

IMPRINT

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MADE FOR
RELATIONSHIP

Jesus restores harmony.

One Sister's three-year-old nephew, Gus, sat in the hospital room as everyone greeted his brand-new baby sister, Flo. At first, he was thrilled to coo over the little one. But as time went on and everyone's attention fixated on the squirmy bundle, he went and sat in a corner, with a furrowed brow and folded arms. "What's the matter, Gus?" his father asked. Gus stood up and marched to the middle of the room. With one arm pointed at Flo and other arm pointed at his mother's tummy, he demanded, as he did during toy clean-up, "Pack her away!"

Like Gus, we all desire to be seen, noticed, and loved. We are made for communion. In fact, communion is the very beginning of the story of humanity. In the book of Genesis, God looks at Adam and says, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (*Gen 2:18*). We were fashioned to be in constant relationship with our Creator, and God didn't stop there: He desires our peace. Peace comes when we live in right relationship with God, ourselves, one another, and the world.

But just one chapter later in Genesis, we see relationships fractured by sin, and this same brokenness played out over and over throughout the history of Israel. In our ache for love and the insecurity woven into our hearts through original sin, we have the tendency to view the other as a threat or a burden. Even now, we can often feel that sin and wounded relationships are the end of our story.

But fear, mistrust, isolation, and hurt do not have the final word. God is always coming close, inviting us to healing and communion. The shattering of harmony which has reverberated since Adam and Eve finds its healing answer in Jesus Christ. Because of the Incarnation, everything, even our weakness, can be invested with His light. Jesus draws near to us in vulnerability — in the manger, on the Cross, in the Eucharist — and invites us into the peace that only He can give. He is the Divine Potter (*cf. Is 64:8*), the Master Craftsman, and He comes to accomplish the great and marvelous work of not only restoring, but elevating, our hearts and relationships through union with His pierced Heart. "By His wounds, we are healed" (*Is 53:5*) and raised up higher than we were in the Garden of Eden. May Jesus, Repairer of the Breaches and Source of our life, give us the grace to see ourselves and each other, not as a burden or a threat, but as a gift.

With gratitude and prayers,

In Christ, Our Life, and Mary, Our Mother,

Mother Mary Concepta, SV

Mother Mary Concepta, SV



Peace comes when we live in right relationship with God, ourselves, one another, and the world.

GOD DID NOT CREATE YOU TO USE YOU.



by Sr. Marie Veritas, SV

We can often be tempted to measure our worth by how useful we are or how we feel about ourselves. And when we fail or we feel poorly, we become overwhelmed with discouragement. But our achievements, emotions, and thoughts about ourselves, as subjective and transitory realities, do not determine our worth. Your identity is grounded in the firmness of eternal Love, Who never stops speaking over you the truth, “You are very good” (*cf. Gen 1:31*). He doesn’t measure your worth — He Who gives Himself to you on the Cross and in the Eucharist *is* the measure of your worth.

You are the goal of God’s Heart. “God, infinitely perfect and blessed in Himself, in a plan of sheer goodness, freely created man to make him share in His own blessed life” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1*). God did not create you in order to use you, for He is totally sufficient in Himself. He created you out of love as a unique and unrepeatable reflection of His glory, simply because He desires you to be filled with His love and to seek, praise, know, and love Him. He takes joy in you — you, specifically. And He came to save you out of love.

You are the reason the Second Person of the Holy Trinity became man, walked the hills of Galilee, preached, healed, was crucified, died, rose, and stays with you in His Spirit. Intentionally and carefully fashioned in His image, you are not just important to His Heart — you are an icon of Him Who is.

The human person is not made to be used. Use is proper to an object: I play music on a violin, or swim in a pool, or enjoy chocolate cake. It’s right to use things. But as a living image of the living God, a person is never to be used as a means to an end. You are an end in yourself. You’re not just *something*;

you’re *someone*, with your own free will and destiny. Not even God uses you to gain an end. He so reverences your dignity and freedom that He invites and proposes, but He never forces or imposes. When the saints speak of God using them, what they mean is that they have freely given God permission to involve their hearts, minds, bodies, circumstances, strengths, weakness, victories, and even their sins and setbacks in His marvelous designs.

God wants a free response to His love, because love, as the “unification of persons” and willing the good of the other, never comes at the expense of someone else (Karol

Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*). The ultimate good of the other means the flourishing of the person — body, mind, and soul. I’m not loving someone if I’m using or leading him or her to sin, even if it is pleasurable or productive. “The value of the person is always greater than the value of pleasure” (*ibid.*). Use hurts everyone involved. Use binds us to someone as property, which is below our dignity. “If I treat someone else as a means and a tool in relation to myself

I cannot help regarding myself in the same light” (*ibid.*).

The only proper response to you is love; anything less is not worthy of you. We can spend our whole lives racing around ourselves trying to find ourselves, when Jesus invites us: “Let yourself be found. Let Me show you who you are. Let Me show you the love for which you’re made and the love you are capable of giving.” We are not His slaves, but His beloved sons and daughters. Let’s live free. Let’s allow ourselves to be loved and to love with His love.

