

IMPRINT

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**WHAT DO
YOU THINK
ABOUT?**



God thinks of you.

“If God withdrew His hand for a fraction of a fraction of a moment, it would not be as though we were destroyed... it would be as though we’d never been....Everything is dependent upon the existence of God,” our founder, John Cardinal O’Connor, once told us.

God never ceases thinking of you. He thought of you before you were conceived, and desired to bring you into being. He has been thinking of you every moment of your life, and He thinks of you now, holding you in existence. St. Faustina, a Polish sister who enjoyed an intimate dialogue with God, wrote of a powerful experience she had regarding this truth: “When I received Holy Communion, I said to Him, ‘Jesus, I thought about You so many times last night,’ and Jesus answered me, ‘And I thought of you before I called you into being’” (*Diary of St. Faustina, 1292*).

You are always on God’s mind; in fact, as Pope Benedict XVI said, “Each of us is the result of a thought of God.” He does not know how to abandon you. Yet, so often, we forget this truth and are tempted to discouragement. But discouragement is only a tool of the evil one, never of God! As soon as we become aware of discouragement, we need to reject it, and instead, repeat truths about our identity. God is thinking of me with joy and delight because



He created me! We are true, good, and beautiful in His eyes! “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (*Phil 4:8*).

Dwelling on the good changes us. A Sister and I recently visited one of our faithful chaplains who had just turned 104. He kept telling us, over and over again, about a happy childhood memory, and each time he recounted the story, his face radiated with joy. He had spent his entire life finding, savoring, and pondering the good. For 100 years, he had cultivated this memory of goodness.

When our minds are filled with what is true, good, and beautiful, our words and our actions flow from that, and we generate a radius of peace around us. And yet, the marvelous thing is, even if we find ourselves tempted toward dark and negative thoughts, all is not lost. When we run to Jesus and surrender that which was leading us to discouragement, He draws us back into His heart. He reminds us of our goodness; instead of crumbling under discouragement, we claim a moment of intimacy with Him.

So let us become preoccupied with goodness, and claim our thoughts for Christ. Know of our prayers for you and your loved ones this Easter season.

In Christ, our Life, and Mary, our Mother,

Mother Mary Concepta, SV
Mother Mary Concepta, SV





How We Think is How We Live

By Sr. Mary Grace, SV

Our thoughts matter. Thoughts aren't just personal, nor are they simply neutral; what we think about shapes how we relate to ourselves, God, and the world, and that can have a universal impact.

Holocaust survivor and now psychologist and specialist of post-traumatic stress disorder, Dr. Edith Eger, shares that it was in Auschwitz concentration camp where she discovered her inner resources. "Freedom," she said, is "letting go of the concentration camp in your mind." That is, within each of us is the power to forgive, become liberated from lies, and make decisions about how we think.

Because more important than what happens to us is what we do with what happens to us and how we think about it.

Not all thoughts we have or ideas we hear from the outside world subscribe to the Good News. For example, the Roman empire believed that the average person wasn't worthy of the gods' attention, but that people existed only to serve as slaves to the distant deities. Nazism blatantly denied inherent human dignity and viewed individuals exclusively through the lens of usefulness to the state. Marxism and communist regimes declare that only work grants meaning to the human person, reducing our worth to material value alone. Liberalism dictates that meaning lies in the unimpeded freedom to do anything, anytime, without limit, and that treating another person as a means to an end is totally justifiable.

Christianity subscribes to an entirely other narrative that confronts, with clarity and truth, the distorted understandings of what it means to be human. Jesus, by His Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection reveals to us that we, body and soul, are good — "Father, they are Your gift to Me" (*Jn 17:24*) — and calls us to measure our lives not by success, pleasure, power, or utility, but by His redeeming love (*cf. Mt 25:40; 1 Jn 4:7-12*). "Only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light....Christ...fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear" (*Gaudium et Spes, 22*).

What do you believe? What do you think about? It matters.

The thoughts of the people who championed ideologies like Nazism and communism resulted in widespread death. The thoughts of people who upheld the dignity of every human person, like Mother Teresa of Calcutta or Pope St. John Paul II, led to a worldwide surge of hope and life. "Ideas have consequences," said George Weigel, biographer of St. John Paul II. Our own thoughts affect us, but they also affect others.

