times I ever give marital advice, I suggest that women who feel this way should certainly remind their husbands of the date in big bold writing on the bathroom mirror.)**

**So, with regard to prayer, we cannot tell God that He must show His love for us by granting a particular request, no matter how important. But it is cold and unloving to approach God with a stance like this: "I go to Sunday Mass and I say my morning offering and night prayer of contrition, so You should be pleased with me. I don't need to pray from the heart the way those "sentimental" other Catholics do." Why? Because if we truly love the real God we have to want to be close to Him, not just to do His will better, but also as a foretaste of heaven where there will be no tasks to perform, as such, only to bask in such forms of love as seeing ourselves and others loved by Him to the point of satiety!**

**You might want to check the web to order Dietrich Von Hildebrand, *The Heart*, from St. Augustine's Press or used from Barnes and Noble.**

**When a Blogger Can't Blog**

17 June 2011

Between a 2 day retreat and a day at the airport and jet lag I missed a week of blogging. I began to think I had ceased existing! I blog, therefore I am???

This coincides with my trial of A New Way – see previous blogs on this. The idea is to see if between insight and grace I could cease talking too much in situations where it is not a matter of “teaching” but really using every social situation as a teaching platform. From praying to see what childhood experiences, etc. might be behind that tendency and then praying for healing of those, and then, the big step, trying to be willing to endure the suffering, small and large, it would entail to avoid the sinful or unhealthy pattern – I had quite a week.

The good part is that if you try NOT to go with your usual pattern, you have a different experience of life. Specifically, in my case, I could enjoy more of the beauty of nature at the retreat (this is the Edmundite Retreat Center off Mystic Connecticut on Ender’s Island – a sublime site surrounded by the Long Island Sound). A high point was forcing ourselves to arise at 4:45 AM to pray morning prayer actually seeing the sun rise over the ocean. This beautiful half hour would have been quite different had I been busy formulating words to talk about it at the time. Describing it days later is different.

I also tracked how often I use conversation as a means to “work on” everyone, interjecting subtly and unsubtly into small talk about how they ought to change according to my lights! By the end of a week of observing this pattern I wondered why anyone has ever wanted to be my friend or even an acquaintance! I guess God has graced me with other qualities since I am very loved in spite of this syndrome.

I have one person pledged to work on one of her faults and check things out with me at 10 PM every evening for 5-10 minutes max. If you go back to the blog about A New Way, you can also enjoy this chance at an identity crisis!

Lord have mercy on us all.

## **Peace as a Fruit of Talking Less**

**17 June 2011 I have been working on talking less as a part of a self-help program I devised called New Way. Now, I have been a chatter-box for 70 years, so that is no mean trick or grace to improve. And I have also been praying for peace since my conversion 50 years ago with little success – i.e. I only feel peaceful if I get an infused grace for this. What I never thought of was that peace is incompatible with the type of talking too much I engage in usually.**

**How so? Well, since my conversation is often based on rehearsed lines I plan to use to try to control everyone around me – which, by the way, I am singularly unsuccessful at, this leads to peaceless tension as I plot, execute, and then become angry or sad when I fail. It sounds hilarious but I am betting that some reader of Watershed has a similar syndrome and will benefit from this analysis. Or, you can forward it to some friend or family member who drives you crazy with chatter!!!**

**So, now one week into talking less I am experiencing a delicious peace – a graced reward for my efforts, I believe.**

**Try it, you'll like it.**

**Senora Magdalena**

**17 June 2011**

**When I lived in Morganton, N.C., I used to see a tiny woman about 4'8" dressed in Guatamalan attire sitting for hours in the Church in prayer or asleep. Over time I learned her story.**

**She came to the US with her husband many decades ago and is now the grandmother of a clan numbering in the 70's. She speaks almost no English and little Spanish, but a dialect that few any more understand even in her family. Now a widow, she lives sometimes with one part of the family, other times another – usually with the one with the youngest baby to help. The house she lived in when I moved here is about 5 miles from the Church. There are various**

**cars in the drive way but because the inhabitants are illegal, they only drive these at night to their 24 hour factory jobs.**

**A frequent communicant, cold winter, or hot blazing summer, Senora Magdalena spends 3 hours of the morning walking to the noon Mass. We daily Mass people with cars can't call her to pick her up because we don't know which of the many houses she is in and, in any case, she doesn't answer the phone. So, whenever we spy her along the streets we pick her up, and we drive her back after Mass to whichever house she wants to go to. To those places she brings food from our parish pantry. In sign language she directs us to these houses.**

**We have become very fond of her. I was doing a TV series for EWTN on widows and I thought it would be good to take a photo of her to be shone on the show, viewed by 50 million people potentially and the same amount ever time the show is repeated. These were my words when the photo was shown:**

**As dedicated widows, with Jesus as our Second Bridegroom, we go to daily Mass whenever it is not impossible. I wonder about retired people with cars who find it too difficult to go to daily Mass, when this woman in her 80's walks 3 miles in cold or torrid heat for the privilege of receiving the Body and Blood of her Savior?**

**Funny and Inspired sayings of my Grandchildren**

**17 June 2011**

**The budding musician: When the priest was preaching at Pentecost that the laity should transform the world, I whispered to Max, pianist and composer of 15 years – "later I'll ask you how music fits with transforming the world." He replied on the way to the car "That's simple. Music comes from the Holy Spirit." Asked whether cacophony came from the Holy Spirit, he replied – "that's not really music."**

The five year old: I casually mentioned something planned for the next day and asked what her father thought about doing that. “I don’t think Papa likes to think about the future at all.”

Want to put some of your own favorites as comments to this blog?

A delightful Christmas Book for the Whole Family.

17 June 2011 Pat Looper, a friend of mine and member of a Christian Writing Group I ran in North Carolina a few years back, has published a book of Christmas stories she worked on with us. It is both for adults and children with themes circling around secondary characters in the Biblical account and how the Nativity inspired their lives. Pat has many degrees in theology, so it is not a sentimental book you wouldn’t like. The illustrations are done by an excellent artist.

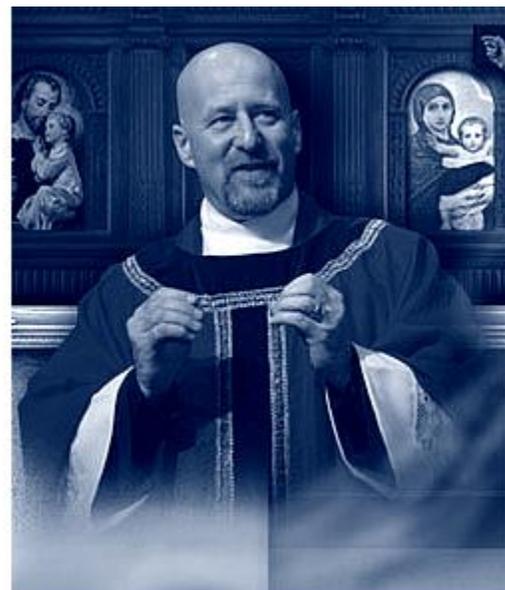


Check out the description on Amazon. You can order it from them or cheaper through Pat Looper at her e-mail. Here is the information: Pat Looper: Christmas Eve Stories. Her e-mail is [4PBLPAT@bellsouth.net](mailto:4PBLPAT@bellsouth.net)

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Inner Healing Retreat at Our Lady of the Rosary in Greenville, SC

21 June 2011 Many days without writing blogs because I was the guest speaker at a wonderful parish. You may the Pastor, Fr. Dwight Longenecker. If not, check out his



blog which was the inspiration for mine at [gkupsidedown.blogspot.com/](http://gkupsidedown.blogspot.com/). At this parish there is a combination of absolute doctrinal orthodoxy and beautiful high liturgy with interest in psychological insights. The deacon and his wife are my dear friends and co-authors, Ruth and Richard Ballard. You will be hearing about our forthcoming book from Tan/St. Benedict's What the Saints Say about Heaven:101 Holy Meditations.

It was a wonderful weekend and I will be sharing with you different insights that came out of it. Since one of my talks was based on my NEW WAY method, I went to confession after the talk for harsh judgments of people in denial. Fr. Longenecker referred to the concept of Scott Peck of the People of the Lie. The idea is that many people in denial were brought up to care more about appearance than truth. This means covering up any defects of character with denial or excuses. Anything would be better than, say, admitting I am angry because I am envious of you, etc. etc. Fr. Longenecker suggested that people brought up like me to be honest and open even about negatives in my own character, need to be merciful to those for whom being open and honest could be extremely painful.

More in next blog.

### Dependency and Virtue

27 June 2011 Of course all creatures are dependent on God and on others in a multitude of ways. Inter-dependency on other human persons is inevitable, necessary, and something to be extremely grateful for.

Recently I have been thinking of aspects of dependency for widows. I realize that reliance on friends for sporadic helps as in help on visits or on projects is a totally different thing than living-together situations as in long, long, visits, or in community, or in live-in work situations.



**This is much more like family with all the pluses and minuses where our virtues and our faults impact one another in a daily, wonderful, and usually also chronically negative way.**

**I was remembering a long visit, as a widow, with a close friend in an emergency situation. Qualities that only mildly bothered me for tiny visits, I would then want to try to help the person change. The seeming motive would be fraternal correction, but also, of course, it would be that they should change to suit my needs. Mea culpa for the last part!**

**This is one of the main reasons many widows and widowers don't want to live with their adult children. Qualities of the adult children and the in-law spouses that are merely amusing or mildly annoying on short visits, become much more taxing in a committed long term situation.**

**The big question for all the widows I know is the great desire to live in family because of love and that kind of closeness, measured against the desire, instead, to be free of those kind of conflicts, but with the huge minus of loneliness. After 20 years of widowhood, I don't think this question has any easy answers or final answers until we are so disabled in older, old age that we are happy to be anywhere that is not just awful and, I am told, in consolation, that at a certain age I might not notice anything at all – from semi-coma to the gates of heaven!**

**See my web [rondachervin.com](http://rondachervin.com) under Widows: Options for Widows for my latest solution.**

**Freedom of Spirit**

**published 28 June 2011 by [Dr. Ronda Chervin](http://Dr.RondaChervin)**

**I was waiting in front of a gate at the airport when I heard a violin. There**



was a shabby character paying country western music. I thought he was soliciting but his case was closed and there was no tin cup. After awhile a few people began to sway and clap. Most paid no attention since they were glued to their iPhones.

Even though country western is not my favorite kind of music I loved this guys freedom of spirit. Between tunes he said he was bored and figured why not do his thing. I praised him greatly and dropped on him some adages about God and music such as "I bet your guardian angel is thrilled when you do this for us. Since 9/11 the airports are so tense."

It reminded me a little about these You-tubes about opera singers at the Mall performing for free. So wonderful.

We need money to survive, of course, but anything we can do for free is such a sign of the kingdom.

