



The Dazzling Value of

ONE SOUL

A PUBLICATION OF THE SISTERS OF LIFE / WINTER 2017 ISSUE

YOU, IN ALL YOUR YOU-NESS, REVEAL A PARTICULAR FEATURE OF THE FACE OF GOD.

One of our Sisters was recently present at a delivery, and she had the great joy of being the first to hold the new little wonder in her arms. As she gazed at the face of the infant, wrapped in receiving blankets, she realized with a jolt and with breathless wonder: God, too, had baby eyelashes.

Dear Friends,

Every Christmas we go back to the basics: God made Himself like me. God became a baby. Jesus – the Word-made-flesh – gurgled, hiccupped, and cooed. He learned how to walk and run, sing and dance. He experienced pain, sickness, and sorrow. His profound taking-on of our humanity speaks to the tremendous worth of every human person, each created in His Image and redeemed by His Blood. It changes the way I see every person.

We all long to be seen and understood. In this world of a thousand photos, we can ask ourselves: Do we really see each other? Do we experience ourselves as seen, known, and loved? A thousand photos and a thousand-thousand words those photos speak do not contain the reality of my being. Only the Word Himself, and the truth of myself as an image of the Word, contain who I am. “In reality, it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear.” (*Gaudium et Spes* 22)

Every encounter with a human person is an encounter with the Infinite God. We are icons of Jesus Christ, unique and unrepeatable reflections of His glory. An icon is not simply a picture or a painting; it is a presence. You, in all your “you-ness” – your smile, face, shape, color, your mannerisms and preferences, your desires, hopes, and dreams – reveal a particular feature of the Face of God. He has made each of us in His Image and willed us for our own sake, not for what we can do or achieve. Our worth lies in this, in the Truth that we are uniquely lovable, loved, and made to love. Our dignity lies in the fact that each of us is called to communion with God. In our encounter with the living Lord we come to see and know ourselves, all of ourselves – that which is

beautiful and true, and that which is marred – and see in it all: I am loved.

Our founder, Cardinal O’Connor, once said:

“If there are millions and billions of [persons who in the same way] reflect the Divine Image, then the loss of any one, or a thousand, or hundreds of thousands would be as the loss of a falling star. But each one is an unrepeatable act of God; each one brought into being for a specific purpose, a purpose that will not be carried out by anyone else. This makes every human being sacred, very special. I believe this passionately.”

At Christmas, as we stand before the crèche and contemplate, yes, even the eyelashes of the Baby Jesus, we realize that God made Himself like us so that we can be like Him and have the joy of finding Him in every person we encounter.

With prayers for a blessed, happy Christmas from all the Sisters of Life,

Mother Agnes Mary, SV
Mother Agnes Mary, SV

THE DAZZLING Value of One Soul

By John Cardinal O’Connor
(Reprinted from *On Being Catholic*)

We probably do very few things in life for one, single reason. I’m sure a number of factors motivated me to become a priest. But I’m absolutely certain that if somewhere along the line I had not become convinced of the blinding value of the human soul, no other motive or collection of motives would have been enough. As many of my age, boys and girls, we looked at pictures, read magazines, saw occasional simple movies (they were much less common then, and certainly simple) about “the missions.” We learned of the Maryknoll sisters and priests through books like *When the Sorghum Was High*, of Columban brothers and priests through earlier counterparts of *The Red Lacquered Gate*, of the Holy Ghost Fathers through pictures of snow-capped Kilimanjaro.

China became a dream we were driven to live, Africa a land of risks we had to take. We would do what all missionaries did: We would open medical clinics, cleanse the sores of lepers, feed the hungry, teach the illiterate, fight the lions of ignorance, slay the dragons of superstition. A great deal of it was romantic and sentimental, much of it unrealistic, as I was to learn years later in visiting many of the lands and peoples I had known only from what were then vast distances. But through it all ran one never-changing motif: We would “save souls.” However naïve we may have been about the real worlds of Shanghai and Nairobi, about the reason for going to such places and living out our lives among “our people,” far, far from home and loved ones, about this reason we never doubted. We would become sisters, brothers, priests and save souls.

And what was that all about? That was all about having been taught and believing that Christ

HE CAME FOR YOU



would have come into this world and suffered and died for one soul, had there been but one in the world. Such was the value of a human soul, we were taught. Such was the cost, the price Jesus paid, not to save “the world,” but to save each one of us individually, so precious is each one of us to Him. And this is what we had to tell the peoples of Timbuktu and Mandalay and the Fiji Islands. And more than telling them, we had to love them in the same way and live and die for them, to help them save their souls.

Were we uncharitable? Were many of them better “Christians” than we were, even if they hadn’t heard of Christ? Were their real needs radically different from those we dreamed of fulfilling? How do you calculate these things a half-century later? Let whatever was real, whatever fantasy of a world long ago, the world of my boyhood missionary dreams, be sorted out by others. This I believe: Neither the value nor the cost of a human soul has changed. If I did not believe that passionately, I would see absolutely no point in being Archbishop of New York, no sense in being a priest at all.