The trajectory of our lives begins on the inside. Untruthful thoughts cause a downcast vision of life. Unchecked, they can grow into a debilitating weight that can blur our vision of life and what matters. The evil one knows this, which is why he threatens our thoughts; he is a bully, and shame is his first language. For example, even healthy guilt — the tugging of our conscience when we realize we did something wrong — can easily be twisted into a claim on our identity, suggesting thoughts like, "I am wrong"; "I don't have what it takes"; "I'm never quite enough"; "I'm a fraud"; "It won't get better"; "I'm bad." If we begin believing the lies about ourselves, then we begin believing lies about others, and then about the nature of life. But we don't have to succumb to untruth. We have the power to look up.

Difficult thoughts aren't places to run from, but places we can invite Christ into. Shame may be a character in our story but it never has to be the narrator. Christ presents a clear idea about how to think about ourselves: that we are not objects to be used, but free persons made for love, in need of healing and redemption. Thinking of ourselves in truth is what allows us to live with joy and purpose. This is the secret of life with Christ: He can transform every setback into another starting point. The serpent cannot stop us from trusting in Jesus, nor can he prevent Jesus from being victorious.

We can decide what we want to think about and how we want to think about it. And it can change the world. May we let the truth, in love, form and transform our thoughts, and so too, our lives.

What do you believe? How do you think about your life? It matters. It can change the world.

Marriage on Mission

An interview with
Michelle and Asis Lopez
by Sr. Miriam Bethel, SV



Asis: I was born and raised in Miami. I always say I lived “Catholic-lite.” I was busy living in the world and having what I thought was fun. But my dad’s passing at 58 was one of those moments where I started asking some of life’s bigger questions: *What is success? How is success defined? What is the meaning of life, and what’s my purpose?* Whatever I was trying to fill that hole with wasn’t working out. I ended up going on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic. It was an experience that led me to the church where Michelle and I met.

Michelle: Asis and I were good friends for about a year and a half. We dated for six months, got engaged, and then got married six months later! We felt a call in our hearts; if we were going to get married, it was to live marriage on mission.

Asis: I think at the core of that was the desire to live our marriage, our mission, at the service of others, to allow our home to be a place where people encountered God’s love and hospitality.

Michelle: God met our desires, and surprised us in bringing about a beautiful story of bearing witness to the sacredness of human life.

Asis: We got pregnant three months after we got married, and lost the baby at eight weeks; that baby’s name is Providence. A month later, we got pregnant again with baby number two, who was Asis Gabriel, our son. Early on, the medical team started noticing some issues. The doctor told us, “This baby’s very sick; he’s not fit for life,” and that most people in this scenario choose to abort. I told her, “Well, that’s not an option for us. That’s our boy.” The next day we decided to put together a prayer team. We reached out to all of our big guns. Asis Gabriel was born on December 12th. When he was born, his heart actually didn’t look too bad. They said he might need surgery later on, but that many patients live full lives with this. We felt like it was a miracle.

Michelle: After he was born, we had a little celebration. Then things started popping up, not being like they should. We decided to do

an emergency baptism. It calmed all the fears, all the confusion. We gave him the greatest gift, the one gift that goes into eternal life with him. After more testing, the doctors shared that he had a genetic issue, a deletion which caused 85% of children not to reach full term, and that 90% who are born don’t live past a year. It was devastating news. They said, “In order to avoid a suffering like this again, *In Vitro Fertilization* (IVF) is your only option.” And you said...

Asis: “No! This is our son. This is a miracle that God has given us. If he sends us more, I’ll take them all.” We came home on hospice, and we were here for two weeks.

Michelle: We made the decision early on to invite our parish community to walk with us in our suffering; we decided that we weren’t going to hide away, that we weren’t going to isolate. We made the decision together that whatever God was doing through us and through Asis Gabriel, that that was part of our love story, and we were going to celebrate his

life and invite others to do the same.

Asis: We had him for 44 days. He entered heaven on the sixth anniversary of my father’s passing — a meaningful detail the Lord used to show us His presence, as our son was named after and in honor of my dad.

Michelle: Asis’ dad used to cherish *los momenticos*, the little moments, because they never repeat themselves — that was pressed on my heart when I heard the news about our son. We wrote daily reflections — we call them *los momenticos* — reflections of what God was speaking to us through our circumstances and situation, which speak to the struggle of learning how to suffer redemptively and of learning that life is sacred and a gift, no matter how it comes. Asis Gabriel had a unique mission to play in our world, and as parents, we were called to be mission supporters. We invited family and friends to step into this: This is how we’re seeing; this is the lens through which our faith helps us interpret the events of our life; come along with us.





