

FAITH

THE GIFT TO SEE



Faith in God

expands our capacity to see
beyond the limited vision
of what we can see and touch,
beyond our fears and control;
it transforms what once seemed
grey, narrow, limiting and hopeless
into a reality filled with beauty,
possibilities, wonder and awe.
It is the gift to see and
experience life as it really is,
in the presence of Another.

SISTERS OF LIFE



Do I have faith?

YEAR OF FAITH:

Oct 11 - Nov 24, 2013

"Only through believing, then, does faith grow and become stronger; there is no other possibility for possessing certitude with regard to one's life apart from self-abandonment, in a continuous crescendo, into the hands of a love that seems to grow constantly because it has its origin in God."

Pope Benedict XVI

Faith in Jesus Christ changes everything. It positions my life smack dab at the center point of mystery. With faith, my human life is not merely the sum total of my physiology, my psychology, my familial world and friendship networks, my work and avocations – it is so much more! With faith in Jesus Christ I am granted the vision to see the sublime dignity of the human person, ratified in His Incarnation; with faith my eyes are opened to perceive the truth of human love

as gift and a privileged participation in His Trinitarian life; with faith I recognize that the astounding beauty, intricacy and symmetry of the natural world is but a reflection of the grandeur of God; with faith the horizons of my life expand beyond the material universe to the Maker of that universe.

Every year is a good year to grow in faith, but this Year of Faith holds the promise of special graces and opportunities to come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, and to receive from the treasures of His Church. There is a big difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus. Pope Benedict has noted, "Christianity is not a new philosophy or new morality. We are Christians only if we encounter Christ... Only in this personal relationship with Christ, only in this encounter with the Risen One do we really become Christians..." An encounter with Jesus changes us.

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta told of the time a woman rescued from the gutter in terrible condition was brought into one of the houses of the Missionaries of Charity. Mother Teresa welcomed her with great gentleness, cared for her and spent

hours cleansing the festering sores that covered her body. Despite this, the woman never stopped cursing. Through it all, Mother Teresa continued wiping the sweat off the woman's brow and moistening her burning lips. Finally the woman asked: "Sister, why are you doing this? Not everyone behaves like you. Who taught you?" Mother Teresa's answer: "My God taught me". And the woman then said: "Introduce me to your God". Kissing her, Mother Teresa answered: "You know my God. My God is called Love."

This is our God – One who so loves us, and so desires us to know and love Him in return, that He makes Himself a helpless baby so that we might have no fear in approaching Him. This is the God we are called to recognize, receive and share in a renewed way during this Year of Faith.

In this newsletter, you will read about some of our dear friends who share the ways the Lord has surprised them. These men and women allowed their hearts – their innermost core – to be touched and changed forever by an unexpected encounter with Jesus. Their faith reminds us of a young couple of more than 2,000 years ago who were also surprised by the Lord. The "yes" Mary and Joseph lived paved the way for all of us to meet the One who saves us and sets us free. May we all have eyes and ears to recognize and receive His beautiful Presence in a new way during this Year of Faith, and may we follow Him with confidence and courage.

With prayers that you and your loved ones have a blessed Christmas Season,



Mother Agnes Mary, SV

It happened while crossing Broadway

Can you give us a window into your life as an agnostic?

While in college I was a professed agnostic, except every once in a while when I would accidentally eat a nut because it was in something and I would end up in the emergency room. When filling out the forms, I always checked Catholic, I was not going to fool around then. Except for that, I was a professed agnostic.

During my sophomore year at Columbia, I was home for Easter and my mother insisted that we go to the Easter Vigil. I walked into Mass with a copy of Hume. So here I am reading a philosopher who was a relentless critic of religion during the Easter Vigil. I was not rebelling against the Church. I was honestly looking for truth, and that was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

What inspired your search for truth?

I had a wonderful high school teacher, a Jesuit priest. He saw everything that human beings do as something that was part of God's plan. This gave him and those of us in his class a great love for learning.

At Columbia we started with Homer and Virgil and went through the great classics of Western culture. It really broadened my whole perspective, and was preparation for the Gospel because you need to be open to all of the great things human beings do and the great questions of the human heart in order really to be open to the working of God.

How did your search for truth become a search for God?

I met this girl named Nancy. She was a born-again Christian. I remember it was around Christmas and we were talking. I was trying to get a little more serious, and finally she said to me, "Look, you and I can't have a relationship because I have a relationship with Jesus Christ and you don't." It was as simple as that. I thought, "Well, what do I say to that?" Either this is just a figment of her imagination, or maybe there is something to her faith in God. I redoubled my efforts to find truth.