The Archbishop of New York, as any sister, brother, priest, deacon, any layperson, married or single, has grave obligations to the poor, the hungry, the homeless, to all in need. That’s of the essence of our religion. It drenches the Gospels. I am keenly aware that the unusual visibility and the extraordinary status given the Archbishop of New York require that, in addition, I concern myself sincerely with an almost endless number of “civic” problems, the general needs of the community, inside and outside our faith, the drug and alcohol problems, the prison problems, the AIDS problems, the housing problems, the racial problems, and the countless more. I accept such opportunities as a great privilege. But in my heart of hearts, critical as are all of these needs, and grave as my obligations to help meet them are, for me there is an above and beyond and beneath, and that is my obligation and high, high privilege to try and help people save their souls. That’s quite simply why I am a priest.

When I ask people to come home at Christmas, at Easter, or whenever, I am asking them to give up whatever it may be, however precious in their lives, that is keeping them from intimate union with our Divine Lord, and hence, risking their eternal salvation. I want those who have drifted to recover their mooring, those who have slipped and fallen to relearn the mercy of the Christ who came to earth to pick up the pieces of broken lives. I want everyone who will find peace only by returning to Mass and Church teaching to embrace it once again. But I want all this and more ultimately for one reason that transcends all others: that Christ died to pay for our salvation, that Christ suffered and died because of the dazzling value of each individual soul. Had only you been alive in all this world, He would have come and suffered and died for you. 🌱

OUR NEW POSTULANTS

We asked each postulant, “What drew you to the Sisters of Life?” Here are their responses:

(Top row, from left to right)

Annemarie: Lake Grove, New York

Religious life was never part of the plan for me! Growing up, I always desired to be a bride and a mother, so I never truly considered it because I thought it would mean the renunciation of my desires. In July 2016 a friend invited me to attend a Young Women’s Retreat led by the Sisters of Life, and I was shocked to find myself falling completely in love with the Lord and was ever more shocked when I felt a stirring in my heart to become His bride and a spiritual mother as a Sister of Life. My journey was totally unexpected, but I feel great joy and peace in Christ, the fulfillment of ALL desires.

Larysa: Avon, Connecticut

Working as a physical therapist, I had a sense of awe and reverence for the human body as created by God in His image. With each patient, I could reflect on this unique person’s dignity which was not dependent on their age or physical and cognitive capabilities. It is humbling to be at this stage of discernment now, and my heart is drawn to the Eucharistic-centered contemplative dimension of the Sisters’ prayer life.

Mikayla: Grand Rapids, Michigan

There are three things that drew me to the Sisters of Life: their unhindered joy, the richness of their life, and above all, the way they love.

Marlena: Belleville, Ontario

In our noisy world, the beauty of true love and God’s plan for human life are often lost. After meeting the Sisters of Life and coming to know their charism, my heart was drawn to live it in a more total way in consecrated life; my very personal call to turn up the volume on love.



(Bottom row, from left to right)

Kayla: St. Paul, Minnesota

What drew me to the Sisters of Life was the call to be mothers to all and to love each person with the heart of Christ. I will never forget my first time meeting the Sisters and seeing how they love each person so uniquely, reflecting the unique and unrepeatable aspect of each soul created in the image and likeness of God. During my time in University, I quickly learned that the sins made against God were made because people don’t know the infinite love and mercy of Jesus. I wanted to spend the rest of my life sharing that love with all those I came in contact with.

Melissa: Lewisville, Texas

Through every encounter with a Sister of Life, I rediscovered my identity as loved and willed by God in a way that left an imprint of the Resurrection on my heart. It was kind of a magnetic love that drew me into intimacy with the Lord. How the Sisters of Life embodied spiritual sensitivity, untiring generosity, and maternity deeply restored my understanding of the human person and moved me to desire the same for