A year and a half later, we got pregnant with Pieta Marie. At the 18-week fetal anatomy scan, we found out that she was not looking healthy, that she could pass any day.

Asis: Michelle ended up having a miscarriage, just shy of seven months. Pieta Marie passed on May 27th, which is my parents' wedding anniversary. We weren't able to see her, to hold her, but we were able to get her footprints and her handprints — we have them on the wall. We have different themes for each of our children, and with her, it was even in the womb, we have a mission. Through her, we started a yearly Mass at the parish for families that have suffered miscarriage.

Michelle: With Pieta Marie, because she had already passed, they recommended not laboring, but having a procedure done, a D&C. The night before the procedure, I had a moment of freaking out and thinking, "Who is this doctor, who will be the only one to get to see her? I don't know who he is." And I wasn't okay with that. In my wrestling, the Lord gently put me at ease to trust Him.

I wrote the doctor a note that said: *I just want you to know that you're the only one chosen in this world to be able to see my daughter, and you're the only one that will get to hold her — I can't even get to see her as a mom, and so I ask that you treat her with great reverence.* That was a moment to tell him about the sacredness of human life and dignity — even though she passed in the womb, her value extends beyond that. She was unrepeatably. I discovered later that this doctor was a man who had performed 20,000 abortions. When I learned that, I entrusted his conversion to her intercession.

Asis: A year later, we got pregnant again, and we were excited to welcome a new life. At the fetal anatomy scan, we learned that the baby might have the same genetic issue. I think we were really blessed to have a disposition that life is a gift to be received, however it comes. We're not owed a healthy baby. We were excited, not because they're perfect, but because life is a gift. Even if their life is short on this side, it's eternal on the other side.

Michelle: John-Paul was born and he came home on continuous hospice care. We decided that we were going to treat every day as a gift — that was John-Paul's theme. He was with us for two and a half years. It was a joyful, incredible experience to witness what God was doing through him. He passed away on

December 26th. The moment of his death was like the Mass, where heaven meets earth; we sang songs, and prayed him into Our Lady's arms. It was a real moment of grief, but also joy at this profound mystery. We had the funeral two weeks later, and it was standing room only. We call him "John-Paul the Small." In his smallness, he has been teaching us so much about the Father's love for us and our profound dignity.

One week before John-Paul passed, we learned of baby Avila's life. We weren't trying for another baby, and we were shocked but excited to welcome another little one. When we went to our four month appointment, she looked totally healthy, which was an incredible miracle. And we wanted to welcome her with the same joy we welcomed our other kids, knowing that her life is a gift, and allowing God to do something beautiful through her life as well.

Asis: Some people don't really understand, like, "What the heck are you doing? How do you guys keep having kids? How could you subject them to this suffering?" We were evangelizing our family and our friends through the decisions that we were making to continue to be open to life — however it came, however it looked.

Michelle: A deciding factor of really choosing faith and choosing to let God work is being able to have truth be the guide of my thoughts, not fear or comfort. If we know we're loved by God and that He's with us, then we know that if He allows something to come to us, then He's going to bring us through it, not for our destruction but for our thriving. In tough conversations with family and friends, we invite them to let the truth

of God shape the understanding of our circumstances.

We love sharing our story; we're not ashamed of the suffering that it has involved. There's much to rejoice in. Although our children's lives were short here, we have accomplished our role as parents (which is to get them to heaven), and we let their legacy point us in the direction of truth. Part of that legacy is *Los Momenticos*: Family Care Packages & Causes, a nonprofit we founded to support and inspire faith in families with children suffering in pediatric ICU's. This is just one of the many fruits of our children's lives, the mission entrusted to them to evangelize the world.

Choosing to let God work is being able to have truth be the guide of my thoughts, not fear or comfort.

Resources for miscarriage, infant loss, and adverse prenatal diagnosis:

- *Los Momenticos*: Family Care Packages and Causes: losmomenticos.org
- *Be Not Afraid* Support for Adverse Prenatal Diagnosis: benotafraid.net
- *Red Bird Ministries* Catholic Grief Support Ministry: redbird.love

Getting a grip on your thoughts

Just because a thought comes to mind doesn't mean we need to consent to dwelling on it.

by Sr. Léonie Thérèse, SV

There is a battle being waged for our souls, and it happens between our ears. We have thousands of thoughts that swirl in our heads daily, and it can sometimes feel chaotic and confusing. It's easy to get in the habit of just accepting everything that floats across our minds, but not everything we think is necessarily good for us. Scripture urges us to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor 10:5) — but how? It starts by figuring out which voice I'm hearing.