A longtime friend and chaplain of our community, Fr. William Elder, JCD, Chair of the Canon Law Department at St. Joseph's Seminary and Judicial Vicar of the Interdiocesan Appeals Tribunal of the Province of New York, shares his unlikely journey of faith that ultimately led to the priesthood.

How did Nancy respond to your search?

I had come to a philosophy of life that a lot of modern people have. Basically, we do not know, we just do not know. The universe is at best indifferent, it might be hostile, we do not know what this is all about, but what makes human beings great is that we create our own meaning. I told this to Nancy and she said, "I'm very impressed that you are really looking for truth." Then she said to me those famous words that changed my life, "but have you tried praying?"

Did you try praying?

I was an arrogant Columbia intellectual, but I had enough humility to realize that you can't just dismiss prayer until you have honestly given it a chance. So I decided to try praying as an experiment.

I went to my dorm room on the ninth floor. It was in the evening. I knelt down by the bed and I thought, "Alright here is what I am going to do. I am going to say some words and then observe what happens." I made up a prayer, something like, "Okay God, I don't know if you exist, but if you do exist, maybe, show yourself?" I waited a few minutes and nothing happened, so I got up and thought, "Well that was interesting, I will try this again some other time," and that was it. But then something inside, the Holy Spirit, said to me - "That was not prayer."

So you realized that you were approaching prayer as a science experiment, not as a living relationship with another person. What happened next?

I thought, alright, here is what I am going to do, and this was a tremendous leap of faith, I decided that for a moment I would really be open to God. If He existed, I was going to be open, I was not going to kneel there observing and judging, I was honestly and sincerely going to be open.

I knelt down, and immediately I had this experience that totally blew me away. Words fail to capture it. I did not see a vision or anything like that, but I had this tremendous awareness of God and His majesty, His glory, His splendor. I was aware of God as a supreme being who was infinite and greater than anyone could possibly conceive of. I was aware of God as being supremely intelligent, utterly beyond me. I was nothing in comparison, except that He was revealing Himself to me. I felt there was an aspect of God that was reaching down to me and touching me. I was also aware of God as being all over the place, involved, all over creation, not identical with creation but intimately involved with every aspect of creation.

It was like nothing I had ever experienced before. I knew definitively in one revelatory moment, that God exists and that He is infinite and glorious and majestic and personal.

How did you come to Christianity?

I didn't want to put a name on what I had experienced or jump to conclusions, so I decided I would take my time figuring this out. I took a couple of different courses, one

was on the New Testament and the other was on Buddhism. I was very impressed by the reverence that the Buddhists had for the holy, but they do not acknowledge a personal God and that of course was the deal breaker, because I knew that God was personal. I realized that there was this claim made about Jesus of Nazareth, that He rose from the dead in His physical body. That is the claim that makes or breaks Christianity, so I thought, let me look at that.

Later that semester, it was around 6 pm in the evening and I was crossing Broadway at 114th Street to go to a hamburger place called Hungry Macs. I would typically get a hamburger and fries and go back to my dorm to watch Star Trek. So, I was crossing the street, thinking about why Our Lord could not have risen from the dead, I got to the island in the middle of Broadway, the light changed, and I had to wait. I was thinking, well there are all these reasons why Jesus could not have risen from the dead, but suppose He did...suppose He did...That was it.

At that moment I felt the presence of the Lord, I knew He had risen from the dead and that was it. I was stunned and filled with joy. It was that simple. I cannot explain it. The light changed and I went into Hungry Macs. I went up and just kind of mechanically ordered and somehow made my way back to the dorm. I sat there and ate, I think I might have even watched Star Trek, but I was thinking, "He really is alive, it's really true, the whole thing, it's really true." It was amazing.

Were you moved to respond to this truth?

I realized I had to do something. Obviously I had been given the gift of faith and I now knew the whole thing is true. Jesus is risen from the dead. God is three persons. God has given me this gift, now what do I do?

I had heard somewhere that you have to give your life to Christ and I knew that Nancy had done that; so I figured I should give my life to Christ. The next night, I knelt down by the side of the bed and gave my life to Christ. That was the decisive moment in my life.

When did you hear the Lord calling you to the priesthood?

It was a couple of years later. I attended Mass every Sunday at Corpus Christi Church for the most glorious liturgy around - Gregorian chant, magnificent vestments, incense so thick they had to open the windows, the bells - it was like heaven. You were lifted up and led into worship of God.

I began thinking about a life totally dedicated to the Lord and at the service of His people. I wanted to do something great for God with my life and be totally committed to Him. Finally I realized, It is not about me anymore. I was being called to serve the people, God's people. It just clicked and I knew that I was being called to the diocesan priesthood.