You’re not
just
something;
you’re
someone.

SET FREE BY LOVE

A conversation with Marcia & Victoria
by Sr. Charity, SV



It was an unusual birthday party. It started like any other — cake, presents, a colorful balloon arch. Marcia, the birthday girl, shared her dreams for the future as her daughter, Victoria, approved with gleeful squeals. One Sister encouraged Marcia to let Jesus set her free in new ways in the year to come. The room was full of expectant hope and joyful celebration. But then the party took a rather dramatic turn as Marcia stood suddenly on her chair, aimed a safety pin at the balloon arch and asked, “Sisters, what should I let go of this year?”

At first, we were confused and slightly concerned about Marcia’s precarious balancing act. But slowly, we started to catch on. One Sister suggested, “Let go of fear!” Marcia popped a balloon.

“What else?”

“Shame!” Pop! We all cheered.

“What else?”

“Self-pity!” Pop! “Anxiety!” Pop!

“Sin!” Pop! Pop! She popped two for that one. When she finished, all of the Sisters wanted to blow up more balloons so we could pop them ourselves. It was awesome. “For freedom Christ has set us free” (*Gal 5:1*).

But Marcia would be the first to admit that she didn’t always know the meaning of freedom. Before becoming a mother, she was living a party lifestyle and buying into the culture’s notion of freedom as the license to do whatever you want. “You think you are free when you’re drinking, when you go to parties... Actually, you are a slave. You don’t realize it, but you’re a slave,” she said, looking back on those years. She said she felt tremendous pressure to look perfect and to be noticed.

I think that’s why
God created the
family: to show us
we need each other.

“I was losing my identity,” she said. It was what she now describes as “a horrible life.” But everything began to change when she became pregnant.

“When I found out that I was pregnant, the first feeling was fear. So much fear,” she said, tears coming to her eyes as she recalled that time. She remembers taking three pregnancy tests, unable to believe the two lines that would change her life forever. After the third positive test, she sat down on her bed and closed the curtains around it. She was sleeping in a curtained-off area of her living room so she could rent out the two bedrooms of the apartment to help make ends meet.

Not knowing how she would be able to take care of a baby, she reached for her Bible. She opened it to the story of Hannah offering her child, Samuel, to the Lord (*see 1 Sam 1:20-28*). Marcia prayed, “You gave me this [child]. [This pregnancy] is the consequence of my mistakes, but I know this is a blessing. My child is going to be Yours.”

Soon after, the Lord responded to her prayer. “I was alone in my room and this song came on called ‘Resurrecting’ [by Elevation Worship], and I heard, ‘Your name, Your name is Victory,’” she said. Tears streamed down her face, and she knew her daughter’s name would be Victoria. The song continued, “By Your Spirit I will rise from the ashes of defeat. The resurrected King is resurrecting me. In Your name I come alive to declare Your victory. The resurrected King is resurrecting me.” For Marcia, the song contained a promise. “God was saying to me, ‘This is the song about your life, not just about your daughter. I’m going to bring

you back to life. I'm going to resurrect you."

At that time, a friend connected Marcia with us and encouraged her to move into the convent. Initially, Marcia was scared and resistant. The fear of living with other people she never met, let alone Sisters, was terrifying.

"I was still scared," she said, "Very scared to go."

It felt like a huge risk: Would she be rejected or unwelcome? Too much or not enough? What if she didn't get along with others? What if it didn't feel safe or it didn't feel like home? Was living with others, especially when she had real needs and a lot of unknowns, even possible?

But, ultimately, she knew this wasn't her idea — it was God's invitation.

"When you are pregnant you realize, you can't do it by yourself.. You need help. I think that's why God created the family: to show us we need each other. The devil says, 'You can be alone.' No, you can't. We need each other," she said.

Marcia compared her time in the convent to a mother's embrace. She smiled thinking of how she stops Victoria's tantrums by scooping her up and drawing her close. Marcia said she experienced that kind of love in the convent. It was as if God was saying, "Come here. Let Me love you first." Our Holy Respite mission is intended to give women a place of security, healing, and rest as they step into motherhood. "We lived like a family," Marcia said.

During the time Marcia lived in the convent, God began to fulfill the promise of resurrection He had made to her. "The beginning of resurrecting is: 'Come here. Let Me restart you. Let Me give you power.' Love is the answer to everything," she explained.



Experiencing the tender love of God, she gained new confidence to be who God created her to be, no longer needing to compare herself with others. "I feel loved. I feel full of love. So for me this is freedom. Jesus is freedom. You feel free and full of love, and you don't need to compare," she said. She left behind the party lifestyle and all of the pressure and enslavement that went with it.

"Since I said 'yes' to God, to life, He picked me up and said, 'I'm going to take care of you both,'" she shared, "God knew that [my daughter's] life would change me, change my life, change everything."

Victoria is now almost 4 years old. "She's my strength...[and] she's my greatest teacher. My daughter is my greatest teacher. I learn from her every single day," Marcia said.