Some of our thoughts are inspired by God, and some are just from us, but some can be suggestions from the evil one. These thoughts from the enemy are deliberately designed to derail us and turn us away from God. If we are unaware that both God and the enemy are proposing ideas to us, we are, in a way, handicapped in our ability to respond. Once we become aware that our thoughts can be influenced by something beyond us, we are already at an advantage. In order to more fully engage the spiritual battle in the realm of thought, we must be able to discern whose voice we are listening to. We can then either assent to the thought or reject it. In the tradition of St. Ignatius of Loyola, this is called “discernment of spirits.”

How can we tell whether a thought is of God, or is a temptation or distraction from the enemy? In the moment, it can seem difficult to discern the origin of a thought. Most thoughts sound pretty convincing; but as we grow in awareness, we can start to notice patterns that help us to recognize where it is from.

When a thought leads us to feel shame, discouragement, hopelessness, or a sense of being stuck, these are some red flags that the enemy is behind that thought. Other indicators that the enemy is at work are absolutes like “always” and “never”; for example: “Things are never going to get better” or “You always make things worse!” Thoughts introduced into our minds by the enemy will often have a flavor of accusation, blame, confusion, or fear. The evil one does not respect our freedom, but often speaks with the language of “should”; for example: “You should do this, or else.”



On the flip side, thoughts that are from God have the ability to bring us peace, strength, and clarity, even in the midst of difficulties. A thought that is of God savors of humility, truth, and regard for our dignity and worth. Even when God convicts our conscience, He does it in a way that encourages us to move forward with hope rather than filling us with shame. The voice of the Lord is one of both truth and mercy. Thoughts that are of God have a tone of invitation, not of force. When He proposes a thought, He always respects our free will and ability to choose.

We can choose to engage the good and reject the bad. Just because a thought comes to mind doesn't mean we need to consent to dwelling on it. As soon as we become aware that a thought is not of the Lord, we can make a choice to replace it with a thought of goodness and truth. For example, if we catch ourselves getting sucked down a drain of hopelessness, we have the ability to think instead, “God, this is not coming from You. I choose to believe that You are in charge even now, and I can trust You.” We can bring a thought into conversation with the Lord, and ask Him, “What do You say about this?” Turning to God and speaking truth in response to a lie can dispel the evil one's attempted deception.

God does not leave us to fight the battle alone. Jesus tells us in Scripture that the Shepherd “calls His own sheep by name and leads them out.... He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers” (Jn 10:4-5).

Although the idea of a spiritual battle raging in our thoughts may seem daunting, the good news is that we are never alone. It's not just on us to “figure out” and sort through all the thoughts that swirl around in our heads. The Holy Spirit wants to teach us how to recognize His promptings and voice, and He can do this in many ways — through Scripture, through time in prayer, in our conversations with a spiritual director or good friend. We can always ask the Holy Spirit for light and guidance. The Lord allows us to engage in this battle, and in the very wrestling He teaches us to recognize the sound of His voice. He wants us to know His voice so that we can follow Him.

CHOOSING WHAT WE PONDER

Many of the decisions we make on a daily basis, like choosing what to eat for lunch, may seem quick and simple, but there is a lot going on behind the scenes. As human beings endowed with an intellect and will, we have authority over the realm of thought. The intellect is the power to know truth and perceive the good. The will is an appetite for what the intellect apprehends as good, and the power to choose it. Because of these two powers of the soul, we actually have the ability to *choose* what we think about. What we spend our time pondering, in a sense, shapes us. Our thoughts form patterns and affect our actions, and every decision we make forms and shapes us. The more often we choose to think a certain way, the easier it will become to “default” to a particular thought process, for good or for ill. We have the freedom to choose the good! Our intellect and will interact in a series of steps. With our intellect, we are able to recognize what seems good and weigh the factors involved. With our will, we are able to make the choice to move toward something we have deemed good and desirable. This dance between the intellect and will bears fruit in the human act.