It was so interesting, the little kid in me who used to play Mass was suddenly jumping up and down for joy because the adult in me had said 'yes.' It was just amazing. Talk about being integrated. I was finally Bill Elder. Myself. The person God created me to be. I have never regretted it. It only gets better and better.

faith fully alive in the Church

PERPETUAL PROFESSION OF VOWS
August 6, 2012

Top: Mother Agnes receives
Sr. Mary Louise Concepta's vows.

Bottom: Sister and Cardinal Dolan
embrace after her profession of vows.



Surrendering our lives that others may live

FIRST PROFESSION OF VOWS:

(left to right)

Sr. Cecilia Rose, SV

Sr. Faustina Maria Pia, SV

Sr. Virginia Joy, SV

Sr. Mary Louis Concepta, SV

Sr. Marianna Benedicta, SV

Sr. Avila Marie, SV

Mother Agnes Mary, SV

(Timothy Cardinal Dolan in the middle)





ROSEMARY'S *GIFT*

Enriching multitudes in her brief, but beautiful life.

Faith is the capacity to entrust myself totally to Someone capable of fulfilling the infinite longings of my heart; believing that evil, pain, and suffering in this world never have the last word because love is stronger than death. Living faith gives me the vision to see the deeper meaning of reality and the certitude that my life is only the prelude to an eternity of unimaginable joy.



Mary and David Vicinanza, friends of the Sisters of Life, provide a window into how living out faith in our daily lives gives us the ability to respond with love even amidst the sorrows of life, and to become a witness of hope to all those with whom we come in contact.

What was it like when you were pregnant with Rosemary?

I had nine boys before Rosemary and her pregnancy was somewhat different. I was not feeling her move as much and I was not as sick with her as I had been with the boys. Initially David and I thought the difference in the pregnancy might have just been the gender.

Can you tell us about your sonogram?

About halfway through, we could tell something was wrong. The technician was getting really tense, and she just kept going over and over Rosemary's heart. Then the doctor and the genetic counselor came in and told us they had found at least six things about her that were very alarming. She was diagnosed with Trisomy-18. Only about five percent of babies with Trisomy-18 make it to birth and then out of that only a very small percentage make it through the first year of life. It was a tremendous blow and very sobering. However, I remember having a deep sense that God was there and we were on the brink of something really important.

How did your experience of your pregnancy change once you knew Rosemary had Trisomy-18?

I had this realization that unless she was healed, most of her life would be in the womb. So every time I would feel her move, I would talk to her and I would tell her that I loved her. I was trying to get to know her. I wanted to pour as much love on her as I could; I used my pregnancy for that.

What was going through your mind at this time?

I spent the first month after the diagnosis preparing for Rosemary's death, arranging the funeral and all those things. Then my brother, Fr. Peter, said to me, "Mary, you have prepared for her death, now you need to prepare for her life." When he said that, there was a change in me; I thought, "Yeah, I need to prepare for her life." In order to do that, I had to pray for her to be healed because she did not have what it takes to survive in this world. I chose Mother Teresa as her patron. At the same time I knew I had to accept whatever God was going to do. So many people were praying for us and I felt like I needed every single little prayer - I was carried by everyone's prayers.

What was your hope for Rosemary's life?

I remember my doctor said, "What do you want? What do you hope for?" I said, "I just hope I can hold my baby alive in my arms." He said, "Okay, you know we are not going to do certain things because of her frailty. It would not be appropriate," but he said, "I want to give care that will give you 12 hours with her."

What happened when she was born?

We almost lost her in the first five minutes, and then the doctors rubbed her and gave her some oxygen and she was fine. They put her in my arms, oh she was beautiful, Rosemary, just this little doll. She was only 5 pounds 13 ounces, so petite. When the nurse put her in my arms and I was wheeled down the hall with this live baby in my arms everyone was so happy, it was like this triumphant thing.

Fr. Peter baptized her in the first seconds after her birth. When we got back in the room my sister Meg had made her a baptismal gown and we dressed her. All of my children were there. We were rejoicing in every little thing. The nurses had decorated the room for us and put a tablecloth on the table with some flowers. I felt so elated; we were all looking at this very frail little creature, and she was breathing on her own.

After Rosemary was alive a couple of hours, I stuck my finger in her mouth. She had a strong suck, and that was this whole other level of excitement. Where there is life there is hope. I thought, we are going to care for this baby in every way we can, the best we can, moment by moment.

How did the hospital staff respond?

My perception was that they tended to reflect the patients' attitude. They saw that we were not despondent and we were not crushed by the diagnosis. When Rosemary was born, I think they were relieved and happy that we were happy, they responded in kind. It became a good experience for them because even though this was a baby that everyone knew would probably not have a long life; they saw that the family was committed to the child, so the doctors and nurses became committed to the child. They were all very caring and concerned; it was such a positive thing.