## **Fear in our Church - the Sadness of It**

**29 June 2011**

A thing that makes me so sad is to see parishioners walk into the Mass and not sure where to sit when they are a group of 3 and there are only two empty places showing this look of fear of sitting, say, up in front where there are more seats because they might make a mistake in their participation in the liturgy, etc.

The good side is reverence leading to not wanting to distract others from prayer by fussily stepping over their legs. We don't want the other extreme of people slouched in the pew chatting away. But I wish, wish, wish that we felt so



loved in our parish Church that we couldn't imagine feeling fear just getting into empty seat!

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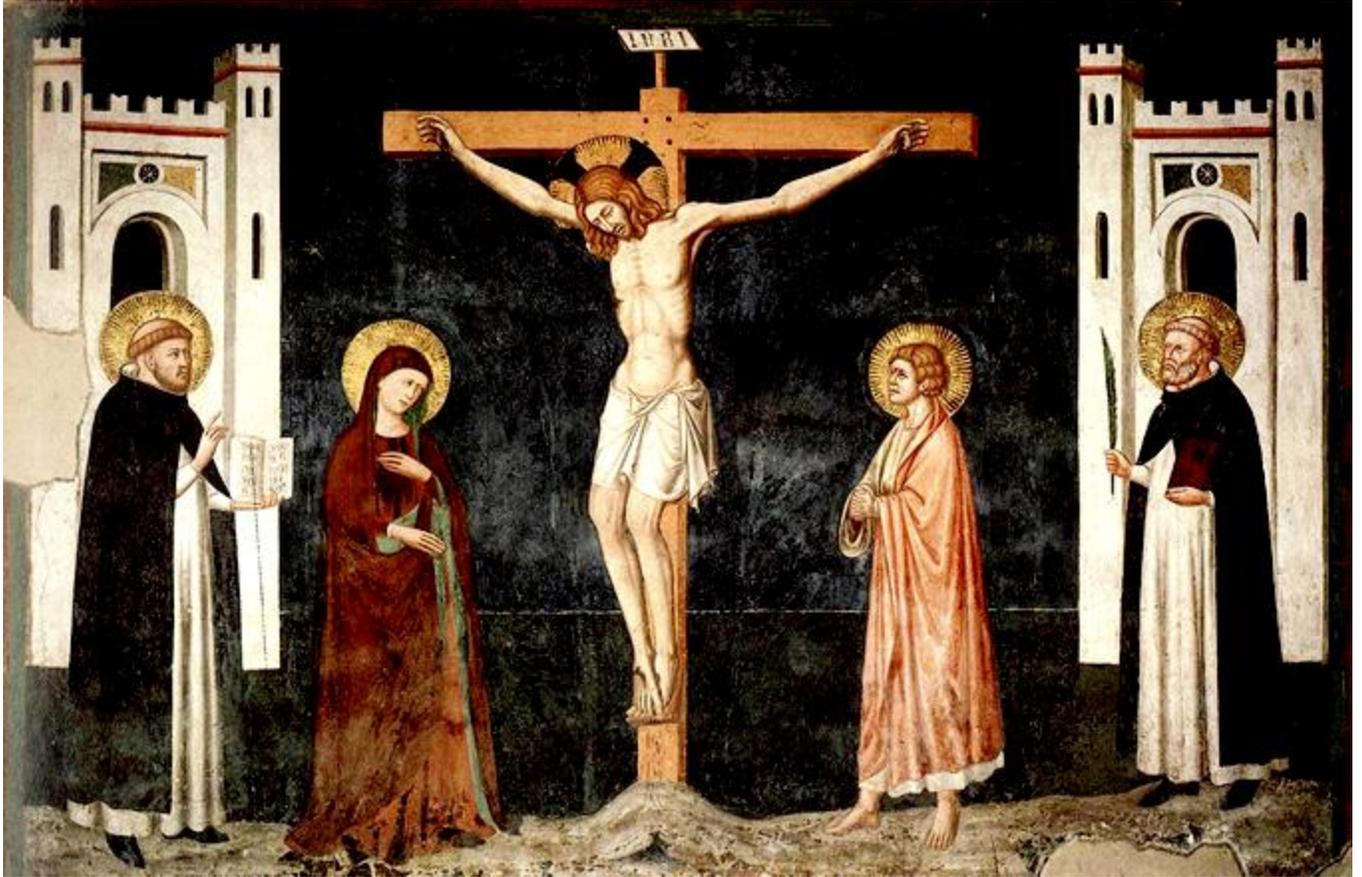
## **The True Meaning of Leadership**

**29 June 2011**

The Saturday night before Pentecost this year I was at a parish with a large Guatemalan charismatic prayer group. The leaders were trained as lay preachers in Guatemala. They are magisterial and always tell the 250 strong group including many teens, that Mass and Confession are absolutely necessary and the prayer meeting is not a substitute. One of the leaders has a son of 19 in a wheel chair most of his life, totally disabled with a face that register only joy or numbness. He sometimes brings him to the prayer group. When this leader speaks passionately about trust in God he is so credible because of the way fathers this young man.

It is a terrific witness to me. I have found that any words of wisdom I try to offer in talks is always more credible because of surviving my son's suicide without losing faith or becoming bitter.

**What is the cross you bear that gives you credibility?**



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## When Upset, Ask Questions

30 June 2011

I am visiting my daughter, Diana, who does computer management training programs. I was telling her a long story about a conflict. My purpose was mainly to vent, but she decided to turn it into a teaching moment. She had me role play the person who I was planning to rant at while she



pretended to be me. After I did it my angry way, she talked to me about the negative effects this could have and then had me have a conversation with the same person asking questions instead of delivering speeches.

I soon realized that this fits in with my “New Way” work on talking less. Instead of a fifteen minute diatribe about why I was upset, I was able to write an e-mail simply asking my victimizer what he thought about the conflictual scene.

For those of you who read [A New Way](#) which debuted on June 2nd as a blog, I will tell you it is going very well. In Seattle where I talked about it, the pastoral staff had to keep leaving the hall to make extra copies. Tracking my speech patterns and speaking less exteriorily and interiorily had yielded many insights. For example, in general, not in the above instance, when I plan to talk less I am less angry. How do? Because I am not rehearsing in my head vitriolic come-backs.

#### First Blog from Visit to Corpus Christi at a Watershed Home

1 July 2011 It is many, many years since I was in the living room of the Ridley family, part of the founding team of Watershed. They are among my closest friends. I met them when teaching at Our Lady of Corpus Christi in the early 21st century. They illustrate my favorite Watershed combination:



magisterial, deeply spiritual, free-spirited and creative. One of the children is my god-child, John Ridley.

After welcome hugs and a prayer of gratitude in their driveway came ebullient sharings followed by a long bedtime praying together of the luminous mysteries with the youngest, Philip, tucked under Claire’s armpit and Anne and Margaret with colorful books of the mysteries. John, my godchild, was alternately serious

and then with droll eyes examined this godmother he has heard of for years but not met since his baptism. Claire prays, even amongst the children, like a contemplative nun – absorbed and focused. This has always impressed me because I can't sit still for 5 minutes. Jim, the father starts on his knees.

The scene so delighted me that I got distracted and made mistakes when it was my turn to lead a decade.

Whereas any children I have ever seen praying the rosary can't wait for it to be over, these add favorite Latin hymns ending with some kiddie ones as “dessert.”

I blurted out one of my favorite sentences of Dietrich Von Hildebrand: “The children are the love of the parents made visible.”

### Laughing vs. Crying about Senior Moments

1 July 2011 For the longest time after I turned 60 I felt humiliated and frightened every time I had a senior moment. By 74 I feel a twinge of humiliation and fear but then resort to the Recovery, Intl. (not 12 Step but for anger, anxiety and depression) slogan: “humor is your best friend.”



We seniors like to exchange our senior moments each day and laugh at each other and at ourselves. I am visiting my daughter, Diana, in suburban Redondo Beach, California. Today's ones of mine, started with driving an unfamiliar car to Mass and shopping. LA, considered to be a hundred suburbs linked by freeways, is challenging for a senior. It amuses me to drive a classy, if old, Mustang convertible. Not at all my style as a pseudo-St. Clare. But I rack up senior moments by the dozens just going 20 minutes away trying to avoid the “left

wing” Church 5 minutes away for a delightful Spanish style Church with a hispanic super-magisterial priest. I would not have dropped driving, except for Mass, if the GPS was around 4 years ago. But this Mustang doesn’t have a GPS, so I clutch tightly Mapquest directions on my lap.

Where my daughter lives there are stop signs on every block. Sounds easy. Well not if your head is buzzing with Watershed projects. Which of these 3 cars on each corner arrived before I did? Duh! Meanwhile, since it is really my turn, I try to avoid notice the faces of the drivers in the 3 other cars bewildered and angry that I am not moving. Next comes passing the right turn onto a big boulevard because 182 street comes right after 179th street, not like in NYC where I grew up where every street number follows the one before or ahead. Now I turn on 181st which turns out to be a dead end. I glance at the clock on the radio panel! Will I be late for Mass? What about that train that comes 2 times a day through a main thoroughfare and keep you waiting 20 whole minutes unless you happen to know how to veer off on side streets?

Big sigh! I made it to Church on time after all. Beautiful Mass, beautiful sermon. Lovely sight of all the ethnic varieties present. LA has 42 Catholic language groups. There is a huge Samoan looking man who stands rigidly in the first row in a trance-like state praying with eyes glued to the tabernacle. By my side is a beautiful hispanic woman decked with about 10 rings and a large gold crucifix. At my other side is an anglo woman of about my age dressed in a blue linen jumper with a Franciscan Tau cross. She, like many others, nods quickly at the peace gesture, hands folded, with a smile to show she is being traditional vs. unfriendly.

But then come more senior moments. Having heard my cell phone vibrate I crouch on the steps of the Church to talk to a friend about arrangements. A tiny woman rushes out of the adoration chapel to chide me that I am bothering the adorers with my loud voice. Why didn’t I think of that? Then comes the ride home where I miss another left turn. I wind up where trying to make a left turn across a 4 lane road means trying to beat out traffic from both directions. After

ten minutes I resign myself to making a right turn instead and after 2 blocks getting into a turn lane.

The entrance to my daughter's drive way involves scooting across with a left turn. The opposing right lane people have no visibility whatsoever as they are climbing a hill that ends one yard from her driveway. Good young drivers tell me not to worry because they will be driving slowly. "Maybe?" I think as I clutch the wheel and rev up to 50mph across the right lane and screech to a halt in front of my daughter's garage door worrying about how much room my son-in-law's big Dodge needs. He is gone now but when he comes back will he hate me if I have parked too close to his sacred space?

It is only 9 AM and I am strung out with adrenal coursing through my body half dead!

Without my 20 years of Recovery International for anger, anxiety and depression, I would have had to go to confession for vulgar words emitted loudly early in the morning.

Puullleeze, when you spy senior drivers like me, don't curse us, pray for us to give up driving asap. But, would you want us to give up Mass just to make your day less stressful driving behind us?