The day Marcia moved into the convent she started writing a book. It begins with the words, "God just started a new chapter in my life." She hopes, one day, to finish that book and to encourage other women with her story.

And — she said with a smile — at her book launch, there will definitely be a balloon arch.

INTO LIFE: Love Changes Everything

The Sisters of Life and the McGrath Institute for Church Life teamed up with CampCampo Films to create an original 12-part video series based on the work of the Sisters serving women who are pregnant. Journey with the Sisters of Life as they explain what it means to walk with a woman who is pregnant and vulnerable. Learn what it means to deeply listen to and understand the heart of another, how to rejoice in the beauty of the individual person, and what it means to truly accompany someone into God's life and freedom.

intoliferies.com

Coming soon in Spanish!

La Esencia de la Vida: El Amor Todo lo Puede

THE PANTHEON:

An ancient Roman revelation of our need for God's love

by Sr. Rose Patrick O'Connor, SV



If you've ever been to Rome, you might have gone to see an ancient Roman temple known as the Pantheon. This giant concrete structure, which is now a Catholic church, is famous for its domed roof with a hole in the center. The oculus, or "eye," fills the church with natural light, and was built to represent a connection between heaven and earth. The oculus was also an important part of the engineering design. The hole might be seen as a nuisance, or foolish, as it would let in the rain, snow, or birds, but actually, if the oculus of the dome was filled in, the whole building could collapse.

We're wired for heaven. There is a space inside of us that's made to be open to God's infinite love. If we try to fill our need for God with other things, our life starts to unravel. The ultimate answer to our longing for stability, security, and intimacy is found in the Lord's personal and unconditional love.



You are espoused to the Eternal King

(Back L-R) Sr. Martha Maria Guadalupe, Sr. Mary Catherine, Sr. Claudia Marie, Sr. Lumen Gloriam, Sr. Madeleine Carmel
(Front L-R) Sr. Juliana Guadalupe, Sr. Mary Casey O'Connor, Sr. Cora Caeli, Sr. Luca Benedict, Sr. Charity, Sr. Tirzah Mariae



Final Profession of Vows - June 29, 2024
St. Michael's Cathedral in Toronto, Canada



Final Profession of Vows - August 6, 2024
St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York



► Cardinal O'Connor's younger sister, Mary Ward-Donegan, brought our founder's love to the Profession Mass.



“Every corner of my heart wanted to give this ‘yes...’”

- Sr. Tirzah Mariae, SV

FIRST VOWS 2024



June 22, 2024
Sacred Heart Parish in New York

(L-R) Sr. Rosa Goretti Immaculata, Sr. Israel Mercy Magnificat, Sr. Israel Rose, Sr. Eve-Mary, Sr. Luz Maria Jose, Sr. Katherine Veronica

WHAT ABOUT YOU AND ME?

By Sr. Mary Grace, SV

“On that day, when evening had come, He said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ And leaving the crowd, they took Him with them in the boat, just as He was. And other boats were with Him” (Mk 4:35-36). “And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger” (Lk 8:22). “But He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, ‘Teacher, do You not care if we perish?’ And He awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mk 4:38-39). “He said to them, ‘Where is your faith?’ And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, ‘Who then is this, that He commands even wind and water, and they obey Him?’” (Lk 8:25).

There are times in our lives when we hit limits — when it seems like the worst only gets worse, and the worst appears to be the only possible outcome.

Until this point in the Gospels, Jesus’ followers interpreted circumstances in their lives via a two-step approach: 1. This is my experience; 2. Therefore, this is the conclusion. For example, a windstorm arises; therefore, we will perish. Certainly, all human effort was applied to control the boat, but there are times — more often than we’d like to admit — that we can’t stop the storm or know where it’s leading us. “They woke Him and said, ‘Do You not care if we perish?’” They call Jesus careless and incapable of changing their situation. They reject His very name: Savior.

Jesus isn’t a lucky charm for terrible days. He’s not a genie for complex situations, and He’s not an auto-reply. He’s more invested in you than a quick fix. You are not a problem to be solved, and your circumstance is not a burden to Him. The only person who can control the outcome of every situation is Jesus. It was His idea to board the boat, fully aware the disciples were headed for a terrible storm in the black of night. He had a plan; He always has a plan. He *is* the plan.

Jesus delivers a whole new way of making sense of storms. He slept, abandoned in a deep, heavy, restful slumber, that not even a storm could dare wake Him. He let the storm rage to show us that storms do not rule our life, but He does.

He asks, “Where is your faith?” Or, in other words, “What about you and Me? What about *us* in this? Will you let Me be with you here, love you in this, give you My peace here?” Faith is not a one-way street. It’s about two persons: Jesus and you. No one can replace your faith, and no one can answer your heart but Him.

Jesus is always about being in relationship with you. He wants to be with you in everything. Whether that’s a paper cut, a new decision, a time of transition, pains or joys — not to micromanage your life but to abolish the threat of loneliness. To be with Jesus is rightly relating to God. This isn’t just restricted to the storms, but He is crucial to them — in fact, it’s a matter of perishing or not.