I remember a night nurse came in and she was trying to be very unobtrusive and very quiet, but she knew I was kind of awake and before she left, she patted my shoulder and said, "Thank you for having your baby."

What was it like when you brought Rosemary home?

Rosemary lived 45 days and 42 of those were at home. She was pink and breathing, calm and peaceful, and so wonderful. We held her all the time. All the children loved to hold her and their friends would come over to hold her. My family and David's family were able to come during those six weeks to meet her. All those days were happy days. We were trying to fit in a lifetime.

Every day I would wake up and think, "Okay it's not today, she is still here." We were living moment to moment and day to

day. I had an image of Jesus the Divine Mercy right across from my bed and I just kept saying, "Jesus, I trust in you." I was praying with every breath. Mother Teresa has a prayer, "I take what you give, and I give what you take." I would repeat that prayer over and over. God was preparing me for the moment when I would have to give Rosemary back to Him.

Can you tell us about the day Rosemary went home to God?

It was the first Sunday of Advent and Rosemary just did not seem right. The doctor came to our house in the evening and he took the baby and started listening to her. Then he handed her back to me and very quietly and calmly said, "The valve is closing. This is the day, remember you keep asking me, 'Is this the day?' Well this is the day." I hugged Rosemary and prayed that prayer again, "Lord I take what you give and I give what you take." We brought her into the family room and explained to the boys what was happening.

What was your grieving process like?

As soon as Rosemary died I experienced tremendous grief, desolation. We had poured out our love; the more you love the more it hurts. I was so attached. It was like a broken heart, it hurt physically.

The separation was so clear, she is not here. Heaven never felt so far away. Then gradually over time, like on a spectrum, my grief began to change. There was always the knowledge that she was in heaven but it was just taking up this little tiny bit of my consciousness, the rest was all grief and the memories were so, so painful, but over time the line moved and the idea that Rosemary was in heaven gained ground, pushing out the grief more and more, very gradually. You know it intellectually but it dawns in your emotions slowly.

How did your relationship with Rosemary change after her death?

When she was alive and here with me I was caring for her with everything that I could. I slowly transitioned from this little person that I would care for to this person that I was developing another relationship with. I would talk to her. The relationship gradually changed from, I can't pray to her, she's just my little baby, to - "Okay Rosemary there are some big issues that you need to know about, you are a big girl now and I have some jobs for you."

We talk to her a lot and we ask her intercession for all kinds of things. It is an incredible gift to have a child in heaven. The days we had with her were beautiful and the loss was devastating but you come back. You are not so afraid of pain and sorrow because you know you will survive. It is so devastating and you think it is going to be like that forever, but it lifts.

I remember three months after Rosemary died, David and I went away. He had a business trip in Arizona, so I was alone for the first time, walking on a desert path feeling her loss so greatly and then it came to me, of all my children, she is with me. They are

all back in New Hampshire, but Rosemary is actually with me now. She can be with me because she is in heaven.

What was your prayer life like during this time?

At first, all I could do was repeat to myself, "I know she is in heaven, I know God is good." I would feel so upset and sad but I knew no matter how I felt, there are certain things that are true, "God is good, and He loves me." I would just keep saying it. "I know God loves me, God loves me." But I could not make sense of it. Why did He give me a daughter and then take her away? I kept repeating that prayer, "I take what you give and I give what you take." I would not necessarily feel like I meant it, but I knew deep down I did. I couldn't summon up the warm fuzzy feeling to go with it. It was just the will.

When did you first really feel that God had answered your prayers?

Over time I was able to think about Rosemary's life and how I prayed so much for her healing and I realized, God answered my prayer. My daughter is whole. My daughter is healed. She is a completely well person. She is the person she was meant to be. I would imagine what it was like when she went to heaven because it was the opening of her consciousness. With her Trisonmy-18 she was very retarded, so the first awakening of her intellect was when she died and went to heaven.

I have a friend who is a Carmelite nun and she said something to me after Rosemary died that was so incredibly comforting, she said, "Mary, you prepared Rosemary for heaven, you did your job as a mother, because all she

knew here on earth was love and when she got to heaven, it would have felt very familiar to her because love is the language they speak there." And I remember thinking, Oh thank you, because there is the whole human, earthbound way of looking at things and then there is the light that faith provides to see the same reality in a different way. Love is eternal.

I would picture all the people who prayed for her. She was this little tiny person, seemingly insignificant in the whole scheme of things, but she is connected to a whole lot of people who prayed for her and those bonds of love are still there. I pray every day for those people and I ask Rosemary to intercede for them and ask our Lord to bless them, because she knows who they are now.

From your experience, what did you learn about the connection between sorrow and joy?