**Meeting Watershed People Face to Face Live**

**10 July 2011**

It was years of watching Mother Angelica on EWTN before I met her in person. On the screen she seemed funny, smart, and deep. When I had the joy of being interviewed by her, first about my conversion, I couldn't believe how



warm she was with her large compassionate eyes seeming to want to pour love into my frenetic little heart.

“TV is a cold medium” I was told. This means that somehow it doesn’t pick up on warmth of character.

I am having the same experience this weekend meeting with Watershed people I only saw on the web, such as some of the composers and singers, including Jeff Ostrowski (I met him once briefly years ago but not so as to remember him well). On the web, several of these musicians seemed to me like a formidable, very formal, imposing characters, perhaps a little austere. One in particular. I doubted he would like me since I am very informal. Meeting him now face to face he is a vibrant warm person, overflowing with joy. No way on the web does Jeff’s warm enfolding demeanor come out either.

An analogy – we read about Jesus in the Bible. We picture him through art and films, but what will it really be like when all that totally supernatural love of Jesus will be known face to face in heaven? “Eye has not seen...what God has prepared for those to love Him.”

## **An Evening Among Friends**

**10 July 2011**

Saturday evening I met in person Watershedders Cynthia and the now world famous Carmen, the darling baby. As well, at the gathering were my dear old friends Francette and Michael Meaney. For those of



**you who have seen Cynthia Ostrowski only on the Watershed web and think, as I did, that no one could possibly be that beautiful in real life, she is! But in a wonderful way that beautiful face in repose rather than posing, has a depth and pathos you can't see in the web pictures. I especially liked the way she looked with Carmen in her arms just listening to the others like an icon of motherhood.**

**Our gathering was at the convent of Sister Anne Sophie who many of you know from her incredible apostolate, the Society of the Body of Christ, with hundred of lay people helping Sister reach out to the neediest cases in Corpus Christi. I provided editorial assistance for her first book *On the Front Line*. Check the web to get this extraordinary account of Sister Anne Sophie's out-reach to the sick and dying.**

**Claire Ridley worked for hours and hours on the spread. Michael Meaney, a philosophy professor, filled us all in on some of his most pungent ideas about spirituality. Francette, who founded a terrific pro-life center and boarding house for girls and women, to save their babies, always inspires me greatly by the type of total helping hands and hearts she and her people give to this segment of the world's neediest.**

**Since the last blog I watched the Fr. Pacwa interview with Kevin Allen, and learned even more of the significance of the Sacred Arts Music apostolate in our times.**

### **The Nagasaki Christian A-bomb Victims**

**11 July 2011 Someone gave me a book called *A Song for Nagasaki* about Takashi Nagai and scientist, radiologist, convert and survivor of the Atomic Bomb. I was reading it kind of just for more historical understanding of the Japanese experience of WWII, but it is an incredible story of a truly holy Catholic husband, father, and hero.**



**Nagai was an atheistic playboy scientist whose conversion came through reading Pascal and the prayers of his future wife, a descendant of the families of Nagasaki who were martyred for their Catholic faith. His description of his life before his conversion is illuminating because I always had the stereotype of Japanese men as ridiculously Stoic. It was good to read about his passion for truth and his deep longing for the love of his saintly future wife. Also, I didn't realize that there were Japanese even in the army in the war with China before WWII who were questioning unjust wars.**

**If you get this book (Ignatius) you will see how he became a fervent Catholic and incredibly sacrificial doctor before and after the A-bomb. Here is a sample of his beautiful ideas as described by Fr. Lynn, author of his biography: "The navel is the reminder that our body and our life are gifts from another. Nature has placed this sign in the very center of our bodies, where we cannot fail to see it. It is a symbol of the love, goodness and heroic sacrifices of our mothers. Nagai saw mothers as images of God and grace."**

**In a most extraordinary way he led the remnant who survived the A-bombing of Nagasaki to think of this as a holocaust where they were sacrificed to bring about the totally unexpected unconditional surrender of the Emperor. The people wanted to die instead fighting to the point of total annihilation for their Emperor, but the Emperor conceded to save his country. Nagai thought that graces from Mary saved the remnant to, hopefully, bring about through the reality of the horror of war the abandonment the characteristic Japanese military pride in favor of peace.**

### **Later Life Meetings with Siblings**

**11 July 2011 Mostly I see my sister at family reunions. There we act out our admiration and love for each other as well as our tensions before an audience. This year we thought we**



would both go to a place we love just together and see if we could do better.

I am thinking that some of my observations could fit the case with any visits of adult siblings.

One of the best parts is being with someone who intimately knew our parents who have, as the Irish sometimes say, “gotten away from us” to eternity. We think we both admired and loved the same things and disliked and even hated the same things, but usually it is different. This gives us a chance to re-evaluate. Oh, maybe old Mom or Dad did this and that for a reason my sibling knew about and I never knew about. This can be healing.

We could be alike in certain characteristics but exercise these in quite different ways. For example, one might be obedient to genuine authorities when it comes to large vistas and plans and ideas and the other generally rebellious about those. But the other might be very obedient about liturgical practices or refinements of manners where the other is sloppy and sometimes offensive! Without directly confronting one another could we observe and learn where we need to?

After 4 days it reminded me of marriage where even if each one gives 100% there are still inevitable annoyances and conflicts. But, also, like in a good marriage, it is worth it because of those great virtues of the other, known over so many decades!

How wonderful it will be to be “family” in heaven, by repentance and God’s grace, to only experience the good! Lord, have mercy on us all!

**Redeemed Ecology a la Pope Benedict**

**12 July 2011**

**There is a pattern revealed in Church history in the past few centuries if not further back. The culture comes up with something crazy seeming like women's lib and most Catholics totally reject it. But, then, a few decades afterwards the Church comes up with a redeemed Christian version such as Christian Feminism. When I first saw this term in the writings of JP II I thought some translator smuggled it in. No! It was genuine and now is an accepted philosophy of the feminine.**



**In a similar way, I just learned, the Church is redeeming ecology, often mocked as a label for tree-huggers who don't care about babies only about the whales, etc. etc. Read this from Benedict XVI:**

**“What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of new life-styles ‘in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings, and investments.’”[1] It is within this quest which is a desire for truth, goodness and beauty that ultimately leads to the foundational principle of an integral human development in relation to God.**

**Integral human development is closely linked to the obligations which flow from man's relationship with the natural environment. The environment must be seen as God's gift to all people, and the use we make of it entails a shared responsibility for all humanity, especially the poor and future generations.[2]**

**An example he gives is that the forests that are stripped of trees for profit will not be there for future generations. I, for one, never thought of that.**

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**[1] Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, par. 51.**

**[2] Benedict XVI, Message of His Holiness for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2010, par. 1.**

**Pessimism - Not a Virtue**

**14 July 2011**

**If you have been following these blogs you know I am on a new adventure with grace called A New Way (see blog of June 2nd). I am doing very well with a partner for accountability. She is doing clutter and I am doing talking too much. Another friend wants to work with me on pessimism. Here are segments of my first e-mail with her just in case you have problems with pessimism or others have problems with your pessimism!**



**“Dear X, Here is my plan for my pessimism. Each day when I wake up I will think of one thing that is likely to go wrong this day. Then I will consider that there is at least a 50/50 chance it will go better than I think. I will report to you how it went when I didn’t go in glumly pessimistic to that situation as well as any other observations the Holy Spirit sends me. You can try whatever way you think would help you.**

**Also let’s identify the basic root of my pessimism that needs healing by Jesus. In my case I remember being a cheerful optimist as a child even after my father left us because I was closer to my mother and sister in any case. I started getting pessimistic in High School. I was skipped 2 years so I was younger and gauche among the other girls who were older and more attractive. I began to feel inferior. They were 170 IQ kids at that school. I was 137. I gradually raised my grades up from 85 to 94 % but until that 94% I was treated, I thought, by the other kids as a marginal dunce.**

The relationships I had with boys and men in college before my conversion were mostly sinful. My first real rejection by a young man I adored was because even though he loved me, he wanted to marry a rich doctor's daughter who could advance his career one day as a doctor. He was pre-med. This shattered my romantic ideas about relationships with men.

I guess that's plenty to explain why I became pessimistic, eh?

Now, what would be my prayer for healing: Dear Jesus, You, not the world, should be our reason for hope. You brought me hope in you and in eternal life. Help me also to have hope that even if people and things are often disappointing that everything will be good in terms of your Providence because you bring good out of every evil.

So, going into this day. I am at an Institute teaching in LA that has mostly priest teachers and priest students. I am the new girl on the block. So my pessimistic thought, in spite of being such an extrovert super-friendly person myself, is that they will all reject me and I will have a miserable 7 weeks living here, except when I escape on the weekend to my loving daughter's place an hour away. Instead I am going to think: more than 50% of the time I do make friends in new places – not everyone becomes a friend, but some. Jesus, let me wait hopefully for one of these new people to like me. Okay, for starters the head of the program loves my work, which is why he hired me, and is super-friendly!"

So, I sent this off early this morning and already at breakfast there were two very friendly priests who I talked to and who seemed to like having me among them. A proof that my original pessimism was wrong. But, perhaps, if I had walked into the dining room emanating anxiety, they wouldn't have been so friendly. I think when we are willing to try to change, the Holy Spirit loads us up with examples of how bad it can be the way we are, and how good when we open to change.

**Attitudes toward those of other Religions**

**15 July 2011**

**At the institute I am teaching at this summer in LA there are many shelves of books collected over decades. When I come to a new place I pray to the Holy Spirit to find me something to read that is not part of my teaching. This time I took one called “The Faith Club: A Muslim, A Christian, A Jew – Three Women Search for Understanding.” I figured with such a title it was probably written by women who had in common a less than traditional relationship to their religions, but that I might learn something from reading it anyhow, especially about Islam about which I know very little.**



**The book relates the gist of conversations 3 women in the New York City area conducted in the course of trying to write a children’s book about their three faiths rooted in the one God.**

**I am learning. For example, I never considered what it might feel like to be a truly moderate modern Muslim woman living in the US with a strong love of God and neighbor, and having to be identified the moment she mentions her faith as part of what most of us now think of as a terrorist religion! Besides feeling herself to be the brunt of that stereotype, she is having trouble finding a mosque to attend since the mosques are full of what she considers to be extremist fanatics. Could she, and others like her, be feeling the way we, proliferators, do when someone casually assumes that all those in front of abortion clinics are only interested in yelling that abortion is murder rather than in saving babies and helping the mothers?**

Reading the words of the Jewish woman, very culturally Jewish, but like many modern Jews not even sure there is a personal God, pierced my heart. So many Catholics think we don't have to evangelize Jews because, from years of hearing passages from the O.T., they think Jews are like Isaiah or Esther. A rabbi teaching Jewish roots at the LA seminary told me that surveys show that only about 10 % of Jews in the US believe in a personal God! Others hope there is such a God, especially when they are facing the death of others or themselves, but really most of them live in great confusion about God even if they still attend services 2x a year – like Catholics nowadays who go only at Christmas and Easter to Church but still pray?