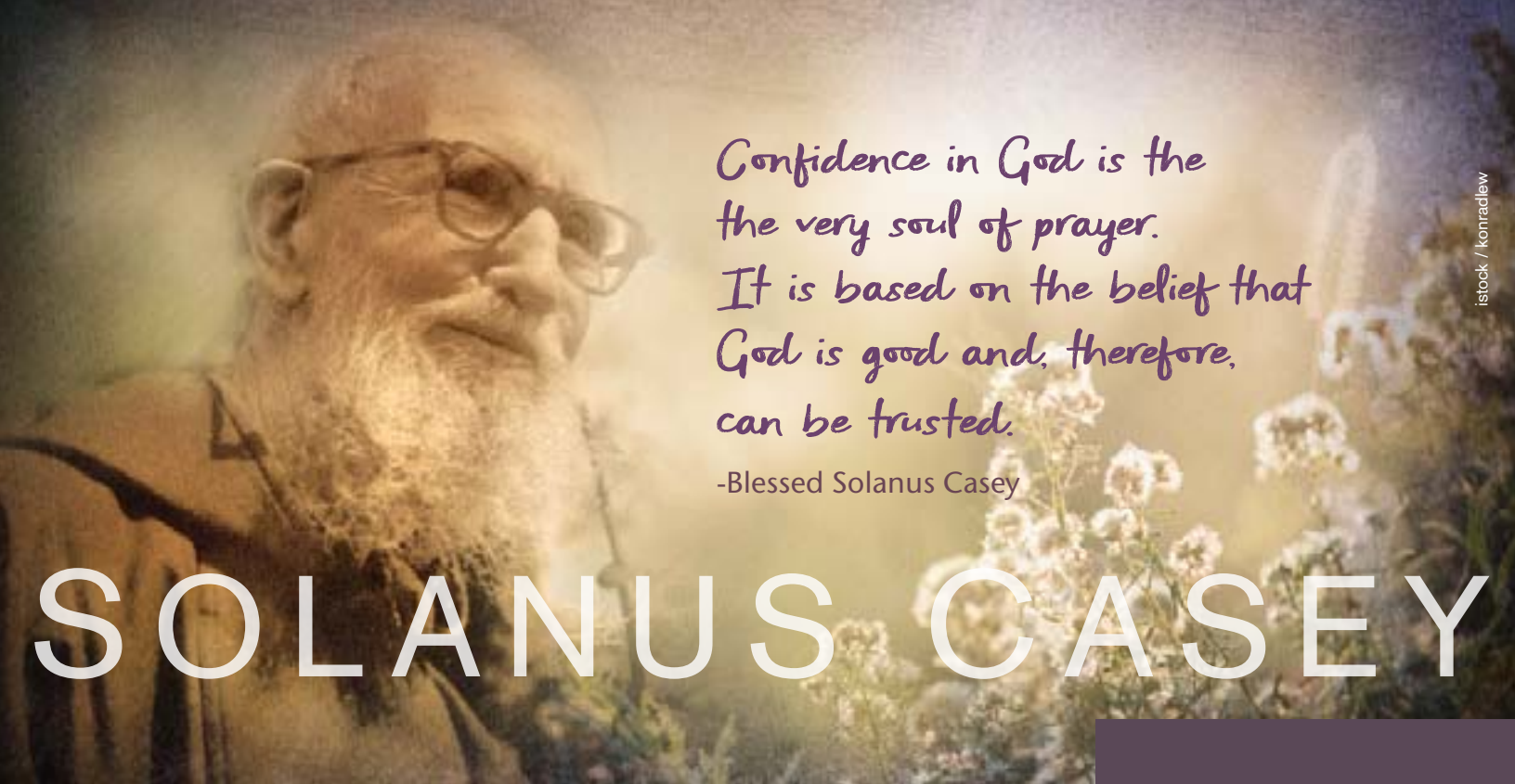
every soul I encountered. I began to recognize the Charism of Life burning within me, and, through it, a deeper call to respond to the challenges and questions of our time in a way that enriches each soul to become fully alive in the beauty and truth of the Gospel.

Maura: St. Louis, Missouri

Several years ago, I heard an unexpected call to religious life while in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. I tried “Googling” different religious orders, to no avail, and it wasn’t until I told God about the Charism of Life on my heart that He revealed to me the Sisters of Life. When I met the Sisters, I was immediately drawn to their gift of spiritual motherhood and their beautifully radiant joy that can only come from knowing Jesus.

Molly: St. Louis, Missouri

A wise friend once told me, “God does not call us Christians to the semi-abundant life.” So, when I met the Sisters of Life, I couldn’t help but be drawn to their happiness that seemed to overflow into everything they did. They were so themselves! It was almost as if they were in love with Life Himself.



istock / konradlew

*Confidence in God is the
the very soul of prayer.
It is based on the belief that
God is good and, therefore,
can be trusted.*

-Blessed Solanus Casey

SOLANUS CASEY

You would wait in line to see him – “the holy priest,” the blue-eyed, thin-faced, squeaky-voiced Franciscan doorkeeper, who made you feel like you were the only person in the world. Every day, for almost forty years, from New York to Detroit, people would flock to this wise, gentle porter (monastic term for door keeper), who would not only take time to quietly sit, listen, and pray with every person, but who actually worked real, daily miracles. A single prayer from this man resulted in extraordinary things – like healings from cancer, gangrene, depression, blindness, memory loss, and arthritis, the multiplication of food, and radical conversions.