I remember my mother explaining to me how the joys and sorrows of life come together. They are like two vines and they grow together, intertwined. If you try to cut out the sorrow, you will also cut out the joy. After Rosemary died I really understood this. The fact of her existence and her life keeps manifesting itself and as time goes by we realize what a gift she is to our family. Rosemary is our treasure in heaven.



Rosemary with her brothers

FINDING GOD *in* Okinawa

Excerpts from a conference given to the Sisters by John Cardinal O'Connor



Many years ago, as a priest,

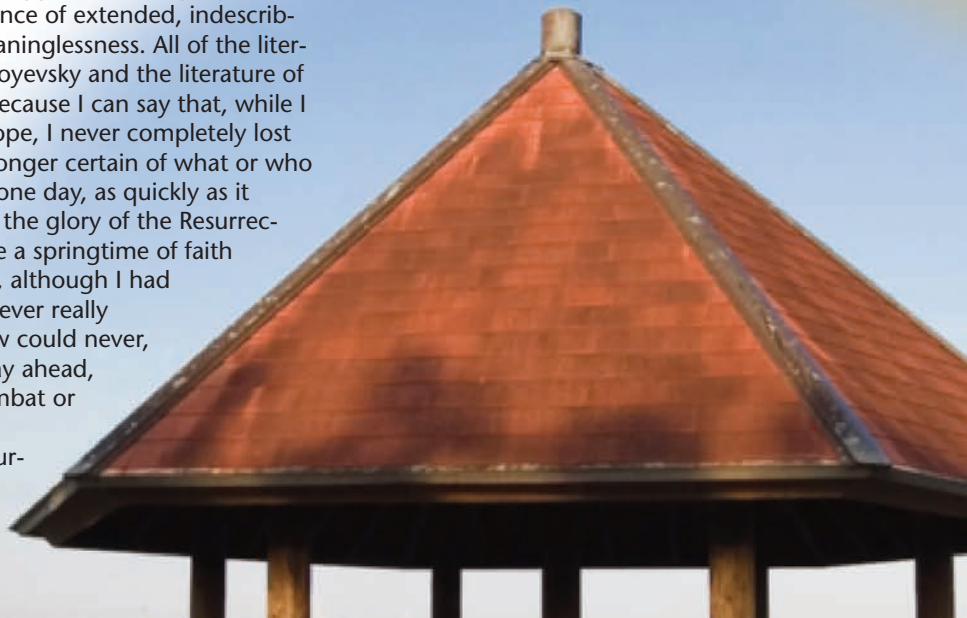
I felt that I had lost my faith. I had certainly seemed to lose all hope. I was in Okinawa, many thousands of miles from home. Okinawa has one shore facing the Pacific Ocean, and one shore facing the South China Sea. It was a totally alien culture. I had a tin Quonset hut as a chapel. I was the priest, the only priest, for thousands of men without families, without the ones they loved, torn by a thousand temptations articulated by the presence of nearby villages which seemed to exist solely to meet the lusts and the desires of the men without families. I would offer my Mass each day. I would hear confessions, I would

preach. I would work, if anything, harder than usual. Then, the long night would come. I felt total emptiness, of Christ on the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" I would go to my little tin hut chapel and there I would kneel in the darkness before the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle, in the glow of the little red tabernacle lamp. There, I would pray to what it was very difficult for me not to believe was but an empty tabernacle.

The nights were long. Night after night I would spend before that tabernacle, begging, pleading to One who had suddenly become the unknown God, wondering if it would ever end, preparing at the time to go into combat, knowing that the possibility of being killed was very high, and wondering if it would make any difference to myself or to anybody else, if it wouldn't be the best thing that could possibly happen- to die trying to do my job, trying to help others. It was an experience of extended, indescribable, terrifying desolation, of emptiness, of meaninglessness. All of the literature of alienation I lived, the literature of Dostoyevsky and the literature of Camus. Every night I went to that tabernacle because I can say that, while I had no sense of faith, and surely no sense of hope, I never completely lost the love of the Eucharist, even when I was no longer certain of what or who or whether the Eucharist was or is... And then one day, as quickly as it came, the darkness and the desolation left and the glory of the Resurrection filled the totality of my being. With it came a springtime of faith and awe, the beauty of springtime, a faith that, although I had been a priest many years by that point, I had never really known before. With it, came a hope that I knew could never, never desert me and that, whatever darkness lay ahead, no matter what would be the vicissitude of combat or living in a hole in the ground, in the mud, surrounded by violence, and no matter what if I survive would face me for the rest of my life as a priest. I knew, I didn't presume, I knew that

I would never waiver in faith or in hope again. That was more than thirty years ago and there has never been a moment of it since. Love took over : the love of the Eucharistic Christ.