The ex-Catholic Episcopal woman, who I thought would be a totally watered down Christian comes out rather well because she really does believe that Jesus was God and that He is our redeemer and manages to have a good influence on the other two women.

Waking up after reading a few chapters of the book made me want to pray much more earnestly for all those represented by these three. Since I assume that most of those going to Watershed are Catholics, I want to ask you how much you pray for those of other faiths except when they are in your own family?

Here is what I am praying this morning: Dear Jesus, you prayed that all would be one. May our witness as members of the one, true, Church truly be a light for those who are seeking God, our Father, by different means, or in Christian churches who see much of the light but are still not united with us.

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### Wearing a Crucifix

16 July 2011 When I was a little girl in NYC in the early 1950's every Catholic wore a gold or silver crucifix about 1 to 1 1/2 inches and many Catholic teen-



agers had rosaries dripping out of their pockets. So, when I became a Catholic this was a sign of my new identity.

Right after Vatican II there was a big change. Within a few years Catholics started wearing silver or gold chains around their necks with no crucifix. Symbolic?

Those Catholics who were in the new charismatic groups, however, started wearing big wooden crosses without the corpus. Symbolic?

After a few years of the big wooden cross, I went back to the crucifix. As these got lost, I'd keep getting larger ones. My husband used to quip – "at this rate, someday, you'll be walking down the street with a life-sized cross!"

At the same time many Sisters went out of habits, and many priests stopped wearing clerics in public. Symbolic?

Now, as a dedicated widow, I wear a big crucifix and a blue jumper. Some people assume I am a Sister. The ones who admire Sisters are very friendly to me and treat me better than they otherwise might, for instance at check out counters. In the Bible belt where I used to live, non-Catholic Christians look at the corpus and say "that's a pretty necklace." I take it to mean that even though they don't wear crucifixes they want me to know they love Jesus. I respond with something like, "Oh, isn't Jesus wonderful." Strangers with bad memories of Sisters scowl at me.

I don't know why so many magisterial lay Catholics, men and women, don't wear a crucifix again since it is one of the easiest ways of witnessing without even talking. What do you think?

### Evangelization and New Age

17 July 2011 I have followed some of the controversy about Harry Potter books and movies but not actually read any of the books or seen any of the movies. Some



friends took me to the last one yesterday. It was 3 D and shown in a fantastic Hollywood Mall area.

Of course the tech part and the nature scenes were fabulous. I kept wondering what The Passion, or Lord of the Rings would have been like with this 3 ,D much advanced since 3D first came out in my youth. During the long movie I kept thinking – this is a form of gnosticism (Gnosticism was a name for a variety of heresies in the early Church times that combined all kinds of pagan elements with Christianity) for surely this included many Christian symbols and plot elements with magic and other bad elements in the hands of the good guys. Then I compared it with Narnia and Lord of the Rings and thought it was a kind of version of those without the same kind of depth of Lewis and Tolkien, but then the movies of these Christian favorites have little of the depth of the actual books.

When I left the movie I asked one of the priests in the group “does it seem to you like bridge to Truth for young people, or a substitute? He said he thought most young people took it as a substitute. I am going to send this blog to some of my grandsons, who saw or will see the movie, and see what they think.

Decades ago when E.T. first came out there were Jews for Jesus standing outside the movie theaters handing out leaflets proclaiming that E.T. was really Jesus because of E.T.'s “resurrection.” I thought these Jewish believers in Jesus are pretty smart. Why don't Catholics do things like that? Any ideas how?

*A comment from Ronda's college age grandson:*

“I have yet to see the most recent (Harry Potter) movie but I have seen the other ones. But to answer the question I don't think it is necessarily either (a bridge to Christianity or a New Age substitute). I think for most kids its just completely separate. I think they take it and enjoy it for the effects and maybe the plot and characters etc, but I don't think they necessarily even relate it to their real life in any way.”

*from another grandson of Ronda's:*

After being intrigued enough to read up on the matter a bit, there's a number of interviews where the author of the books, JK Rowling, describes the series as an allegory of how she came to understand her own religious beliefs when she was younger. As she's now a devout Christian, it would make sense that the series would contain various signs of Christian symbolism.

Like I said, I haven't seen past Part 3, but the interviews do imply that Harry's coming of age is symbolic of her own struggles with coming to terms with her religion when she was younger.

### Types of Pride I Never Thought Of

18 July 2011 At the International Institute of Tribunal and Theological Studies, Msgr. Chaffman summarized ideas he found about types of pride. I thought they would interest you.



1. **Pride of Timidity** – this where from fear of not being perfect we can't stand being prominent. I can come from being criticized too much as a child, but basically it is pride to think we could be perfect and to feel terrible that we may be shown not to be perfect. Ronda's comment: my godfather used to say that we should see ourselves as weak little creatures and humbly confess to God during the day "Well, that's what I'm like. I make mistakes. I have faults. Help me." The opposite is self-hatred because I am not perfect.

2. **Pride of Sensuality** – A romantic urge for self-gratification; too much need for affection. Ronda: Maybe what "pride of life" means in Scripture? The pride comes in because we think we merit lots of lots of pleasure and affection vs. having our minds on how to serve others?

**3. Pride of Sensitivity – seeing oneself as a victim. Ronda: used to be called 'touchiness.' Again, it is as if others have to suffer due to original sin, etc., but I should have a charmed life?**

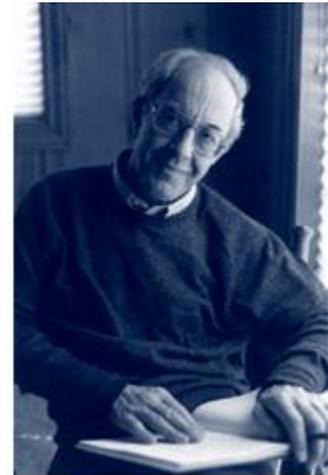
**4. Pride of Dictatorship – this is obvious and the one we mostly identify as pride. A form of this common nowadays is what is called micro-managing.**

**Well, that will be enough to provide you and I with matter for Confession!**

**A beloved daughter or son of God?**

**19 July 2011**

**The same priest I mentioned yesterday in my blog is teaching a course on the thought of Henri Nouwen. For any of you who do not know him, Henri was a Dutch psychiatrist-priest who came to the US and taught at Yale but then left teaching and joined the L'Arche movement where those with so-called mental disabilities live in the same houses with others who Jean Vanier and Fr. Thomas Philippe (founders of L'Arche) considered to be way ahead of most of us in their ability to love God and neighbor.**



**Msgr. Chaffman, the professor who will teach Nouwen, quoted him with this formulation:**

**Ask yourself,**

**“Who am I?”**

**What other people say I am?**

**What I do?**

**What I possess?**

or

the beloved of God?

This sounds self-evident that we think we are the beloved of God more than the first 3 choices. But, consider! How miserable do we get when insulted by others? How eager are we to introduce ourselves by our professions and accomplishments? How much do we envy others their possessions?

Sometimes when I give talks where I am announced with all my degrees and books, a woman will approach me after the talk to make a comment proceeding it with this phrase, "Of course, I am only a housewife, but...." I stop her immediately and ask how many children she has? Then, I say, "which one of those children would you like to trade in for a book with your name as author? A book that will eventually be relegated to the dumpster vs. a child who will live for all eternity?"

A friend challenged me today about this? Do you think people only love you because of your teaching and books? Not just because you are you? I am going to stop writing this minute and run to the chapel and just sit and ponder blissfully that my real name is not Dr. Ronda but beloved daughter of God.

### Turning Greetings into Witness Moments

21 July 2011 A repetitive situation I dislike is when people return to a learning institution after a vacation and everyone asks "how was your summer?" They want to hear, "terrific," but really my summer might have been difficult, but if I say so it seems inappropriately personal, and just saying "glad to be back" seems kind of evasive!



**I have a wonderful friend, Dorothy, in North Carolina. Whenever I visit my family there, I am shocked anew because whenever you ask this woman who is in chronic sometimes acute pain most of the time, “how are you, Dorothy?” she responds, “I’m good with God!”**

**I realize that she is turning a conventional neutral moment into a graced witness moment, since her answer forces us to stop complaining about our lesser aches and pains and to think of God.**

**You might want to think of an answer to “how are you?” that fits your personality and would be as refreshing. For now, when people ask me about my summer I’m going to copy Dorothy and say, “it was good with God.”**

## **Let's not be pessimistic about our Church**

**22 July 2011**

**I am giving talks at a Church in Hollywood. By 8 AM there are countless homeless people on line waiting to get vouchers for a Mac Donald’s breakfast. They also come in during the Mass to the vestibule to use the restrooms to clean up. It felt so wonderful that while the Mass was being celebrated I could see these woe-begone people finding help from our Church.**

**Another inspiring sight was the consecration performed by an elderly priest whose arms are limp from some disease – so he has to grasp the Eucharist with both hands as best he can! He so obviously is praying that he won’t be retired because of this. Here he is pastor and he can do lots of things that are very important that he couldn’t do if he became only a helper priest at another parish. For example, he hosts young people in an old building who are discerning vocations. They volunteer at the parish while thinking about the future. It is wonderful to see some 5 young men praying their hearts out in deep silence before the Mass. Oh, these are hi-tech young men who do liturgy of the hours off nooks or kindles, or iPhones!**



## Listening vs. Arguing

25 July 2011

I have a relative who doesn't go to the Sacraments but does pray a lot and is very loving. This relative was asking me if I thought God loved "them" in spite of not going to Church.

I said yes and I was about to go into a long argument about how not going to Church is rejecting the love Jesus has for one and not letting Him come into one with His Body and Blood.

Instead I just kept listening to this person's reasons for not liking to go to Church.



The relative then said, “You know, usually whenever I talk about religion you jump down my throat angrily. This time you just listened. That meant so much to me.”

I think this is related to my big push to talk less (see A New Way, June 2 Blog). What a dividend!

I must watch for this. No matter what splendid retorts I have on different Church matters, it might not always be the right thing to enunciate them. Sometimes we need to just listen, especially with family members.

The next thing my relative said was how running to Mary helps so much because she understands!

Thank you, Mary.

## Creativity and Security

26 July 2011

My daughters, Diana and Carla, were terrific artists when they were children. They were so good that, since we owned the house, we let them “fresco” the walls of their bedroom with delightful funny pictures. I still recall the parent of one of their little friends marveling that any parents would let kids do such a thing!

Carla went on to be a poet primarily. Diana writes wonderful comic narratives about family events, but also is now going back to art. She is doing great Chagall/Van Gogh like paintings. I love them. She refuses to take art lessons to “perfect” them because that would ruin the fun. Her house looks a lot like the Ridley’s house – Watershed leaders in Corpus Christi – in case you have been there.