With a fondness for baseball and playing the violin (albeit poorly), Solanus Casey was a simple man. Growing up in Wisconsin in the 1870s, he worked basic jobs – lumber jack, prison guard, and streetcar operator. He failed out of seminary but felt Jesus call him to join the Capuchin Franciscans. He so struggled with Latin and German that his superiors decided to ordain him a “simplex” priest, prohibiting him from hearing confessions or preaching formal sermons. Instead, he was given the very simple jobs of sacristan and porter.

But answering the monastery door was exactly what God had in mind for him. Gratefully embracing what seemed like failure and the ultimate humiliation for a priest, Fr. Solanus became so full of the the light and love of Jesus that he began to radiate.

Miracles started after Fr. Solanus began to enroll people in the Seraphic Mass Association. The whole thing was an ordinary affair. He would talk with you warmly, often bless you on the forehead, and, having a sense of what God would do, either said: “Don’t worry. Everything will be alright,” or strengthened you for what was to come. He left the rest to Jesus.

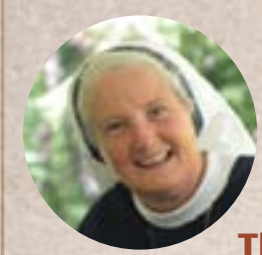
Fr. Solanus never attributed anything to himself, but he constantly exhorted everyone to trust in God. “Thank God ahead of time,” he would famously say, his eyes twinkling from behind his spectacles, his bald head framed by a wispy white beard.

Fr. Solanus’ simple trust in God transformed countless lives. During his lifetime, over 250,000 people came to him, and when he died on July 31, 1957, more than 20,000 mourners lined up to say one last goodbye. Even after his death, his intercession has garnered a flood of miracles, so much so that, on November 18, 2017, he was raised to the altar as Blessed Solanus Casey, one step closer to canonization. ▲

BLESSED SOLANUS CASEY The Miracle Worker

The friars’ soup kitchen ran out of bread one day, while there were still 300 hungry men waiting. Fr. Solanus said, “Just wait, and God will provide.” Right after praying an Our Father with the despairing men, a bakery truck arrived. When unloading the donations was completed, the delivery man was amazed to see that he had brought more bread than his truck could even hold. Fr. Solanus simply said, “See, God provides. Nobody will starve as long as you put your confidence in God.”

Fr. Solanus had a gift with animals. Once, he calmed a swarm of angry bees by playing an Irish tune to them on his harmonica. Another time, he approached a swarm of bees without gloves or netting, and he began speaking softly to them. Then he said, “Oh, they are swarming because there are two queens.” He reached his bare hand into the hive and drew out the second queen. “Poor little thing,” he said, as he tucked it into his sleeve.



My Mother’s Miracle

By Mother Agnes Mary, SV

That I am alive and able to tell this story, is thanks to Fr. Solanus Casey.

Here is how the tale begins: my father, Harold Donovan, was from an Irish farming community in Northeastern Pennsylvania, and my mother, Catherine McDermott, from the Rockaways of New York City. The McDermott family spent summers in the country in Pennsylvania where they had a cottage on a lake near my dad’s family farm. It was there that their lives first touched. As teens Mom and Dad were given by God a beautifully young and deeply felt love. But the joy of that love would soon be interrupted, for at the age of 19 my mother contracted tuberculosis while working as a college intern in the local hospital. With the onset of the illness, she disappeared from sight socially and from my father’s life.

Being sidelined as a young woman and contending with a grave disease focused my mother’s mind and heart on the great questions of life. With time to read and pray, she grew and deepened in her understanding of the spiritual life, and she came alive in her relationship with God – a relationship which would remain with her through life. TB is a cyclic disease with seasons of remission and periods when one suffers the disease intensely. But, by the time she was 28, the TB had invaded her second lung which signaled a terminal diagnosis. At that point her Aunt Genevieve, having heard that Fr. Solanus Casey, a priest with the gift of healing, was in the nearby Brooklyn parish of St. Michael’s, suggested to her mother that “...we take Catherine to see this holy priest.”

When I asked about the day she met Fr. Solanus in 1946, my mother laughed and said, “I looked wonderful!” Because of the illness, she had very rosy cheeks which set off her Irish porcelain skin, black hair, and hazel eyes, and it seems she felt a bit self-conscious asking for a miracle, when she could be mistaken to look the picture of health! Nonetheless, upon encountering Fr. Solanus, she told him about her illness and her desire that God heal her. She reported that Fr. Solanus, who sought always to bring those who came to him for help nearer to God and to living in the mysterious will of God, looked at her thoughtfully and asked, “Is this is too much for God to ask of you?” My mother, surprised by the question, finally responded, “No, I don’t think so.” Fr. Solanus said simply in conclusion, “Then we will pray.” Leaving the encounter, my mother would quickly realize that she was healed, and by October she had confirmation that she was well!