He is the perfect love and He sees His own reflection in us. He loves us not simply because of our weak and foolish selves, but because of the reflection of Himself within us because He is love... There may be some who find it difficult to believe in the Eucharistic presence of Christ. Don't try to believe. Just let yourself love and be loved by the Eucharistic Christ. When you receive Him in Holy Communion don't ponder theological questions. Say, "This is my love. I have received my love; my love has received me." ...Without love, there can be no joy. One could truly define the absence of joy as an absence of love, a failure to love. I felt no joy in Okinawa, and I felt no faith and felt no hope because I had suppressed love. The Love remained, the Love saved, the Love purified, but I had to let it become active again within me. I had to let it flood through me. I had to remember that the Eucharistic Christ is not simply the presence of Christ, but the presence of Christ who is love. And oh how I prayed through Mary, how I prayed through Mary, Mary, the womb of the Eucharistic Christ; Mary, the womb of love!



The mystery of Christmas reminds us of the gift that comes to us every day, that of a God who dwells among us and seeks to be born into every experience of our lives – past, present, and future. In the same way the infant Christ brought life and light to the cold manger of Bethlehem through his Divine humility, so too He waits for our permission to bring His transforming presence into the dark manger's of our hearts and souls.



The following is the testimony of a woman we met through our Hope and Healing Mission (an outreach of support and accompaniment for those seeking healing after abortion), and how her faith drew her past fear, and into a life-changing encounter with Emmanuel, the God who is truly with us, in and through all things.



STEPPING OUT IN FAITH / letting go of fear

He came for me.

Healing at Christmas from a past abortion

“My journey towards seeking, receiving, and accepting God’s forgiveness began during one Christmas season, when I least expected it. I won’t start from the beginning because I find that the many reasons and factors that lead up to having an abortion are so similar, as if our stories start from an interwoven place that looks much like a quilt sewn from fear, isolation, social pressure, presumption, misguidance, and when sewn together, we can all identify with it. I will start from the end, which happens to also be the beginning of my journey in seeking God’s forgiveness and peace.

For 26 years, I lived a life in which I carried a great burden in my heart. A life in which I could not find peace or satisfaction, no matter how I tried to occupy myself. I lived in a place in my mind that I

thought protected me from having to face a terrifying truth - that I committed a great sin against God and myself. The irony of it was that in reality, I had to face the truth to RECEIVE the truth, that our Lord Jesus Christ in all His mercy forgives us - even our greatest sins – when we seek His forgiveness. For about five years I prayed and hoped to somehow find a path towards repentance, but I really could not see sharing my dark secret with anyone and therefore could not see any such path existing.

After Mass one Sunday, there was an announcement about an Advent tree. Members of the parish were asked to take a tag in order to give a gift to a local family in need. I picked a couple of tags and glanced at the date when I needed to bring them to church. I bought the gifts, wrapped them, placed the tags on them and placed them aside. After a few days, I brought them to church and was told that they had already delivered all of the gifts.

I asked if I could have the address, so I could deliver my gifts in person, but the woman replied, "It's a nice thought, but I think it's best to wait and try again next year," and told me that the group that organized it was the Sisters of Life. Thinking that I still had a chance, I went home and immediately looked them up online and began reading about all the different ways in which they served the community. Then I saw this: Hope and Healing after Abortion. Clicking on that link changed my life.

It happened that a day retreat was scheduled near that time, but one of the first steps towards registering was a phone call...yikes! That meant that I had to actually TALK to someone about my dark secret! How could I possibly tell someone about what I had done? It was terrifying and it took all the courage that God granted me to make that phone call.

Once I arrived at the retreat I was greeted with such warmth and tenderness. I felt like it was a place where there was no judgment, only love. It was emotional, spiritual, frightening, and comforting. It was the first time I had shared my secret with others who I didn't know, but because we all shared our stories and pain, it felt so safe and I actually felt the Holy Spirit present - around, within, and through us. That was the beginning of my healing journey with the Lord, and it continues today.

Having had an abortion is a regret that will never fade away for me, but with God's great mercy and love, and the angels that He places in my life, I am able to live my life not in the regret, but in the beauty that is best described in Luke 7:47 when Jesus forgives the woman of many sins - I love much because I have been forgiven much.



"During this Year of Faith we will need to keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ,... in him, all the anguish and all the longing of the human heart finds fulfillment. The joy of love, the answer to the drama of suffering and pain, the power of forgiveness...and the victory of life over the emptiness of death: all this finds fulfillment in the mystery of his Incarnation, in his becoming man, in his sharing our human weakness so as to transform it by the power of his resurrection." -Pope Benedict XVI

MY LITTLE SOPHIA

"Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. It makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness."

Pope Benedict XVI

Opening a door to so much more *By Jazmin*

Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Jazmin, one of our courageous guests at Sacred Heart of Jesus Convent, tells the story of hearing this invitation, and giving the Lord permission to open that door for her and her daughter Sophia.