I am visiting her off and on this summer in LA while teaching elsewhere. She recently bought a huge wooden low bureau for \$10 at a yard sale to paint up. Below are some photos of what she has done. I love the sheer spontaneity of them, the freedom, the love of color and love of God’s creation they display. But some people think it is just crazy: “you should paint on canvasses, not bureaus!”

It brought to mind long reflections I have made about conformity and non-conformity. I am convinced that hatred of non-conformity comes from a very understandable and even correct intuition that without a certain degree of conformity there would be no safety at all. If you didn’t expect that most people will not kill you when they got angry... you couldn’t budge out the door. Along these lines is

the fact that the custom of shaking hands was started centuries ago, supposedly, to prove you didn't have a knife in your hand!

Parents, in the hippie era, associated long hair and full beards with drugs and draft-dodging. Thus non-conformity was associated with something much more dangerous than hair. This explains why, still, I can't get any mileage out of telling my seminarians that since they will be alter-Christus they should try to look like him with long hair and beards.

Anyhow, if you catch the fire, think about painting old bureaus. If you have kids, they will love it!

## Security or Jesus?

28 July 2011

I was running through fantasies about secure futures for myself in my older, old age with a priest-friend. After awhile it just became apparent that the problem wasn't which one would be better but that the desperate search for security in the future is a symptom of lack of trust in God. Not, of course, that we shouldn't plan and look into things, but the enterprise of dangling 5 possible options with A-Z on each one has to be foolish if not also an offense to God.

I heard the Holy Spirit ask me: "So if you had a choice between security or Jesus, what would you pick?" Of course, Jesus. The priest remarked: "there is a simpler word for this: faith!"

Later, in Confession, another priest gave me Ven. Charles de Foucauld's Prayer of Abandonment which includes these wonderful lines: "Father...do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you."



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## Changing language; changing thoughts

31 July 2011

Years ago I tried writing a book called *Screwtape Comes to the Seminary* based on Lewis' famous Screwtape Letters. In one of



the chapters I explained how each of the polarized groups in the Church has it's own language so that you can tell very a quickly where a person is coming from based on phrases he or she uses often. For example, contrast Mother Mary with the Holy Immaculate Virgin.

Recently the one I am noticing is how in some circles "sin" went from being called "problem" to now being called "issue." As in she or he has an issue where previously it was called he or she is lazy or rude.

The intent is often to be charitable. To say someone is lazy or rude sounds so blunt and judgmental! God forbid we would use the word "fat." It is certainly true that some of us, mea culpa, who tend toward harsh judgment will use the worst word possible to describe others we disapprove of, and we need to realize this is not charitable!

So? I suggest that when talking about our own sins we break the euphemism habit by using the real word. It will be a step out of denial as in "I am a chatter-box," "I am a gloomy party-pooper," "I am a smotherer micro-manager."

Then we can enjoy the response which is usually, "Aw, come on Ronda, after all, you also have lots of virtues, otherwise we wouldn't love you so much."

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## The Glories of Parenting Babies

4 August 2011

Jeff Ostrowski, President of Watershed, asked me to contribute a blog on babies. This takes me back many decades but is still relevant.

I was a twin and we were the only children in our family. I knew almost nothing about babies when my twins were born in 1962. It was before breast-feeding was revived in our country. It would have so much more convenient to feed them simultaneously, one at each breast, instead of one after the other as in 1:30 AM feed little Carla; 2:45 AM feed little Diana. That is, Mama never sleeps more than a half hour at a time! Happily when my son was born La Leche League was alive and



well. I loved it. I developed the analogy (limping to be sure) that my body was like Jesus' Eucharist body. My milk was so good it could nourish a baby, just as the Eucharist is so good it can nourish our souls.

The birth of our twins was a revelation to my husband who was 46 at the time. He had always wanted to be a father. As he carried the babies in his arms for the first time he got a realization of how God the Father must love us, His children.

By the twins' six month of life, however, we became acquainted with a sign that innocence is not forever. One twin pulled out most of the hair of the other. This took place in their playpen when one was jealous because the other learned how to stand up first! We were flabbergasted. We have a photo which neither of them enjoy seeing!

Thank you, Lord of heaven and earth, and have mercy on us in our fallen natures.

## The Spiritual Classics

7 August 2011 I am presently working on a course for Holy Apostles, for seminarians and other students, on the Spiritual Classics. Simultaneously with the assignment to prepare this course, I got an ad on e-mail from a business called Professor's Choice which binds up in pleasant form the anthologies professors put together to replace grunchy looking mish-mashes.

So I am off and running assembling excerpts from the spiritual classics. If any of you want to let me know your favorites I will be happy to consider them. Here is the draft of the table of contents:

St. Augustine's Confessions  
St. Benedict's Rule  
St. Bernard – from Song of Songs  
St. Francis – Little Flowers  
from St. Bonaventure  
St. Gertrude  
Blessed Julian(a)  
St. Catherine of Siena  
Thomas A Kempis



## **The Cloud of Unknowing**

**St. Ignatius**

**St. Teresa of Avila**

**St. John of the Cross**

**St. Francis De Sales**

**Brother Lawrence**

**St. Therese of Lisieux**

**Sts. Kolbe, De Montfort, Liguori on Mary**

**Ven. Conchita**

**St. Faustina**

**Also excerpts from**

**Von Hildebrand**

**Merton**

**The Way of the Pilgrim**

**Nouwen**

**Escriva**

**Gabrielle Bossis**

**Buber Chassidic Tales**

## **Themes in the Spiritual Classics**

**8 August 2011**

**I thought I would convey to readers of this Watershed blog what is coming through to me as I work on my anthology of excerpts from the spiritual classics.**

**I start with Augustine's Confessions. The aspect that always hits me first when I teach this great book is how personal it is. It is the first autobiography in the history of Western Civilization. It fits well with my favorite Old Testament Scripture passage: "You are called by name."**

**This conviction is the opposite of some sort of vague image of being some sort of employee of God, one of many coming off a kind of cookie-cutter to do a certain work in the history of the universe, judged only by merits, not cherished as an individual daughter or son of God.**



The second aspect of the Confessions I love the most is how when this great philosopher gets stuck he just calls upon the God of truth and begs Him to resolve the problem. Since Augustine didn't report audible answers, we must presume that what he writes next after asking the question, he attributed to the Holy Spirit. Although one cannot judge such answers to be infallible due to the ambiguity about messages from on high, it is certainly possible that Augustine's wisdom was mostly from on high since he is a Doctor of the Church.

When we are stuck on a theological or philosophical problem, why wouldn't we run to the God of truth?

## Gratitude

11 August 2011

My godfather, Balduin Schwarz, spent the last decades of his life working on an analysis of the meaning of gratitude. He was a philosophy professor who fled Germany because of the Nazi regime, taught for years at Fordham University in New York City, and then became the Chairperson of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Salzburg.



When I met him in 1959 while I was studying at Fordham it was a given that young people like me would complain bitterly about the shallow values of people in the USA in contrast to the depth of European thought, music, art. He would respond by expressing his undying gratitude for this country of freedom where he had found asylum during the time of the evil regimes of Nazism and Communism, results of a culture that had largely lost the foundations of perennial truth and Christian faith.

As he worked on his book on gratitude, Balduin Schwarz was greatly impressed by the fact that a foundation in Dallas, Texas had constructed in a big mall something called Thanksgiving Square where busy shoppers could stop and express gratitude to God in a chapel.

Schwarz's main theme was that the gifts of God and from others are not really opened until we are grateful because it adds immeasurably to our joy to know that the good things are gifts of love for us from God and others. Here are some quotations from the manuscript of his book that I use when I teach gratitude in my courses in Philosophy of the Human Person:

From Balduin Schwarz on Gratitude:

**“Wonder... opens up our dialogue with reality; or rather, takes it up and continues it, since reality has already spoken the first word in addressing us as persons... There comes then into being a dialogue between that which ‘speaks to us’ and our soul which receives it. For this to take place, we must open ourselves inwardly to what is given to us, cooperate with it, ‘go along with it,’ bring it to completion in ourselves, work together with it.”**

**‘Humility is truth. It is metaphysical truth. I affirm myself as a created self.’**

**“Atheism doesn’t only intellectually deny the existence of God but lives as if God didn’t exist. At the root of atheism is despair: an antithesis to gratitude’**

**‘Through gratitude, I hold onto the gifts I have received. I remain awake to them. Gratitude is a form of remembering. Gratitude is the way the heart remembers’.**

## **Miscellaneous**

**14 August 2011**

**A wonderful sermon today for the Assumption of Our Lady. The priest described Armstrong landing on the moon and saying “one small step for me and one giant leap for mankind.” (I didn’t get it exactly, but I am sure you know it.) He compared it to Our Lady’s leap into heaven to be the first purely human with a resurrected body in heaven.**

**A totally banal but intriguing little incident. I was in a car on the freeway. We went down an unfamiliar off-ramp for me to use the restroom. The driver filled up his tank. The door to the restroom had a big sign: Only for customers. Get the key. So, I went up to the cashier and brusquely said, “We are not buying anything in the store, but my drivers are filling up with gas. The cashier said “No!”**

**I was absolutely startled. Then he laughed and said, “All you have to do is say ‘Please!’” I laughed and apologized for not having said “please.”**

**Back in the car we talked about whether this fell under light fun or maybe was a trifle sadistic given the bathroom needs of elderly travelers. What do you think?**

## **Priorities**

**14 August 2011**

**I had a beautiful day. In Duarte, California, a suburb of Los Angeles, there is a wonderful order of Carmelites – nuns and friars. Among other apostolates, the nuns run a retirement home called Avila Gardens. Unlike some such homes where there seems to be much emphasis on**



distraction rather than becoming more holy, this place is redolent of piety and love of God and neighbor. That is their priority! If you are an older person looking for such a place, check it out on the web.

I came to give a talk based on my book *Seeking Christ in the Joys and Sufferings of Aging*. (you can find it on my web: [rondachervin.com](http://rondachervin.com)). At the end of the talk I told the group that I would be around for more questions. A woman in a wheel-chair with a breathing tube in her nostrils seemed to want to talk to me. I walked over to her table. With a look in her face very unlike affirmation or questioning she exclaimed: "You are blocking my plug!" I leaped out of the way and then smiled. I guess if you can't breath without a tube you would be more concerned with that than with whether it is relaxing, in old age, not to have to go to PTA meetings any more!

## Short Spiritual Images

18 August 2011

Two images given my spiritual directors many years ago came to mind. I still find them insightful and compelling.

The first is that we would like to think of our spiritual journey as running straight up a road to the top of the mountain. More realistic is that we run a few steps, get caught in the brambles of our sins and defects. Jesus comes down the mountain and extricates us from the thorns and we start again and move up until we fall into another bramble-bush.

The second is again that we want to run straight up a road to the top of the mountain but, instead the road spirals around to the top. When we come to same vista we think we have made no progress but really we are seeing the same thing from a higher part of the mountain. That is, we come to the same conflict scenario and we feel discouraged but we are approaching that problem from a place of higher insight.