Resources for good thinking:

The Discernment of Spirits
by Fr. Timothy Gallagher

Aquinas 101:
aquinas101.thomisticinstitute.org

Theology and Sanity
by Frank Sheed

Discerning Hearts Podcast:
discerninghearts.com

Word on Fire Institute:
institute.wordonfire.org

De Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture: ethicscenter.nd.edu

McGrath Institute for Church Life:
mcgrath.nd.edu

cleansed by the Word

by Sr. Maris Stella, SV

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’” (*Mt 3:3*)

Several years ago, a new pathway was carved out in my mind. The labor was intense and involved clearing brush, rooting out stumps, and leveling out uneven places.

It began when I was given an assignment in graduate school to memorize a large section of one of the Gospels and compose an essay on it. I chose the Prologue of John (*Jn 1:1-14*), and also *John 14*. I spent weeks reading and reciting the words. Over time, a mysterious transformation took place as the words made their way from my lips, to my mind and into my heart.


On numerous occasions, I burst into tears as the power of the words pierced my heart. I understood in a new way that “the Word of God is living and effective” (*Heb 4:12*).

Unbeknownst to me, as I labored to memorize the lines, the Word of God was silently, but powerfully creating a new path in my

mind and my heart. The day I completed my recitation and essay, I sat in our chapel and noticed a new clarity of thought: It was as though fresh water and new light moved through my mind. I prayed, “Jesus, I feel like I have been cleansed and renewed.” I looked down at my Bible, and my eyes fell on the words, “You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you” (*Jn 15:3*).

God’s Word had indeed purified and renewed me. Now, years later, when I find myself anxious or distracted, I slowly recite the words of Scripture, and I am transported back to a place of order. As I embark on the journey, the well-travelled path comes alive with each step and I discover new places of life and growth as the seed of God’s Word continues to bear fruit, “thirty, sixty, one-hundred fold” (*Mk 4:20*).

I want to testify to the power of God’s Word in my life. The Scriptures have the power to transform your life, too. Consider listening to an audio Bible or making your way through one of the Gospels. God has something to say to you.



Jesus, I give You
permission to
speak into my life.

THINKING TRUTH, Not Shame



An interview with Kerry, by Sr. Fidelity Grace, SV

What's your story?

My dad worked in New York City, and my mom was a stay-at-home mom. My four brothers and I all went to Church and to Catholic school growing up, but by the time we were teenagers we weren't attending Mass.

I had a complicated relationship with my mom, which led to insecurities and anxiety issues. In high school, I got into drinking and partying, in an attempt to leave all those feelings. When I eventually got pregnant, I was not in a state to think about anything else but solving the problem. I was 26, and I experienced a lot of fear about not having enough money and how would I tell my mom. That's what led me to have the abortion.

After the abortion, I went through a period of relief, and I didn't think about it much. It wasn't until a few years later, when I was married and our first son was born, that all the denial broke, and I realized what I had done. I realized that if I didn't have that abortion, my baby would be alive.

One year I remember thinking, "It's Ash Wednesday; maybe I should go back to Church? Maybe that would help fill the void in my heart." So, while I wasn't living a Catholic life, I figured I would go to Mass one Sunday during Lent. I stood in the back against the wall. I felt like I didn't belong there. But I remember seeing the priest and thought, "I need to talk to a priest about my abortion."

When I knocked on the rectory door, the priest who answered was so kind. I kept saying how sorry I was, as I cried and cried. I thought I was losing my mind. He kept telling me how much God loved me. I thought that he must not understand what I'm saying. He gave me the information for Project Rachel — my first program of healing.

When I got to the Sisters of Life 15 years after my initial counseling, I was having a lot of anxiety issues based on childhood wounds. Constantly trying to answer the question, "How could I ever have done such a thing?", became an obsession for me. In addition, I was constantly thinking about how to keep my children safe — that thought pattern was also linked to my abortion.

How did your thought patterns change?

I didn't have an "ah-ha" moment; I just experienced a shift in my thinking over time. For a while, I tried to just do spiritual stuff, like pray more, go to adoration more...but then I realized that I needed healing for the emotional stuff. I thought going to Confession would be a miracle — like the grief and guilt would just kind of lift off me — but it didn't feel like that at all. I knew God forgave me, but feeling loved by Him was more of a struggle. I thought of Him as a little critical and judgmental.

Being on the Sisters' healing retreats with other women, hearing their stories, and knowing that I wasn't alone was a huge help. I recall thinking to myself, "These are such beautiful women who regret what they've done. It's not like they're bad — they're wounded, scared, pressured." It shifted my thinking to: "If I think that way about them, then why can't I think that way about myself?"