When I found out I was pregnant last year, my friends told me, "It's not a good time for you." They said that I didn't need the stress right now. They saw a baby as something you purchase at the store when you want one.

Being pregnant is like having a heartbeat in your mind. Your thoughts beat constantly. What will today be like? Am I able to do this alone? Can I continue on this path? Will I find the emotional support? All of these concerns absorb you, day after day. It seemed like all of the doors that were once open to me started closing. But I decided to just keep walking. I wanted the life within me to grow. I knew there must be another direction I could take. I had a dream, and now I had this little one too.

As a child, I was never baptized. My parents were not Catholic, and were absent to me. They were never home, so I made friends with the neighbor children, and their home became a home for me. When I would go to Mass on Sundays with the girl who lived next door, I would feel so much peace, like it was where I belonged.

Because I felt alone in my pregnancy, I was scared, so I decided to go to church and to sit with God until He told me what to do. All my life, God had placed people near me who were Catholic and practicing their faith. I didn't know much, but somehow I knew that you could always go to the Catholic Church. I knew the door would always be wide open and I could be in silence. In my mind, the Church was a place where no one would judge me. No one would ask me why I had come, or tell me that I shouldn't be there. I sensed God was saying to me, "You are a child and you got lost on the road. I want you to come to Me."

So I started to go to the church every day, to the very back pew. After two weeks of this, I saw a priest there and went over to meet him. He said, "I'm sorry I'm in a hurry, but you can come with me." So I went, and as we walked he asked,

"Have you been baptized?" I told him, "No." Then he said, "We're going to the rectory!" There, he introduced me to a woman named Nicole. When she found out I was not baptized she asked, "Do you want God to be able to enter in?" I did. So she invited me to consider RCIA classes at the parish and I started going.

After a few Sundays, she said, "Have you ever heard of the Sisters of Life? It would be good for you to meet them." She gave me the website. I was afraid to call because I was so filled with suffering. I looked online and read the testimony of a girl the Sisters had helped. She said, "My whole world was falling apart." Wow - someone I didn't know, somewhere out there, experienced what I'm going through.

Then I asked myself, "Why not?" So I called and left my name and number. A Sister called me back, and left a message saying that she was happy to hear from me! I decided I wanted to meet her.

When they opened the door to me, I almost had a heart attack! I didn't realize she was a real Sister in a habit! She said, "Let's talk," and I said, "I don't want to talk." So we just had tea together. It was nice. I saw their little chapel and was so attracted to it. "Can I go in

there?" Once I sat down, I felt like a light getting plugged in! By the end of our time together Sister said, "We are here for you— your friends to walk with you. We have people to help you too."

I realized, this is real. "Lord, I knew you were going to help me, but I didn't know how big!" When I was thinking about living with the Sisters at Sacred Heart Convent, I asked a Sister, "What is it like there?" Her eyes brightened, and she said, "It is a beautiful home." HOME! Not a place, or somewhere you pass by, but a home.

I had always wanted to live with people who would ask how I was feeling, how my day went, to sit down with me. I always wanted to have a home. So I moved home to Sacred Heart! I thought to myself, "Here I am, pregnant and lost, and these Sisters don't care where I've come from or what I've done." I was welcomed, "You can eat where we eat and walk where we walk!" They allowed me to go into their chapel, where they pray to God for me! I know it is there they receive the courage to deal with so many things. Throughout my pregnancy, I would sometimes pray with the Sisters, or join them for Mass.



I asked my priest to be baptized before my delivery, because I was high risk. I said, "Lord, I am giving everything to you for this child. My soul, my body, my blood. I am giving you whatever you ask from me. I am committing to you." I knew: This is a new beginning. A new Jazmin.

As I was getting baptized, I felt the old me dying. Not because I was bad; but because I never had the faith. I felt so strongly that this was the moment for me to be better. I am dying to who I was, and what I did. I am being forgiven of everything I have ever done in my life. I felt so much joy. I was being renewed, and born again. If I hadn't been pregnant, I truly think I would have died for joy! At the same time I was carrying my child, God was allowing me to become His child. When you are baptized, you become His. It was beautiful.

At the Easter Vigil, when I received my First Holy Communion and was Confirmed, my vision for life changed and my future was created. I realized - I am in full communion with God. I looked around, at the people in the church, and knew they were my family. It doesn't matter where I go to Mass, or who the priest is. The Catholic Church is God's home, and the only home I've ever known. It is where the door is always open and I am one of His children.

When I first saw my baby, Sophia, I held her. She was so tiny; so beautiful. My whole world. I was able to give her what I received...on June 3rd, the Feast of the Blessed Trinity, Sophia was baptized at St. Patrick's Cathedral, and became a child of God. He opened the door for me to complete the journey.