Years later Dad confessed that, knowing my mother was still alive (although he had not seen her in nearly 10 years), he could not bring himself to marry another. In the fall of 1946 his prayers were answered when Mom wrote inviting him to visit New York City over the Christmas holidays. He did, and they were married the next October and were blessed with a large family. In gratitude and with devotion, my father wore a little relic of Fr. Solanus pinned to his undershirt for the rest of his life! Throughout the more than 50 years of their marriage, my parents remained devoted to Fr. Solanus Casey, whose intercession before God made possible their lives together and vocation to marriage and family.

Heaven is so close. The saints, our true and undeserved friends, await our pleas and requests for help with the great and small details of our lives. ▲



My mother and father during their engagement.



“My name is Andy Peterson, and I work for God.”

We first met Andy when we began our mission of evangelization on college campuses in Colorado. His mother, Mrs. Peterson, is the secretary at the university parish. Upon our arrival, Andy welcomed us and gave us a tour of his family home. He began by saying, “I hope that you will be able to understand me, because I have Down syndrome.”

Photo credit: Amanda Pinterpe

A gracious and attentive host, Andy noticed me hard at work and asked if I needed anything. I replied, “Andy, will you say a prayer for me for this talk I am writing?” He responded, “Oh, I pray every day. I will pray for you.” I inquired, “You pray every day? You must be close to God.” He responded, “Oh, we are very close.” I was fascinated, so I pressed him, “Is He your best friend?” He replied, “No, we are more than friends, we are one. I’m in Him, and He is in me.”

I was stunned; I was completely amazed by his response and knew I was in the presence of Christ Himself. I took a couple steps backwards, aware that I was standing on Holy Ground. Once again I was moved by the wonder of God’s ways; it is often through those whom the world might least expect, that the splendor, beauty, and wisdom of God shines most brightly.

From our first meeting with Andy we knew we had a good friend and ally in our mission; he is one of our most faithful intercessors and prayer companions. We trust that Andy’s prayers have won many graces for us and our students. He often assures us of his prayers and once said, “God wants me to tell you that you always have my prayers.”

We asked Andy and his mother to share some of their reflections on life:

Can you tell us about yourself Andy?

One thing I know about God is that He wanted me, and He wants me to love. God has been my guide every day, and I love Him a lot. He is in my heart; He is my life and my strength.

How do you spend your time? Every Tuesday morning, I go to a nursing home. I help bring the people in their wheelchairs to the Mass. Every Sunday, I am the sacristan at Mass, and I love it. It’s an honor to help the priest. Friday afternoons, I work at a restaurant cleaning – last year I was employee of the month. I help people in times of need. When my neighbor calls me and needs help with recycling and carrying heavy boxes, I always help her. She is pretty old, and I think of her like family. Everything I do, I want to help people because God once told me that we are so lucky to have wonderful people in our lives.

Do you feel like you have a special mission? I know I do. God raised me to be a wonderful person and friend for other people. People ask me, “What is it like to live with God?” I say it feels very special.



Where do you get your strength? From God. Because I know how much people need my help, so I do it. I just use my heart and my muscles and help others.

What’s the best part of your day? God knows – I pray every night. Also, my dad and I read together every night. We read *The Hobbit*, *Lord of the Rings*, and right now we are reading about *Tarzan*.

How do you look at people when you meet them? When I meet someone I think they are one of us. I think how special they are to God. God loves all people. You know, God wants us to help other people – even strangers, the disabled, or someone who has Down syndrome. It’s up to all of us to help them.

I had a friend who passed away, and I miss him. You know, I pray for my friend every day. And God answers my prayers. I will see him again when I pass away. I want to live a very long time. I have to take care of all the people I love.

Can you tell us about your prayer? I ask God every day to help the Sisters of Life and other people around me. I pray with all my heart and my life. The one thing I like about God is that He uses me to help the people I know.

Mrs. Peterson: I really think Andy has super powers when it comes to prayers. God hears his prayers in a very special and maybe a little different way.

Andy: One time when my grandmother was living with us and she had a blood clot. My parents were not home and could not answer their phone. So I called my parents’ friend and asked him to go get them.

Mrs. Peterson: It was really an emergency, and Andy had to think and act very quickly. He probably saved her life.

Andy: After that, my mom said to me, “God is proud of you.”

Mrs. Peterson: Then he said, “You could say, I work for God.” That’s been his motto ever since. “I work for God.”

Andy, you have spoken at the local schools about people with disabilities. I have an extra chromosome and that chromosome belongs to God. It is from God. It’s between me and God.

How do you think of God? He is a Father to me just like my dad is. I told my mom yesterday, that He has showed me the true meaning of life. If it wasn’t for Him, we wouldn’t exist.



Do you feel like God is with you all the time? He is in my world. At Mass, I feel like He is part of us – like I am part of Him. I look at Him when He looks at me.

Was it a surprise when Andy was born with Down syndrome, Mrs. Peterson? Yes. Andy was the second of our five children, and I did not know that Andy had Down syndrome before he was born. I didn't know anyone with Down syndrome. But I thought, "Okay, we can handle this."