Jesus can stop any storm in an instant, and He can give rest in the rage of it. He has the power to determine the conclusions in our life. What if we tried out this new way? What if we let Jesus step in between our experience and the conclusion, knowing that He is always with us?

Faith wakes up Jesus; it’s going into the stern of our heart and calling out to Him by seeking His help, praying unceasingly, giving Him our praise and thanksgiving. It’s refusal to struggle solo.

Jesus, You are in control.

You are Lord and Savior.

Jesus, there is a storm, and it won’t stop. Jesus — the storm.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

Faith also finds rest in storms. If Jesus doesn’t wake up immediately, He will always offer us the rest this world cannot give. He may not change the circumstances, but He will strengthen and calm our hearts. Even in the winds of temptation and the waves of fear, resting in His Love is always possible.

Because Peace is a person. Jesus gives us access to a whole new way of living, right for every circumstance. What Jesus says, Jesus does: “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (Jn 14:27).



WHEN LOVE BREAKS IN

An interview with John and Joanna

by Sr. Catherine Joy Marie, SV and Sr. Ann Immaculée, SV

John and Joanna are co-workers and good friends of our community. They live in Ontario, Canada.

Can you tell us your story?

John: I was raised Catholic, but I stopped going to Mass when I was eleven. I was in the wilderness for a long time — it was the culture that raised me more than the Church. I went to university and got involved in partying, but was also searching for what was true and good. I wondered, “What’s the truth inside of me?” I wanted to be good. I got really into the personal development industry. That’s where Joanna and I met. The thing about the personal growth industry and all these self-help books is they told me that I was god — my will and my goals were god. If your life is going well, it’s because you have made it happen. If it’s not going well, then you can turn it around — it’s all up to you. It’s worshiping oneself. I was like a frog leaping from lily pad to lily pad in a self-governed world of ideas and perspectives. There was no adherence to a moral code in terms of relationships, so I was unable to understand how to incorporate our relationship into all my goals. We really didn’t stand a chance of getting to a place of peace.



Joanna: I was baptized Catholic, but I was not raised in the Church. I didn’t have a spiritual foundation in my life. I went to university for sociology and women’s studies because I wanted to help people and to work for justice, human rights, and goodness. But I didn’t know where to find true goodness. I was searching for God and was looking for Him in the wrong places. My life was very fragmented. I felt like there was something missing. I got involved in personal development as well, because I was interested in being successful and working on myself. It was like “anything goes”; whatever you decide is good for you. It’s relativism, right? I was my own compass. It was about what I wanted, what I liked, what I preferred. But I just found myself very unfulfilled and burnt out. But when John and I met and started dating, I noticed, “There is something different here.” We began searching together for truth and trying to better our lives.

How did God lead you back into right relationship with Him?

Joanna: Things started to change for us when we got engaged. One day I received the grace of knowing who Jesus is and what He did for me, and it was like getting hit by lightning. I suddenly realized, “Oh, my goodness, if Jesus didn’t do what He did for us, then there’s no way we could ever be happy or ever be at peace or ever have anything good in our lives.” Jesus just made it so, so, so vivid and clear. I could see the truth about Jesus, and I knew everything in the Bible was true. I immediately let go of

everything in my life and just started going to Church, and God began orienting me properly to Himself. To be honest, it took a while for my intellect to catch up to what God was doing in my heart. For so much of my life I was trying to find the answer to the questions, “Am I good enough? Am I lovable?” These questions came up in every relationship I was in. It wasn’t until God revealed Himself to me that I discovered all that matters is that God loves me and I belong to Him. His love changed everything.

John: I didn’t have that type of infused experience Joanna had. I studied my way into the faith, because I started going to Mass with Joanna to be supportive. There was a priest who told me that what matters most is if something is objectively true, not just if you prefer it or if it’s useful. It was a question of the fullness of truth. After about twelve weeks of going with Joanna to Mass and crossing my arms and getting a blessing at Communion, I realized she was pretty serious about it all, and I decided to go to confession. So I went into the old-style confessional, which was just what I needed because it was dark and anonymous. As soon as the priest said, “Your sins are forgiven,” something happened in my chest. I got a little misty on the way back to the pew. I was in shock because, for the first time, I felt clean.

There’s nowhere else but the Church that I can go and hear someone say that my sins are forgiven, and it actually has the weight of truth behind it. Receiving the sacraments again began warming my heart and chiseling away all the barnacles on my soul. After that, it was like a Catholic explosion of studying, YouTube videos, podcasts, everything.

How did coming into right relationship with God bring you into right relationship with each other?

John: We both had wounds from the sexual revolution, and that was an impediment. Our relationship was all backwards. I didn’t have the ability to prioritize marriage and family because I was struggling to juggle it along with all my other goals. I knew something was wrong; I just didn’t know what. Our engagement opened the floodgates of grace. After we got married, and as we learned about God’s truth, we grew in understanding of ourselves and each other.