The last insight I recalled yesterday in conversation was not an image. At times in our lives when we have seemingly endless interruptions we think that we are being thwarted in our true vocation, but eventually, sometimes, we realize the Holy Spirit is telling us: "Your interruptions are your vocation!" That is, helping people in small ways could be more important in our growth in love than finishing our projects.



## Whose Church is the Church?

19 August 2011

At St. Victor's Church in Hollywood there is a huge replica of the Cross that spoke to St. Francis of Assisi, except it is even more Byzantine looking. I was looking at it just before the morning Mass. Several of the street people who come to a place in the back of the Church for vouchers for MacDonald's breakfasts wandered into the Church and spent several minutes gazing at the beautiful cross and at the other statues. Some stayed for Mass and others drifted off.

It reminded me of Churches in Catholic countries where all day long people come into Church to pray. When non-believers talk as if our beautiful churches come from the priestly caste exploiting the poor, I say, "you've got it wrong. The Church doesn't belong to the priest. The poor see the Church as their celestial living room."

It seems touching to me that nowadays here in our non-Catholic country it is the poor of the streets that now gaze with awe and interest at the pictures, statues, and crucifixes in our Church and, of course, we poor in spirit love to be in our celestial living room other days as well as Sundays.



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## Overcoming Polarity

23 August 2011

I am working on an article about attitudes toward polarities in the Church. Here is a draft of the

start of it. I'd love comments.

### **Polarization in the Church: Despair or Hope?**

The on-line dictionary defines polarization as "a sharp division, as of a population or group, into opposing factions."

Here are some of the most obvious opposing factions in the Catholic Church today:

**Magisterial Catholics vs. Dissenting Catholics (and those who never dissent in public but create loopholes for disobedience to doctrinal or moral teachings)**

**Liturgical classicists vs. Liturgical innovators**

**Charismatics vs. Anti-Charismatics**

**Group joiner Catholics vs. Sunday Mass only Catholics**

**Activist Catholics vs. Quiet Catholics**

**Peace and Justice Emphasis Catholics vs. Pro-Life Emphasis Catholics**

**Mystical Catholics vs. Faith only Catholics**

**Others?**

I realize that just the way I have phrased these divisions is controversial, but try to read on even if you dislike even the wording since you probably know the basic issue that is being addressed.

Catholics also disagree about what to do about this polarization. Here are a few options. You may not fit into any of these options, or you might have variations on attitude 1 about some of the polarities but take attitude 2 options on one or more of other polarities.

#### **1. Increase the Polarization**

**"What we need is not interminable phony dialogue, but a schism. There is no common ground between "us" and "them." We should form our own separate Churches, on either side calling it "the real Catholic Church."**

**or, for the less revolutionary:**

**"We just have to wait until 'they' die out."**

**Or, in addition:**

**"we can do everything we can to push the other side out such as pressing, when applicable, for ex-communication, persecution through firing anyone on the other side from positions where their views could be influential, or that failing, shunning or sarcasm or humor that others find derisive."**

#### **2. Try to Overcome Polarization wherever we can:**

**"we should love everybody including "enemies" within the Church. To do this we need to avoid stereotyping in thoughts and words. For example, we don't need to think or talk about charismatics as**

**“Holy Rollers.” As an exercise, go through the list of polarities given above and think of the stereotypes that each side uses in describing the other side. As peace-makers we need to avoid those thought patterns.”**

**“not assume automatically that someone who thinks “A” also thinks B,C....all the way to Z. Instead listen carefully to see what those on the “other side” really think about many topics and practices.”**

**“accept the pain of disagreement and offer it as a penance toward reconciliation.”**

## **After the Storm**

**31 August 2011**

**I have not written a blog in more than a week. First I was leaving Los Angeles to go back to Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Connecticut where I teach. Then, I had no sooner unpacked and finished my errands when Hurricane Irene hit.**

**Fr. Dennis Kolinski, one of our priests from the John Cantius Society whose seminarians study here, remarked just before the storm “It’s good. It shows us that we are not in control.” I didn’t like hearing that at all! The fear of the storm reminded me of news photos of people being lifted off their roofs into helicopters during Katrina in New Orleans. That was a moving image of loving compassion, but I certainly didn’t want to be the protagonist victim of such a scenario.**

**It was also going to be different than earthquakes of the past where I was protected by family. Yes, there are more than a hundred strong men here at the seminary, but none of them would be in my room when the predicted 80 mile an hour winds would keep me trapped inside! I happen to live in a “cell” within a large house, but my room is the only one facing out with no halls connecting me to the others whose masculine quarters constitute a semi-cloister. It felt awful being the only quaking female amongst all these stalwart men who pride themselves on fearlessness! The other women living on campus are 12 Vietnamese nuns all together in a separate house.**

**Whether by grace or nature, the hurricane dwindled to a tropical storm by the time it hit at 6 AM Sunday morning. No one was hurt, power outages mostly took out the net connections but not the lights. I kept reminding myself of my own teaching that the proof that for anyone “God alone is enough” is that we are not disturbed by earthly occurrences! Humbling, therefore, to have to see how fearful I could be!**



The rector had all able-bodied seminarians of all ages and nationalities drag off the branches from the fallen trees, which, apparently saved us \$10,000 it would have cost to hire professionals!

Today, after 3 1/2 days, the net is up and I can write blogs again. A good result is that I will never be surprised when I hear of good Catholics being fearful or angry when threatened by or in natural disasters!

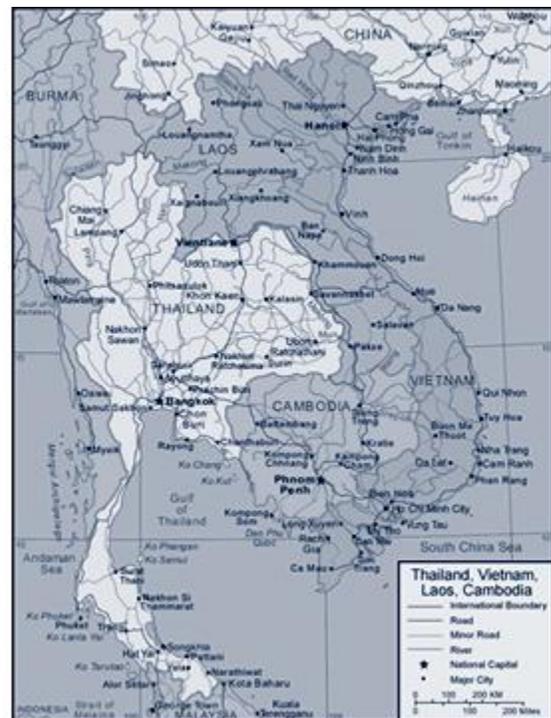
## In Christ there is no East or West, in Him no North or South

4 September 2011

At the seminary for late vocation men where I teach we have many seminarians from countries where the US was once in enmity. Even though the communist government allows the Churches in such countries to be open it is almost impossible for the seminarians to get ordained because of “regulations.” They say, however, that some of the spies, who attend Mass every Sunday to make sure the priest doesn’t say anything political, eventually convert.

So, among these foreign seminarians are Cistercian monks. I am putting together an anthology of spiritual writings from the classics and working on St. Bernard, twelfth century famous Cistercian. And I am thinking that paragraphs like this sound so overly emotional to 21st century minds. This comes from St. Bernard’s commentary on the Song of Songs and is a reflection on the ointments mentioned in this lush love poem of the Old Testament:

“The spices of this second ointment, on the contrary, are not produced on our earth at all, we seek to gain them for ourselves from afar. I mean that all that is good, everything that is perfect, is given us from above; it comes down from the Father of all light. For this ointment is made from the gifts of God bestowed on the human race. Happy the man who makes it his business to gather these carefully for himself and keep them in mind with due thanksgiving. When they shall have been pounded and refined in the heart’s receptacle with the pestle of frequent meditation, all of them fused together in the fire of holy desire, and finally enriched with the oil of gladness, you will have an ointment more excellent than the former, and far more precious.”



Just as I was excerpting this, a friend, who is helping tutor one of these ,comes to tell me how a bishop will come from his country will come to ordain him here and he, the seminarian monk, is simply overflowing with joy from so many years of yearning finally to be a priest and say his first Mass – true son of St. Bernard, true lover of Jesus the Bridegroom.

Ah, Jesus, melt our hearts hardened by cynicism from years of sufferings in the Church!

Shalom, Dr. Ronda

## Wordless Prayer

5 September 2011

This blog will be a little paradoxical because, of course, I am using words to tell you about not using words... well, at least sometimes.

I am recalling that when I was a young new Catholic convert I simply assumed that the best way to pray was always the liturgical prayers of the Church, period! Of course, they are sublime and always should be prayed in Church. What I didn't know for decades was that the mystical saints teach that after years of word prayers said during quiet prayer times alone, we get tired of words. We can imagine it is just because we are distracted miserable creatures. But, really, this is because God wants to move us into prayer of the heart – wordless groans, sighs, and eventually peace.

This isn't just one stage but can reoccur at different times in our lives. Even if we think we are doing nothing that is okay because we are making space for God to fill our hearts wordlessly.



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## The Devil: Father of Lies

7 September 2011

I am watching videos about a prayer ministry called Theophostic. Even though I don't agree with everything on the video the big point I think is right on and very helpful, so I will convey that insight.

Many times compulsive sins or anxieties and anger come from some lie we accepted, especially in childhood. For example, an active homosexual may have believed his childhood friends who told him he was homosexual in order to seduce him. Or, from abandonment by a parent I might think that any time I am not in control things will go badly.

In this ministry they pray people back to those memories and help them listen to "the voice" of Jesus telling them the truth such as "you don't have to be homosexual" or "look at all the good things that happened to you that were totally out of your control such as your conception, the good things in your parents and siblings, graces of the sacraments or your conversion, etc. etc. etc."

I tried praying this way for a few days about little and big anxieties. It worked. Just as they said on the video I got instant relief, hopefully permanent, from letting Jesus into these areas of past hurt.

Since the movement is ecumenical there might be things on the web you would disagree with, but you might want to visit their web just the same to take out whatever is true and helpful.

## St. Francis of Assisi still can Help Us!

10 September 2011 I am working on the Spiritual Classics Anthology. I have read that story about St. Francis and Perfect Joy many times, but this time it hit me freshly.

I have a terrible time with being cold – it comes with old age and my time in Corpus Christi thinning my blood, they say. Anyhow I was dreading the cold weather coming. At the seminary they usually don't turn on the heat until November 15th which is 2 months after I am already cold. I have a heater in my little room, but there is nothing to do about the cold in the chapel where I like to spend a few hours a day. (By the way, today was a day of recollection for the seminarians. They spend 24 hours in silence



and serial adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. I can't remember any Church except here ever being in a chapel with 100 people not speaking or even whispering! Balm to the soul. You know a little more silence in all our lives has to be good. I knew a mother with 8 home-school kids who insisted on an hour a day of silence for herself reading the Bible in her bedroom. The older kids had to answer the needs of the littler ones. It worked. She was peaceful.)