Andy: I was born at 2:30 p.m. on November 6th. That's my birthday.

Mrs. Peterson: He was the cutest baby, with red rosy cheeks and a big smile. Our oldest daughter, Jessie, was 2 years old when Andy was born. People would come over to meet him, and Jessie would open the door and say, "Come on in and meet my brother, Andy!" It was such beautiful, total, unconditional love. I thought, "I need to see him, to see this experience with the eyes and heart that Jessie had." And of course, it didn't take me long. He's been just a blessing.

With all your children you want them to be good and holy. And Andy is good and holy. Sometimes if I would be upset or angry with the kids, Andy would say to me, "Mom, you are not alone. You have to know you need faith, you need hope, you need love." And I am thinking, "He is teaching me! Where did he get that?"

Andy, do you have any advice for someone who might be suffering or lonely? Have courage, strength. They are not alone because they have God. Maybe they should try sometime to pray.

What would you say to others who don't know how to pray or believe that God loves them? I would say, "Fold your hands like this, and say something that's in your heart to God." If they just try – it doesn't hurt to try.

Mrs. Peterson: I will die one day, I will be long gone, and I want to be remembered as Andy's mom. Forget my name, just remember Andy. Because I know that so many people who are conceived with Down syndrome are not born. I just want to be remembered as his mom. Over the years, I just see him as pure blessing. He is pure blessing. It's like living with Jesus. 🌱

istock / Topp_Yimgirrm / bridgol

What makes you happy?

"As long as it makes you happy" is a popular phrase we hear today. But what really makes us happy? We all want to be happy. It's normal. But how do we get there? People have tried to figure out the secret to happiness for thousands of years, because what we believe will make us happy determines how we think, feel, and act. We've tried everything from money to success to food to fame. But when push comes to shove, the only thing that fills our infinite longing for happiness is perfect and ever-lasting Love, Goodness, Truth, Beauty, and Being – God.

So often, we live for the happiness that is generated by ego-boosting, experienced when we are considered more beautiful, popular, or powerful than others – like the fleeting happiness of self-ies, Snapchats, Tweets, and Facebook posts. But this happiness is illusory – over time it is replaced by feelings of isolation, loneliness, anxiety, and depression. We are made for something deeper; to settle for less than the happiness for which we are made will, in time, devastate us.

In his book, *Healing the Culture*, Fr. Robert Spitzer, S.J. offers a helpful guide in understanding the four levels of happiness. Figuring out which type of happiness drives our lives can help us obtain that eternal happiness for which we were made.

So, what makes you happy?



No matter what happens, I know Jesus loves me perfectly.



Level 4 Happiness: Ultimate Good

EXAMPLE: deciding to go on a walking pilgrimage to prepare for Easter. I'm cold, wet, tired, hungry, and yet filled with this crazy, wonderful joy, a joy that's inexplicable other than I know myself to be loved by Love Himself. It's the kind of happiness Jesus talked about in the beatitudes – "Blessed (or "happy") are the poor in spirit..."

- It's realizing that our need for perfect Love, Truth, Beauty, and Goodness is bigger than us. It's realizing that I have infinite desires and that I can only be satisfied by Someone beyond me. It's God-centered.
- It's asking God to give us what we cannot give ourselves—e.g., "Lord, I need you," "Lord I love you," "Thy will be done".
- It's when God responds by filling our emptiness – a real, true, forever happiness deeper than our emotions. And a peace that remains even in the midst of trials and sufferings because it's rooted in the unchanging God.
- *It actually allows us to live Level 3 happiness in its fullness, by making a total gift of ourselves in, through, with, and because of the Divine Love we've encountered.*

Level 3 Happiness: Good Beyond Self

EXAMPLE: serving soup at the local soup kitchen. It is truly life-changing to look someone in the eye, to see their goodness, to help them in their need, and to have them receive our gift. But the day will come when I find I can't rest in even these good people and this good work. I am restless for something more.

- It's about looking out for the good of other people and using our gifts to serve them. It's other-centered.
- It's a change of outlook – life is an adventure, and we're all teammates along the way.
- It's real, bon-a-fide, deep, long-term happiness. We're going to experience full hearts and fulfillment in love.
- But at the end of the day, it's still not enough. We're going to go into crisis when we expect another person to be the perfect and infinite love we ultimately desire.



We're in this together—reaching out to others. I only wish that you understood me completely.



Level 2 Happiness: Personal Achievement ("I have to create myself.")

EXAMPLE: to be employee of the month – forever. There's nothing like being chosen. But when the new guy gets the nomination, it just might shatter my personal universe.