Joanna: I was taught in school that you don’t need a man for anything. I wasn’t encouraged to submit to the love and protection of my amazing husband. There was a lot of fear along the way in our relationship because I was used to doing everything myself. There was a time in our marriage where honestly I didn’t even want to ask John to open a jar for me because I was living like it was all up to me. Why are things not quite right? Why is this not working? I was just running, running, running in my work and in my heart and mind, trying to figure things out. Everything was about career, money, achievements, grades, and success. Although these were good things, none of them brought me into a right relationship with God and with the people around me. In

the past, if I was hurt, I would just shut the person out and run away. It’s a lot easier for me to turn off the light, ignore my husband, and give him the silent treatment for half of the next day.

John: Joanna and I had people in our lives, even groups, that we’d bare our souls to, yet we didn’t have that same intimacy or vulnerability with each other. Yet there’s a different level of vulnerability that’s available for husband and wife. We were missing out. She’s tried to teach me that I don’t always need to find the right things to say. Sometimes I don’t need to talk. Sometimes we just need to be with each other. In the past, if something happened between us, I would think, “I messed up. I just need to let things cool down.” There was a lot of self-loathing. But God showed me: “Don’t go away. Just stay.” I’ve learned to simply stay with her.

Joanna: God has been saying to me, “Don’t close your heart. It’s not about winning or losing. It’s about what’s good for your marriage.” Through God’s invitation and mercy, He’s led me to be vulnerable with Him and my husband. It’s only my vocation as a wife and knowing I am a child of God that matters. I am loved first and foremost by God. There has been nothing more fulfilling in our life than being married and being parents. We can actually be present now.

How has your relationship with others changed?

John: In personal development, I would be coached by others and walk away thinking, “Wow, they’re so good.” In my experience of Christianity, people genuinely help me for my sake. When I walk away from a Christian interaction, I walk away thinking, “I’m so good in God’s eyes. God loves me.”

Joanna: I actually didn’t have a lot of room for other people because I was constantly trying to survive. I had my relationship, and then my family life, and then my work life, and then my school life; everything was very separate. I didn’t know at the time the harm that I was causing myself and others. Even when I was trying to help people, I was still doing it to achieve something. I would look to other people for approval, even in the personal development world. Since knowing God, I go to Him for my identity, knowing that He’s made me exactly how He wants me, that I don’t have to be someone else and that I can just experience myself in His gaze. I now have room for other people because I’m not trying to get anywhere myself.

We fail for sure. He walked me through triumphs over my past habits and my past reactions to things like being hurt. I sensed God telling me, “I’m here now; things are going to be different now. It’s time for you to move beyond this.” He takes me by my hand and walks me very slowly and reverences my heart. He knew how scared I was, and He knew how much my heart had been hurting. And He invited me to trust Him. God’s been leading us. When I take a step back and see it from God’s perspective — He knew all those years ago — I’m like, “Wow.” Everything is up to God.

I was trying to find the answer to the questions, “Am I good enough? Am I lovable?”

Spiritual Realignment

WORSHIP CHANGES YOU



By Sr. Zélie Maria Louis, SV

TESTIMONY OF WORSHIP

As a college student, I was part of a weekly formation program that took place late on Thursday nights.

Getting there involved a trek across town in the often subzero temperatures of Minnesota winters, and I usually found myself dragged along, wishing I could stay home and get more rest instead. The night was built around praise and worship, with a talk in the middle, and time and again I had the same experience: the night that began with resistance and fatigue would end with joy, energy, and new hope as I gave myself to God anew in prayer.

Those times where I was literally forced to take my eyes off myself

and focus on the living God in a spirit of thanksgiving, changed me. It was like a spiritual realignment that reoriented my whole life. Instead of worrying about things alone, I gave them to God. Reconnecting to this most fundamental relationship in my life helped put everything in perspective: God is here. We are in this together. He is taking care of the whole world, including me.



MADE FOR WORSHIP – IN COMMUNITY

What is worship? Simply put, it is praising and adoring God as the Lord of our lives. The Holy Mass is the highest form of worship. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* frames worship as a cause of healing integration, setting man free “from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world” (CCC, 2097). Worship not only integrates man, but also “saves him from an endless disintegration” (CCC, 2114). This openness to the infinite is what “makes man complete. Man is man by reaching out infinitely

THE STRUGGLE TO WORSHIP

Today's world of quick fixes gives a ready response to our subjective, passing emotions. Having a bad day? Go grab a \$7 coffee. Ran out of something? One-day shipping's got your back. We have lost the ability to wait, anticipate, and receive.

Our relationship with God can be subject to these things, too. We can project our experiences of inconstant or unfaithful love onto God, or think that because a person in my life doesn't love me, God doesn't love me. In times like this, the stability of the Church and the sacraments shed unfailing light. The points below can be like check points, assuring us we are on the right road, no matter the terrain or weather of our current circumstances.