Everyone is searching. Everyone is thirsting for faith. Even when you say nothing to Him, when you can't hear anything, even if you don't know how to pray, God won't tell you to go! He waits for you. He wants your faith to grow.

I'm not perfect now. I get hurt like everyone else. But I am trying at every single moment to make things better. I am doing everything I can to follow this glory, and my deepest desires. I always wanted to be a writer. And now, by telling my story, that dream has also come true.



New Postulants!

"Faith commits every one of us to become a living sign of the presence of the Risen Lord in the world. What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end." Pope Benedict XVI

Naomi Collins

Age: 26

From: Lemerick, Ireland

Education:

Univ. of Dublin Trinity College,
B. S. in Occupational Therapy

Fun Fact:

*I'm the 11th of 13 children—
only two of whom are boys.*

**Name something that has
helped to deepen your faith:**

*Mary, our Mother, takes
me by the hand and leads
me to her Son Jesus,
shows me His love for me
and teaches me how to respond.*

Kelly McNamee

Age: 23

From: Berwyn, PA

Education:

U.S. Naval Academy/
Villanova University,
Electrical Engineering

Fun Fact: *I'm an only child*

**Name something that has
helped to deepen your faith:**

*Getting to know the saints and
especially the early martyrs*

Virginia Rose Osella

Age: 23

From: Lexington, VA

Education:

University of Mary Washington,
English and Secondary Education

Fun Fact: *Graduated from
Guardian Angel Regional Catholic
School in a class of eight seniors*

**Name something that has
helped to deepen your faith:**

*Sharing my faith with a great group
of friends in college made it fun
to be Catholic. Our chaplain
also helped us commit to
prayer and recognize its power.*



Laura Rodrian

Age: 28

From: Grafton, Wisconsin

Education: Purdue University,
B.S., computer graphics,
M.S., Information in Human
Computer Interaction.

Fun Fact:

*I've lived in seven different states
in the last eight years.*

**Name something that has
helped to deepen your faith:**

*The unfailing love and nurturing
guidance of our Blessed Mother,
Mary, and the companionship of
friends who, seeing Christ in the
everyday, remind me that it really
is possible to live as Jesus did.*

Larissa Zantua

Age: 31

From: Toronto, Canada

Education: Ryerson University,
B.A. in Interior Design

Fun Fact:

I'm a self taught tap dancer

**Name something that has
helped to deepen your faith:**

*Meditating on the Passion of
our Lord has helped me to
penetrate more deeply into the
infinite love and mercy of Christ.*

Jeanine Den Tindt

Age: 32

From: Toronto, Canada

Education: Wilfrid Laurier Univ.,
Business and communication

Fun Fact: *Through the generosity
of my parents and great mentors,
I was able to live in London,
England for five years.*

**Name something that has
helped to deepen your faith:**

*Returning to the Sacrament of
Reconciliation and receiving the
grace and freedom from this
liberating Sacrament opened
my eyes and heart to the joy
and freedom of life.*

Sisters of Life

Annunciation
38 Montebello Road
Suffern, NY 10901

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In gratitude for your friendship and support, a novena of Masses
will be offered for you and your family this Christmas. A blessed Christmas to you!

SV Directory

Annunciation

(Motherhouse: Generalate and Novitiate)
38 Montebello Road
Montebello, NY 10901
Main number: 845/357-3547
Main Fax: 845/357-5040
Novitiate: 845/357.0258
Novitiate Fax: 845/357-5065

St. Frances de Chantal Convent

(Postulant House, Vocations)
198 Hollywood Avenue
Bronx, NY 10465
718/863-2264 Fax: 718/792-9645
Co-workers of Life call: 347/843-8900

Villa Maria Guadalupe

(Retreat House)
159 Sky Meadow Drive
Stamford, CT 06903
203/329-1492 Fax: 203/329-1495

Sacred Heart of Jesus Convent

(Holy Respite)
450 West 51st Street
New York, NY 10019
212/397-1396 Fax: 212/397-1397

New York Visitation Mission

to Pregnant Women
257 East 71st Street
New York, NY 10021
Pregnancy help call:
212/737-0221 toll free: 877/777-1277

Toronto Visitation Mission

to Pregnant Women
St. Catherine of Siena
1099 Danforth Avenue
Toronto, ON M4J 1M5 Canada
Pregnancy help call:
416/463-2722
Fax: (416) 463-1687

St. Joseph's Convent

172 Leslie Street
Toronto, ON M4M 3C7

Hope and Healing After Abortion

toll free: 866/575-0075
hopeandhealing@sistersoflife.org

Website: www.sistersoflife.org