- It's all about getting to the top, so I can feel good about myself. It's also me-centered.
- It's the game of compare and despair. We're always having to re-create ourselves to be better than others. Other people are threats to the perfect me.
- It's exhausting to always have to be the best, and it's a short-term experience of satisfaction, at most. We're going to feel inadequate, jealous, angry, anxious, depressed, and lonely when somebody else gets ahead.

Level 1 Happiness: Immediate Gratification

EXAMPLE: eating a whole box of donuts while sun-tanning on the beach. It's warm, delicious, and comfortable. But when the bellyache hits and the skin begins to peel, it's not so great anymore.

- It's about my maximum pleasure and minimum pain, now. It's me-centered.
- It's a quick fix. It's fast, wonderful, and totally not satisfying.
- It just doesn't cut it. We're going to feel bored, empty, and meaningless if we try to fill our infinite "happiness tank" with things like pastries and sun-bathing.



Photo credit: Amanda Pinterpe

"When I think back to my grandma, I can't help but get a big grin on my face! So many memories! In and through it all she was a woman of sturdy faith who had a tremendous capacity for love! She always had a sparkle in her eyes. My heart swells in gratitude at the impact her life has had on us all!"

- Sr. Fiat Marie

My Grandma's Gift

By Sr. Fiat Marie, SV

My grandmother suffered from Alzheimer's disease from the time I was 3 years old until her death while I was in college. Despite the fact that I have no memories of my grandmother without dementia, experiencing her love and having the chance to love her in return has been one of the most formative events of my life.

Our extended family is blessed in that most everyone lives relatively close by each other. Because of this, many of us were able to share in my grandma's care: and so too in the graces that flowed from it! Grandma would spend one or two days during the week with us, and often she would stay over on the weekends. We would share a room when she spent the night. I remember telling her how afraid I was of the dark. She instructed me to simply say the name of Jesus when I felt anxious, advice I follow to this day!

Since Grandma's illness lingered for so many years, she experienced all the different symptoms and stages of Alzheimer's. There were joys and sorrows, and the initial stages were difficult. We struggled and stumbled along the way as we tried to navigate and weather the storms of her fear, anxiety, and frustrations. I learned a lot during this time from watching the love of my mom and other family members. They were with her exactly where she was and didn't give in to the temptation to try to force her into being who they remembered her to be. We learned not to limit love to the narrow confines of what we imagined it to be and not to be too rigid in our expectations of others. I learned to see life as a gift.

My grandma definitely gave me the sense of humor I have today. She would get us into so many crazy and embarrassing situations! Once, we got a call from our neighbors who

lived half a mile down the dirt road at 5 a.m. "Your mom is here," they said, "and she has a pound of bologna in her purse!" Another time, we were at Mass, and the priest said, "Let us pray," and then paused. Grandma was particularly antsy that day and thought the priest was taking too long. So she yelled back, "Well then ... LET US!" All we could do was smile at the priest!



No matter what was going on with Grandma, she never lost the capacity to love and to be loved. The lasting image that I have of her is that she was a "ball of love"! Toward the end of her life, she lost the ability to really have a conversation. But we would just snuggle up to her on the couch, and she would smother us with kisses.

▼ Sr. Fiat Marie and her grandma

I remember being very struck at her funeral. I was looking around at all of my family, especially at my 18 cousins, and it was evident how missed Grandma was. I thought that if the world looked at this situation it might expect our family to feel the relief of a long burden of care that was finally lifted, yet that was so far from our experience. I realized then, that, if I would have been denied the ability to be with my grandma in all the ups and downs of this disease then I would have been denied also of one of the most meaningful experiences of love in my life.

Throughout all of her life my grandma prayed for the grace of final perseverance. I marvel at how even deep in the throes of dementia she still voiced this petition. I am certain God gave her the grace to be faithful to the end. God used her illness to prepare her heart for Him, and He used her life and love to transform mine. ▲

THE MYSTERY OF COMPASSION

Those who come close to people in need do so first of all in a generous desire to help them and bring them relief; they often feel like saviors and put themselves on a pedestal. But once in contact with them, once touching them, establishing a loving and trusting relationship with them, the mystery unveils itself.

At the heart of the insecurity of people in distress there is a presence of Jesus. And so they discover the sacrament of the poor and enter the mystery of compassion. People who are poor seem to break down the barriers of powerfulness, of wealth, of ability, and of pride; they pierce the armor the human heart builds to protect itself; they reveal Jesus Christ. They reveal to those who have come to "help" them their own poverty and vulnerability.

These people also show their "helpers" their capacity for love, the forces of love in their hearts. A poor person has a mysterious power: In his weakness he is able to open hardened hearts and reveal the sources of living water within them. It is the tiny hand of the fearless child which can slip through the bars of the prison of egoism. He is the one who can open the lock and set free. And God hides Himself in the child!

-Jean Vanier

(Reprinted with permission, Magnificat, Vol. 19, No. 8)



The power of Armando

istock / MiraPen / konradew

Armando is an amazing 8-year-old boy...