- **Do I let myself be led by the teachings of Christ and His Church?** The commandments and the precepts of the Church are for the freedom and flourishing of who you are.
- **Am I struggling with a habitual sin?** If so, He awaits you in the Sacrament of Penance to not only forgive your sins but also to fill you with His merciful love.
- **Am I seeking God with all my heart?** Is there anything in my life that I have placed above Him?

We can be confident that God is with us at all times.

As long as I have kept the door of my heart open to Him, He is there, and this brings great reassurance. In times of consolation and in times of desolation, He is there. His presence in my life is not subject to my passing feelings. Even if I have closed the door, the truth is that He is constantly seeking me. In the difficult times of life we can confidently press into this certain grace by going to Mass more often, taking time to adore the Lord in Eucharistic adoration, praying the Rosary, etc., knowing that these actions have an indisputable effect.

beyond himself, and he is consequently more of a man the less enclosed he is in himself" (Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*).

Another way to think of worship is remembering who God is. This memory changes our present. Just as in a dark room we stumble and search, unable to distinguish what is around us, so are our lives without worship. Worship is like a light, a compass, that orients our present and directs our future. We are never meant to be alone, and turning our hearts to God in worship reminds us that we are not alone, reuniting us with the deepest reality: God is.

When we engage in worship — either in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, personal prayer or communal prayer — we remember that we are a part of the great story of salvation. Man is "not a being who keeps starting again from scratch; he can only work out his own new approach within the framework of the already existing whole of human life which stamps and molds him" (*ibid.*). This framework involves not just remembering God, but first being known by Him, which allows us to know and understand ourselves.



Emily's* Story

Growing up, I was aware that my mom and dad had struggled with infertility and conceived me through in-vitro fertilization (IVF). I remember feeling honored that my mother wanted me so badly that she went through so much in order to have her own child.

But during a Bible study during my sophomore year of college, I learned the Church's teachings about IVF. My stomach dropped, and my hands grew sweaty. The means by which I was brought into the world were outside God's plan for life and love! Many awful thoughts swarmed my head: *I'm not a daughter of God. I'm not a part of His plan. He doesn't want me here. What happened to the other embryos? How many siblings do I really have? Why am I here, not them?*

I felt so alone and isolated. I did not want to talk to my parents about their choice, out of fear of upsetting them, and I felt that none of my friends would understand. Eventually, I confided in a priest who told me that my Heavenly Father did and does want me on this earth. IVF was not a part of His plan, but I was. Yet I still wrestled with believing that I was His beloved.

I recently went on a retreat, and I began to pray and ask the Lord to help me see how much He loves me and that my identity is in Him. I renounced the lies I had believed for years about myself. I heard the Lord say, "You are Mine" over and over again in my heart. My identity lies in being a beloved daughter of God the Father, and in that alone. I am a child of God, and absolutely nothing, no circumstance, can ever change that.

*name changed for anonymity

To learn more about the Church's teachings on IVF and infertility, visit:
springsinthedesert.org
chastity.com
popepaulvi.com
usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning

opening the door to *forgiveness*

An interview with Erin

by Sr. Caeli Glorise, SV

Erin is a woman who has been served by our Hope & Healing Mission to those suffering after abortion. She shares her experience of opening her heart to both receive and give forgiveness, and reaching reconciliation with her husband before his death.*

Can you share your story?

When this one guy took an interest in me, I was flattered. I was 15, and he was 20. After a few tumultuous years, I found myself pregnant. I was scared to death. I didn't know of any places to get help. When I told my boyfriend, he was adamant that I would not have this baby. I was still not confident enough, and not strong enough to go against him.

After the abortion, I was numb. I experienced such a profound sadness, beyond anything I'd ever felt before. I pushed these feelings down and pretended it didn't happen. My heart finally brought me to confession, but it wasn't the unloading of my pain and the feeling of peace I was hoping for, [because] I could not forgive myself. I felt I wasn't worthy to be forgiven. That's when I stopped going to Church and distanced myself from Jesus.

When I met my husband-to-be, we were working in a Catholic school together. I knew he was a good Catholic man who went

to Church on Sundays and knew more prayers than I did. I had said, "God, please, I want a nice man." I didn't think I was worthy of one because of my abortion, but He gave him to me. After a while of dating, I knew I had to tell him about the abortion. We were walking. He kept saying that I was such a good woman, and I said I wasn't. He was really gentle with me, and said that what was in the past doesn't define you — that he had also done things that he wasn't proud of, when he was younger. So he made me feel a little better.

But I felt guilty for giving up my first baby. Thirty-seven years after the abortion, I read in a church bulletin: "Are you in need of healing from an abortion? Contact the Sisters of Life." Although it was painful to revisit [the past] and say things out loud, it was the beginning of my healing journey. If I never met the Sisters, I don't know where I would be.

It took a while. I didn't just wake up one day and say, "Oh, I'm forgiven." The first time that I went to confession after the abortion, I knew that God had forgiven me, but I couldn't forgive myself. That's what everybody says, but it really happened to me. The more that I was with the Sisters and with all my good sisters in Christ, little by little I forgave myself.