So I am reading where St. Francis is cold and miserable the rain walking toward his monastery and proclaims to Fr. Leo: "What is perfect joy? If our brothers healed the sick, made the deaf hear, even raised people from the dead that would not be perfect joy. Perfect joy would be if we arrive at the monastery and they won't let us in thinking we are thieves, and instead of muttering and grumbling we would forgive them and try to enter with only kind words three times."

Generally when I read the story it just persuades me that "I am not 'cut out' to be saint. Forget it, etc. etc" This time, however, probably because of working on my New Way and also the Theophostic prayer I mentioned a few days ago I thought instead, "what would happen if I made up my mind, after doing everything I can to stay warm, not to even mention the cold for the next 3 months???? I grabbed my dedicated widow companion and told her that any time I mention the cold she can smile and hint "perfect joy?"

Can I challenge you to think of something you tend to complain about outwardly or just in your head? Think, what would it be like if after trying to change the situation, I would just stop complaining for a day, a week, a month?????

## Liturgical Mysticism

14 September 2011

As I wrote sometime back I am assembling excerpts of the Spiritual Classics for an anthology for teaching. When I come upon something I think my Watershed readers would like I cut and paste it for you.

St. Gertrude the Great is one of the most famous Benedictine mystics of the Church. Here is a little about her:

**Gertrude the Great (c.1256-1302)**

Gertrude was given to a Benedictine monastery at Helfta, Germany when she was 5 years old, as was a custom among some devout Catholic families in those



days. It was a monastery influenced by Cistercian spirituality. She was there first as a student and ward but, then, Gertrude joined the order as a young woman, still spending most of her time in studies of Latin and rhetoric. In 1281, as a young woman she had a spiritual experience which convinced her to spend the rest of her life on religious studies. She became a renowned and loved counselor of other nuns. She became highly influential because of her autobiographical writings, especially because of the way her spirituality is permeated by the liturgy of the hours, and also because of her experience of the Sacred Heart.)

Here is an excerpt from Chapter 22 which illustrates how mystical the liturgy can be! For many years I read such mystical writings and they encouraged me to yearn for more than I had in my somewhat faith is enough way of being a Catholic. When, later on, God graced me with mystical gifts, the knowledge of experiences such as those of St. Gertrude helped me not to think I was just “losing it.”

#### Chapter 22 Revelations of Divine Love

I should be unjust in recalling the gratuitous gifts which I have received from Thy charitable clemency, if I ungratefully passed over what was granted to my unworthiness, by Thy most loving clemency, during a certain Lent. For on the second Sunday, as they sang at Mass before the procession, the response which commences *Vidi Dominum facie ad faciem*, a marvelous and inestimable coruscation illuminated my soul with the light of Divine revelation, and it appeared to me that my face was pressed to another face, as St. Bernard says “Not a form, but forming; not attracting the bodily eye, but rejoicing the heart; giving freely gifts of love, not merely in appearance but in reality.”

In this most enchanting vision, Thine eyes, bright as the solar rays, appeared opposite to mine, and Thou alone knowest how Thou, my dearest Lord, affected not only my soul, but even my body and all my strength. Grant, therefore that as long as I live I may prove myself Thy humble and devoted servant....

When Thou didst display Thy most adorable Face – the source of all blessedness, as I have said, embracing me, unworthy – a light of inestimable sweetness passed through Thy ... eyes into mine, passing through my inmost being, operating in all my members with admirable power and sweetness: first it appeared as if the marrow were taken from my bones; then, my flesh and bones appeared annihilated, so much so, that it seemed as if my substance no longer had any consciousness save that Divine Splendor, which shone in so inexplicable and delightful a manner that it was the source of the most inestimable pleasure and joy to my soul.

Oh, what shall I say further of this most sweet vision, if I may so term it? For all the eloquence in the world, if employed daily to persuade me, could never convince me that I should behold Thee more clearly even in glory, O my God, the only salvation of my soul, if Thou hadst not taught me by experience. I will dare say that if anything human or Divine, can exceed the blessedness of Thy embrace in this vision, as I consider, I may truly say that, unless Thy Divine virtue possessed that person, the soul would never remain in the body after a momentary taste of this blessedness.

I render thanks to Thee through the union of mutual love which reigns in the adorable Trinity, for what I have so often experienced, and that Thou hast deigned to favor me with Thy caresses; so that while I sat meditating, or reading the Canonical Hours, or saying the Office of the Dead, Thou hast often, during a single Psalm, embraced my soul many times with a kiss, which far surpasses the most fragrant perfume or the sweetest honey; and I have often observed Thou didst look on me favorably in the condescending caresses Thou didst give to my soul. But though all these things were filled with an extreme sweetness, I declare, nevertheless, that nothing touched me so much as this majestic look of which I have spoken. For this, and for all other favors, whose value Thou alone knowest, mayest Thou rejoice forever in that ineffable sweetness surpassing all comprehension, which the Divine Persons communicate mutually to each other in the bosom of the Divinity! ...

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## Making Mistakes

20 September 2011

I was at a meeting where we work on trying not to think we can control everything by doing things perfectly. I realized that senioritis is a GOOD challenge for that tendency. Why? Because when we get older we can't even dream of doing everything perfectly!

Where do such follies come from? I think that if you had any kind of emotional chaos in your childhood home that you think you can control the results if you do small things well. For example, in school we get gold stars or A grades if we do things well.



So, whenever we make a mistake, it reminds us of the feeling of chaos that afflicted us as children and calls up anxiety.

Remedy? We can immediately when we make a mistake laugh humbly and say – “well, I’m human – I make mistakes.” Then, where applicable, we can apologize, modeling for others that one doesn’t have to get defensive about mistakes.

Basically, since we are called to pray constantly, these are good moments to pray something like “God, you are perfect, I am weak. Help me.”

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## Stamina of Previous Generations

26 September 2011

Here at Holy Apostles College and Seminary we have an alumni day for priests who were ordained out of this seminary. The oldest one, Fr. Francis from Canada, gave this witness story:

“I was one of 16 children in Canada. Over time my family also took care of 140 foster children! I was a baker. One day I told the manager: I want to be a priest instead of a baker. I met Fr. Eusebe Menard, the founder of the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles. At the seminary I kept flunking out, but I persevered. I have been a priest for 47 years!



I guess people from families like his would have a lot of graces to persevere!

Not that God wills that every family have 16 kids and 140 foster children, of course. Each couple has its own vocation. I wanted to have 13 children, in spite of having great difficulty raising my three living ones because of being a spacey intellectual instead of a practical mother. I would have loved all who came just because of the beauty of each one's soul; but I had many miscarried instead. I will see the faces of the other ones in heaven.

After this talk by the Canadian priest, the Rector read a letter to us about the gift from a priest in Florida of relics of the 12 Apostles. What a boon to seminarians some of whom have 6-8 years of study to go!

Tears of joy. The “gates of hell will not prevail.”

## Excuse vs. Accuse

28 September 2011

In the group, Recovery, International, that I have led for some 18 years we have “tools” like the 12 Step slogans. One is “excuse vs. accuse.” I had a miserable example of this, mea culpa, this week. I wanted to try to save money on my expensive unlimited A T and T cell phone by switching to Verizon. But it seems that these cheap Verizon plans are very user unfriendly and that, in general, Verizon is famous for poor customer service.



A dear friend went with me to the Verizon emporium and it took us 20 hours over 3 days to get the whole matter straightened out. Some of you got messages from me about changes of phone number during the course of this. I seethed through the process full of sarcasm and bile plus recurring fantasies of leaving the world in the form of throwing out all tech stuff and spending the rest of my life walking through the country evangelizing people, Franciscan style.

After two days of listening to my rants, my older techy friend, suggested that, after all, most of the Verizon personnel are young techy people who are not used to helping older clients. They just assume you will catch on quickly with a minimum of help.

At this point I thought of our tool “excuse vs. accuse” and realized that in Christian form this meant that I was indulging in harsh judgment and actually sinning against charity. Somehow, when I do this with people I know, I readily see that I am sinning as I go along and quickly repent and ask forgiveness. But when it comes to strangers in business settings, it takes me forever to see that I am sinning – at least venially.

If this example resonates with you, it might be good to think where might the Holy Spirit be wanting me to “excuse vs. accuse.”

## Fresh Thoughts on the Deadly Sin of Pride

3 October 2011

A wonderful priest gave a sermon the other day on pride. I found it so good I had to go to confession that very day. I am excerpting key images I thought you’all might find challenging:

“Don’t be misled by appearances. The kind of loud and blustering person, drawing



attention to himself might not be the prideful person. (Ronda: mea culpa on that description). And the sort of quiet and self-effacing person might not be the humble one. Pride is self-regard... it is simply looking at oneself...a terrible spiritual poison ... We are attentive in a terribly painful way to what others are thinking of us, what impression we are making? How am I doing? Am I up or down? Which of us is the greatest?"

He contrasted this with being caught up in a good conversation where our attention is on truth and insight or the way a child plays, totally caught up in the activity. He quotes an image of another thinker of people on a bus riding through beautiful country with the blinds down and their minds on who got the best seat.

The priest thinks that these are part of the reasons why Jesus says we must become more like little children.

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## Leave Taking

4 October 2011

I was telling a beloved friend that I was departing for a time. He looked at me with love and said, "our hearts go with you, and they will be ready for you when you return."

I thought, "what a loving reaction. How different from the possible look for shock, resentment, and distancing that sometimes comes with such announcements."

It reminded me of how my godfather, Dr. Balduin Schwarz, used to say, "The only remedy for leave-taking is gratitude." Of course, the pain of separation is directly related to the love between.

So, my prayer is this: I thank you, Lord, for all the people who disappointed me when they left me for reasons having nothing to do with our friendship. Heal me of any bitterness. Let gratitude and the knowledge that all human love is a foretaste of heaven help me to remember them with hope.



## Feast of St. Francis

5 October 2011

The Scripture for today's feast day included those words of Jesus: "My yoke is easy." Usually I gag as in "who are you kidding?" But today I got a different take on it. This is because I am going to Al-Anon

meetings and taking in 12 Step wisdom. The “one day at a time” idea is particularly repugnant to this frenetic schemer.

But today I put the two together. Of course! If I am only doing one day at a time the yoke is not as heavy as if I am trying to carry the crosses connected to every future possibility!

The Scripture that matches one day at a time is the Lilies of the Field – and surely St. Francis didn’t carry the burden of the future around on his back every day.



## Negativity on E-Mails

8 October 2011

Recently I wrote a family member an e-mail that included a little joke making a comparison of rules in one part of the family vs. those that pertain in another.

She shot back a furious response excoriating me for insensitivity! I was flabbergasted.

After much loving reconciling phone conversation, she said that really she was pontificating about a tendency often found in our e-mail culture. She suggested that before putting anything even mildly negative in any e-mail we

read it over and over and show it to another person to see if it could be hurtful.