Armando cannot walk or talk and is very small for his age. He came to us from an orphanage where he had been abandoned. He no longer wanted to eat because he no longer wanted to live cast off from his mother. He was desperately thin and was dying from lack of food. After a while in our community where he found people who held him, loved him, and wanted him to live, he gradually began to eat again and to develop in a remarkable way. He still cannot walk or talk or eat by himself, his body is twisted and broken, and he has a severe mental disability, but when you pick him up, his eyes and his whole body quiver with joy and excitement and say: "I love you." He has a deep therapeutic influence on people. ...

What [many people] do not always know is that they have a well deep inside of them. If that well is tapped, springs of life and of tenderness flow forth. It has to be revealed to each person that these waters are there and that they can rise up from each one of us and flow over people, giving them life and a new hope.

There is a well deep inside each of us.

That is the power of Armando. In some mysterious way, in all his brokenness, he reveals to us our own brokenness, our difficulties in loving, our barriers and hardness of heart. If he is so broken and so hurt and yet is still such a source of life, then I too am allowed to look at my own brokenness and to trust that I too can give life to others. I do not have to pretend that I am better than others and that I have to win in all the competitions. It's O.K. to be myself, just as I am, in my uniqueness. That, of course, is a very healing and liberating experience. I am allowed to be myself with all my psychological and physical wounds, with all my limitations but with all my gifts too. And I can trust that I am loved just as I am, and that I too can love and grow. ▲

-Jean Vanier, Founder of L'Arche



FIRST PROFESSION OF VOWS / August 3, 2017 / Main celebrant, Bishop John Barres

Back row, left to right: Sr. Jeanne Marie, SV, Sr. Anastasia Chiara Luce, SV, Sr. Lucia Christi, SV, Sr. Maria Frassati, SV, Sr. Theresa Francesca, SV, Sr. Mercy Marie, SV

Front row left to right: Sr. Celeste Mariae Therese, SV, Sr. Avelina Joseph, SV, Sr. Gemma Grace Marie, SV, Sr. Caroline Caritas, SV



NEW NOVICES

Back row:
left to right:
Sr. Madeleine Agnes
Sr. Martha Maria Guadalupe
Sr. Mary Catherine
Sr. Perpetua Lucia Mariae

Middle row:
Sr. Luca Benedict
Sr. Desirae Purissima
Sr. Lumen Gloriam
Sr. Cora Caeli

Front row:
Sr. Juliana Faustina
Sr. Gloria Maria
Sr. Charity
Sr. Tirzah Mariae

THE SISTERS OF LIFE
Annunciation Motherhouse
38 Montebello Road
Suffern, NY 10901

Printed through the generosity of the Knights of Columbus.
Written and designed by the Sisters of Life.

*In gratitude for the gift you are to us,
the Sisters of Life will pray a Christmas Novena
of Masses for you and your family.*

IMPRINT

Sr. Mary Elizabeth, Editor
Sr. Marie Veritas, Assistant Editor
Sr. Mercy Marie, Copy Editor
Sr. Maris Stella, Writer
Sr. Mary Margaret Hope, Writer
Sr. Pia Jude, Writer
Sr. Elizabeth Ann, Design/layout

How To Reach Us

publications@sistersoflife.org

Annunciation Motherhouse

(Generalate, Novitiate)
38 Montebello Road, Suffern, NY 10901
845/357-3547
Vocations call: 845/357-0258

Heart of Jesus Convent

125 Lafayette Avenue, Suffern, NY 10901
845/547-2630

St. Frances de Chantal Convent

(Postulant House)
198 Hollywood Avenue, Bronx, NY 10465
718/863-2264

New York Visitation Mission

257 East 71st Street
New York, NY 10021
Pregnancy help call: 212/737-0221
Toll free: 877/777-1277
Co-workers of Life call: 646/882-1087
Visitation Convent
320 East 66th Street, New York, NY 10065

Philadelphia Visitation Mission

St. Malachy's Convent
1413 North 11th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19122
267/831-3100

Toronto Visitation Mission

1099 Danforth Avenue
Toronto, ON M4J 1M5 Canada
Pregnancy help call: 416/463-2722
St. Joseph's Convent
172 Leslie Street Toronto, ON M4M 3C7

St. Paul the Apostle Convent

(Hope and Healing After Abortion)
586 McLean Avenue, Yonkers, NY 10705
914/968-8094
toll free: 866/575-0075
hopeandhealing@sistersoflife.org

Villa Maria Guadalupe

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

Sacred Heart of Jesus Convent

212/397-1396

St. Clare's Convent and Eucharistic Chapel

3900 13th Street NE, Washington, D.C. 20017
202/635-0931

St. Mary Magdalene Convent

2771 Zenobia Street, Denver, CO 80212
303/658-0409
denver@sistersoflife.org

Website: sistersoflife.org