How did your marriage impact your healing journey?

My husband and I were really happy together at first. But it wasn't perfect. No life is perfect. And no marriage is perfect.

*named changed for anonymity

Wounds can work their way in. We were married for 35 years, and things changed. The closer you get to God, the more the evil one tries to break you down and separate you from Him. And that's exactly what happened to me. Just as I was really feeling that my healing journey was going along smoothly and I was on the right track, it was like I was moving one step forward and two steps back. I hit a gigantic speed bump. We had our kids, and we weren't communicating as much as we used to. Then my husband got sick. I retired early because I could tell he was going downhill. He needed someone to take care of him all the time. He couldn't drive anymore to dialysis. He never let anyone else in. I was the one. And then he eventually had to go to the hospital.

At some point, I got very angry with him, and our relationship went into a dark place. I wanted to hurt him as much as I felt he had hurt me. I was wrapped up in my situation, and I allowed anger and unforgiveness to build up in me. I'm usually a calm person, but that time of my life I lost so much weight, and I couldn't wrap my head around anything. It was terrible. That's when my friend said, "What's going on with you? I want the old you back." Then, a few days later, my daughter said to me, "I want my old mom back." That's when I really started crying. I said, "I'm going back. I'm going back to Our Lord because He's the only One Who can make me happy. I can't do it on my own. Lord, take over, because I have no idea what I'm doing, and I need You."

I started praying the Rosary; that's what really pulled me together. Every night as I cried, I would have the Rosary under my pillow, and I would just keep praying until I fell asleep.

When my husband came home from the hospital, we started talking. I told him how I felt, and he told me how he felt — that was another line of communication opened. I made peace with him and within myself. I was so happy that we were at peace with each other and that we settled things before he died, or else I would be left empty.

After my husband passed away, I was cleaning out his drawers and found a letter that he wrote me. He said that God had already forgiven me, that He loves me, and that I'm a good person. I couldn't believe how much he wasn't physically saying to me, but he was writing it all down; he really did understand what I was going through.

I started saying to myself, "God, what do You want from me now? What's the next step in my life?" I'm really trying to follow Him wherever He is leading me. I know that God will take care of me because that's what He does — even all those years that I didn't know He was right next to me. I finally opened the door and let Him in.

There is no
better feeling
than coming
back to our
merciful God.

As you have come to receive God's mercy more deeply, how has your relationship with yourself and others changed?

It's amazing how incredibly patient Our Lord has been with me all these years. He was walking beside me and waiting for me to truly open my heart and accept His forgiveness. In my brokenness, Jesus lifted me up and carried me through it. I realized, through the help of the Sisters of Life, that I truly am a beloved daughter of the Most High! You don't think that you are worthy of it. I had to remind myself of who I was created to be. I'm loved beyond measure, and I'm cherished. If He has forgiven me, then who am I to not forgive myself? Now I realize that I'm nobody's judge. If God has forgiven me, then who am I to not forgive other people?

When I finally started communicating with my husband again, I felt much closer to God. Sometimes you just have to let things go. I didn't want to live my life being so angry. The only way this was possible was finding my closeness with God. The Church felt like my second home, and I felt better being there. It gave me hope, and I was back to who I used to be.

What would you say to someone who is struggling with forgiveness or healing?

I teach religious education, and when the kids come into the classroom, I always make them say: "What's the Good News? Jesus loves you and never stops loving you". They say it back to me every time, and I say it to myself, too. Little by little it has sunken in. Once I received that truth, I received my healing again — even though I thought I was already healed. There is no better feeling than coming back to our merciful God. Now I no longer see myself as the world sees me. In God's eyes, I'm valuable, important, and loved more than I can imagine. And so are you, even when you don't have a lot of confidence, or you don't think you're good. That's how I felt when I was young. But now when I look in the mirror, I look at myself through the eyes of God.

For more information on Hope & Healing after Abortion, visit: sistersoflife.org/healing-after-abortion

"The Rosary is a powerful weapon to put the demons to flight and to keep oneself from sin... If you desire peace in your hearts, in your homes, and in your country, assemble each evening to recite the Rosary. Let not even one day pass without saying it..."

- Pope Pius XI



Being comfortably

yourself

By Sr. Lumen Glorise, SV

Hannah* was standing alone, and as a Sister passed by, she felt moved to greet her. Not knowing how to begin, Sister said, “I like your ring!” Hannah burst into tears. She shared with Sister that she’d had enough: much of her life was marked with abusive situations, and she was desperate for another way. We introduced her to a local priest. Hannah soon expressed a desire for Baptism and signed up for a weekend retreat. When we spoke with her at the beginning of the weekend, she beamed and told us, “I told God before retreat, ‘I’m not ready for this. I’m a breed of another kind. I don’t fit the box.’ God said to me, ‘Hannah, I want you to be yourself.’ ‘Oh no,’ she said, ‘I’m too much. You don’t want that.’” Smiling, she told us, “God replied, ‘Hannah, I don’t just want you to be yourself, but comfortably yourself.’”