I think she is right. Pondering it, I added this observation: when we see people face to face, the virtues we love in them, shine through in a way they can't through e-mail. The love in their faces counterbalances words that can be taken in many senses.

A challenge from the Holy Spirit?

## A New Way to Explain the 3rd Commandment

11 October 2011



I am reading a book on natural law ethics called *What We Can't Not Know* by Budziszewski (a name only Poles could easily pronounce). It is the best fresh approach to natural law I have read.

Here is the sample that "convicted" me!

"The third commandment declares that complete engrossment in mundane affairs is not merely tiring but debasing... (So, Ronda immediately thinks that scholarly work is not mundane but dedication to God's truth – or so I have always thought) Thus someone who says "My work is my worship" is deceiving himself – or else worshipping his work. Yes, we should do all our labors as though for God; but for God, we should intermit our labors."

I do believe that it is rather a grey area what kind of work is forbidden on the Sabbath, and there are certainly exceptions made for those who cannot earn a living unless they work on Sundays (did you know that the Saturday vigil Mass was instituted to accommodate longshoremen in Genoa, Italy who had to work all mornings unloading ships, but were free in the late afternoon and evening?)

Just the same, if you happen to be a workaholic, I think Budziszewski's formulation is a ringer.

## Roots of Rage

18 October 2011



I had an incident of out of control rage on my part which yielded such good insights that it is worth it to tell this awful story on myself for the sake of making vivid points.

At breakfast at Holy Apostles Seminary we were discussing whether Catholics who are not sisters or priests can wear rosaries around their necks.

A Seminarian (who is leaving shortly): “No, because it’s making a sacred object into jewelry.”

Ronda: (Looking at the jewelry on the hand of the seminarian, a friend by the way, I grabbed his hand the pointed to this jeweled ring and yelled, banging my other hand on the table: “If you had a rosary with wooden beads, it wouldn’t look like jewelry.”

Seminarian: (grinning) “I don’t like when people bang on the table when they are talking to me. I usually bang on the table back.” (After this sally he walked out of the cafeteria)

Ronda (to the others at the table) “Oh, my God. I gotta get him and ask him to forgive me for making such a public scene and yelling at him. (I caught him outside the building). I’m so, so sorry! How awful of me. Do you forgive me? I think I picked a fight with you because you are leaving and I’ll miss you. If I think of what I don’t like about you, it’s easier to see you leave!”

Seminarian: “Of course, I forgave you immediately.” (Big hug from him).

Thinking it over I realized that the whole thing springs from something way back and what we call in Recovery, Intl. for anger, fear and depression – trying to get a symbolic victory. I was a relatively poor kid surrounded by upper-middle class kids who wore jewelry and cashmere sweaters. I envied them. I get a symbolic victory now as a simplicity-of-life-Catholic by mocking those with luxuries such as jewelry.

Symbolic victory means that by means of anger and sarcasm we get a phony victory over people whose ways we cannot change by quiet reasoning or inspiration. I can’t convince Catholics who wear jewelry that it is better to give the money to the poor, but by sarcasm I can think I have won a victory. It is not a real victory since they don’t change their customs. It is only a “symbolic” victory!

The example I always use to get this across is people giving bad drivers the finger. It doesn’t stop the bad driver from speeding but it makes the one delivering the insult feel superior – phony strong because fierceness feels better than worrying about bad drivers causing accidents where we are the victims.



See why I put in the heading “convoluted conflicts” on this blog, and, heh, guys, aren’t you glad I live far away from all of you!!!!!!

## Questionable Motives for Breaking Up Relationships or Work Situations

26 October 2011 As I mentioned a few times I have been going to Al-Anon. I was reading this 12 Step literature and came upon a witness story of a young woman who said that because she always thought she could change the nearly perfect men she dated but couldn’t change them she would run from one to another. Now that she realizes she can only change herself she is more stable.



The Holy Spirit nudged me to consider whether that could be why I have tried 17 different groups in the 18 years since my husband died! The typical pattern would be that I hear of some wonderful existing place or plan for a group. For a little while I think it is perfect. Then I see flaws. Then I try to convince everyone to change so that the group could be in my own “image and likeness.” Then they resist. Then...I leave!!!!

Oy veh! I have gradually extended the time frame from every 2 months to every 2 years, but still it’s pretty upsetting. Of course the only way I can do this is by living simply so that moving is relatively easy – everything I own fits into one truck load.

Now the next step would be that in the next living situation I am in I will not try to change anyone but myself.

Wanna pray for me?

No one is Perfect

29 October 2011

As a corollary to a previous blog about being upset when things aren’t perfect I got another insight into one of my forms of



this problem. Typically, in my experience, the teddy bear men are wonderfully warm but not inspiring in terms of ascetical heroism – as in some of them eat too much (duh! That’s why they look like teddy bears!); some of them are not very neat; some of them ... you fill in the blanks. So I love them dearly but don’t find them as inspiring as...

The thin, gaunt, heroic ascetical types who are amazingly sacrificial and whose eyes are luminous with the graces of their God alone spirituality. But they are usually not as warm as I would like them to be.

So, after all, who do I know who is warm and also heroically virtuous and luminous? Guess who? Jesus, my Lord, Savior, and 2nd Bridegroom. As a dedicated widow for whom Jesus is my Second Bridegroom, He ought to be enough.

Of course, some man friend is looking at me and thinking well she’s very warm but not very sacrificial or luminous and my other friend “X” is luminous and angelic but not so warm... And who is warm and luminous? Mother Mary. Isn’t she enough?

Well, let’s be thankful for all the warm people in our lives and all the luminous people in our lives and if you know any other than Jesus and Mary who are both warm and luminous, praise the Lord!

## **The Four Elements**

**29 October 2011**

**A long time ago a spiritual writer, Betsy Caprio, developed an update of the old Greek(?) ideas about the 4 elements being Air, Fire, Earth and Water. She transposed this division into a personality typology. In my opinion such typologies, if they are not elevated into panaceas for all the world’s troubles, are intriguing and helpful.**

**Here is the gist of the theory. Each of us is primarily air, fire, earth or water. Then we have a second best of them, a third and a fourth. They come in opposite sets such that if you are an**

**airy person – highly intellectual – or a space cadet in your worst times, you need the balance of earthy people or earthy activities such as gardening.**



fiery person – on fire with ideas, goals – or a rage-aholic in your worst times, you need the balance of watery people or activities such as laid-back people who “go with the flow” and swimming or taking lots of showers and baths.

earthy person – practical, loving of the sensory in life – or cloddish in your worst times, you need the balance of transcendent, very spiritual people and things like mountain climbing, flying, or retreats.

watery person – free-flowing one who delights in surprises – or irresponsible drifters in your worst times, you need the balance of highly motivated fiery people or activities where discipline is mandatory.

Why did I think there was some truth in this? Well, I am primarily airy, next, fiery, next earthy, and least watery and I find I just crave being with earthy people and feel a hundred times better whenever I swim, look at rivers and oceans, or even take a shower.

How about you?

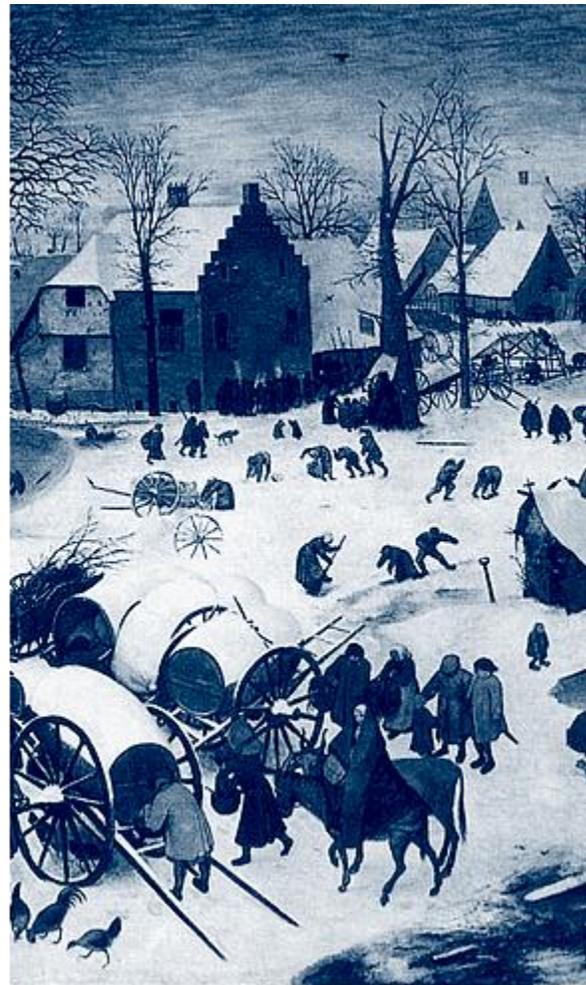
## Contingency and Powerlessness

7 November 2011

This was the week of the big power outage in Connecticut where I live and teach. I have not yet reaped all the insights from this awful experience. The morning after the lights and heat went out one of the priests said “This is good it will get us out of taking everything for granted.”

It was a horrible feeling alone in my room that night expecting that any minute the power would be gone = no land-line, a cell phone whose battery would soon run out that couldn't be re-charged, no heat, no light but a flash light and a prognosis that it could be from 4-10 days before power would be restored.

I had been in the big LA earthquake area, but in that case power was quickly restored and phones and emergencyTV channels were on; it was not cold outside, and most of all I was huddled with family.



Since it was about 40 degrees in the classrooms almost all classes were cancelled. Happily the chapel is heated by some radiant ecological system unrelated to electricity and the kitchen stoves are gas – the cooks in heavy warm clothing were cooking with flash-lights to see by trying to make best use of all the food in the huge refrigerators whose electric power was out.

Soon there were gas lines at the stations from all the people fleeing to their cars for warmth.

A good moment was finding someone with a battery for charging the cell phone that fit with my little Verizon phone. The second night I chose huddling under my comforter with a flash light over sleeping on a hard pew, bag-lady style, in the warmer chapel. The best moment was finding that one of my dedicated widows who comes back and forth from NY State had a house with power back on. So we quickly packed up the car of another freezing widow, waited on the gas line and sped 2 hours away to our friend's house. We passed many trucks of men fixing power lines or dragging away fallen trees on the way.

Many muttered prayers and joy to go to Masses in the light of Churches out of the outage zone, but basically a deep feeling of contingency; that is, anxiety that comes when what we depend upon isn't there. "God alone is enough" was not my first thought or feeling. Alarm that because of tech few of us have fireplaces.

Today I will hear about the local shelter one religious brother went to. The dinner conversation was all about different sizes and relative hazards of generators we might use if this happens again.

Anyhow, after only one long night in New York, the phone call came from the Rector of the Seminary – the power is back! Power! Yes! More power to power and prayers for all those still afflicted and the woman who died from carbon monoxide poisoning trying to work a generator without knowing how.