God wants you to be comfortably yourself,

because to be yourself with ease and freedom allows you to live in communion with Him. And it is from this communion with God that we become capable of entering into relationship with others. But we may wonder what it really looks like to be comfortably ourselves and to live communion with those around us. There are a few simple ways that we can begin do this:

Trust allows us to step toward the other and to let them step toward us, instead of living in the fear of letting people in and putting up walls to protect ourselves. Trust is a key that unlocks our hearts, and opens up the pathway to communion with others.

Vulnerability is key to relationship. We may believe that to be vulnerable we have to share our whole hearts with everyone we meet, to have no boundaries between us and others; rather, vulnerability is the space of allowing ourselves to be seen and loved as we are, and to see and love those around us as they are. It can cause fear, because to be vulnerable means we could be misunderstood, rejected, or hurt where we most need to be received. But the truth is, vulnerability requires healthy boundaries, and healthy boundaries require vulnerability. They work together to bring us to life. And if we stand on the foundation that God loves and receives us perfectly, any hurt we feel from our past relationships won’t have the final say about who we are and what we are made for.

**name changed for anonymity*

Mutual giving and receiving of love between us and another can heal the hurts of co-dependence we may have experienced in our lives. We are made to depend on one another, but in a way that reveals to us and the other that we are both worth loving because God has called us good.

Forgiveness is also vital to communion. It is different from reconciliation — we cannot always maintain a relationship with someone who has hurt us — but we are always called to forgive. It is where mercy meets weakness and creates something that wasn’t there before: a beauty that participates in God’s love for His children.

Reverence is at the heart of all our relationships with others. Alice von Hildebrand comments, “Reverence opens our eyes to the mystery of being, of life, of beauty.” Reverence speaks to the other, “You are a gift, because in you I catch a glimpse of the majesty of God in His creation.” But reverence isn’t only for the one standing in front of us. Every one of us is meant to be revered. When we know that we are sacred ground, the truth of who we are sets us free. This mutual awareness of our sacredness and the sacredness of the other changes things, and allows us the space to become fully alive in relationship together.

God knows our history, and He offers His healing love to us as He invites us to consider again seeking communion with others. When we say yes to this invitation, we receive the great gift of joy and of living as we were made to live: comfortably ourselves and united to those around us.

WHAT DIGITAL DOES TO RELATIONSHIPS

An interview with Fr. Kevin Belgrave
By Sr. Rose Patrick O'Connor, SV

Digital technology has expanded our communication options. At the tap of a finger we can instantly reach someone on the other side of the world. But research shows people are feeling more disconnected than ever.

Why is this so?

Fr. Kevin Belgrave is a priest and professor of moral theology in Toronto, Canada. He says digital relationships are challenging because they don't allow us to interact in the ways we really need. Ultimately, we'll be most happy if we live the fullness of the image of God imprinted in our being.

THE IMAGE OF GOD BLUEPRINT:

Embodied



Whether it's a hug or a handshake, we use our bodies to say, "This is where I am," and "I give myself to you."

Small-Scale



God made the most intimate relationship between one man and one woman in marriage. Our families, neighborhoods, and workplaces are also small.

Interdependent



We all have gifts and gaps, and that's actually a good thing. We help each other out. I don't have to "have it all together" by myself.

Committed



I belong to a community. When I speak with you, I know I'm going to see you again.

Digital media doesn't allow for the fullness of authentic human relationships. Fr. Belgrave notes that "Social media relationships are not embodied — they're precisely virtual, digital. They're not small-scale — oftentimes you have hundreds of people you're talking to every time you say something witty on social media. They're not interdependent in any way. You can be cast off at any moment, you can be blocked."

As human persons, we are made of body and soul, and we bring the whole of ourselves to a relationship. Sometimes Zoom meetings and texting can be helpful, but a relationship that's completely virtual will ultimately leave us empty. The real answer is found in our local community.

"Are you searching to overcome those shadows in your heart in not being able to fit in?"

Fr. Belgrave mused, "Are you anxious? Are you just trying to find those anchor points, that solid foundation in your life? Live the truth of the image of God. Live the truth of the small-scale, embodied relationships that you have."

Live the truth of the small-scale, embodied relationships that you have.

"First, believe that this is where Our Lord is found. He's found in the sometimes mundane, sometimes lacking polish, sometimes imperfect communities that already exist in your life. And risk a certain involvement — just go do something mundane in your community. Look at the faces of the people who are there with you. Know that this is where God's image is found — it's not found in some other ideal thing that you haven't discovered yet, or that you need to grasp for.

"Ask for the grace to look at someone and realize there is an infinite amount of delight, fascination, and good that God beholds in that person. And like you they have hard edges, like you they have scabs and wounds. You have to be ready with that patience. Have the deep conviction that there is something in you, there's something

in them, and there's something in your relationship, in your community, that needs this for its healing, for its growth.

"Believe and trust. Step into that moment with the belief that Our Lord is here and wants this. And then see what happens."

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