Now I don't think of myself as unloving or mean anymore. I'm wounded because of what happened to me as a child. Things out of my control had an impact on me. I still struggle with those thoughts, but now I know they are not true. I do counseling and listen to a lot of podcasts to fill myself with the truth.

What advice would you give to others who might connect with your struggles?

Stay close to God through the sacraments. Learn about emotions and how they work. Be more compassionate to yourself. I can be harder on myself than on other people. We want to feel better and healed instantaneously, but sometimes it takes a while. Finding safe people is really important, because then you feel like you're being understood and it helps you open up more. God always wants more for us.

The power of Confession: *Sin causes our minds to be clouded and distorts our ability to choose the good — in theological terms, it darkens our intellect and weakens our will. When we bring our sins to the Sacrament of Confession, we are not only freed from the burden of guilt, but we are given light to see reality more clearly, and strengthened in our ability to make good decisions. Be not afraid of Confession! It's a gift for you.*

How to redirect negative thoughts

An interview with Fr. Michael Freinhofer, by Sr. Cora Caeli, SV



Can you share your story?

Even though I grew up in a solid Catholic family with holy parents and good siblings, I somehow developed scrupulosity. Scrupulosity is a fear of sinning and seeing sin where there is none — not knowing the lines between temptation and sin. Simply put, it is like having Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) revolving around sin, with lots of anxiety about offending God and going to hell. One stat said that 2% of the population has this.

How did thoughts shape your healing journey?

Over time, I learned that all healing has three components: truth, grace, and time. The truth sets us free. It takes grace to understand and accept the truth. And it takes time to heal. As soon as I began to learn more and more truth, I was able to discern the untruths in my mind. I have to say, though, it is really helpful to have a priest or spiritual director to talk with. For those with scrupulosity, it is essential to have face-to-face contact.

How do you redirect negative thoughts?

I personally try to *gently* transition away from temptations and negative thoughts by praying the Miraculous Medal prayer: “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.”

Sometimes I say other aspirations, like: “Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me.” The key word is the word *gently*. When talking to others, I call this method the “10-second rule.” Try to begin a short prayer within 10 seconds of the negative thought. (In addition, sometimes I just remind myself, again, that certain thoughts are “zero value.”) This works for me now that God has healed me almost completely of scrupulosity. The prayer is not a compulsion. Instead, it is a loving response and shows dependency on God and His heavenly court for help.

What advice would you give to think in the truth?

The seminary was a great place for me — seven years of learning truth. As I studied philosophy, theology, the Church Fathers, etc., I could sense little impulses of healing. I realized that I had some erroneous thinking patterns. I call them “stinkin’ thinkin’ patterns.”

One example of a stinkin’ thinkin’ pattern is: “I need to be perfect in order to be loved.” The truth that I received gave me peace. I even created a document with “spiritual nuggets” to remind myself of the truths that I had learned. An example of a spiritual nugget is from *Mark 5:36*: “Fear is useless. What is needed is trust.” Truth brings about interior peace and security. Of course, having great spiritual conversations with friends also sharpens us in our thinking patterns. I preach frequently that all of us should be studying our faith at least 15 minutes a day. I encourage the reading of the Bible, Catechism, lives of the saints, etc. Spiritual reading feeds our prayer life and faith life, which need to be developed daily. It provides nuggets of truth for people to ponder and grow. These should spark some healing in the mind and heart.

How does technology affect our thoughts?

We know we are called to contemplate God daily. We also know that time is a gift. Much technology takes away from thinking about God, and it wastes valuable time. Many people are scrolling and watching media for 4-7 hours a day outside of necessary screen time. If a person began scrolling about four hours a day at age 10, by the time he is 65, he has wasted about 14 years of his waking life. Think about all the good the person could have done with that time — rosary walks, Holy Hours, calling friends in need, exercise, power naps! I also talk about a recent book called *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt. Basically, it talks about how anxious young people have become in the last 15 years or so because of the use of smart phones. So much screen time and video games are contributing to social deprivation, sleep deprivation, attention fragmentation, and addiction. All of these effects keep us from thinking about God and praying well.

My hope is, for any reader who is struggling, that you will surrender to God, knowing that He is rooting for you. God is love, and He wants you to run to His arms, no matter what sin you have committed or “stinkin’ thinkin’ patterns” you have. He is patient; He is kind. He will give you graces and put certain people in your life to help you heal and advance.

the truth sets us

free

cf. Jn 8:32

I Who speak to you am He.

Jn 4:26



You are made for more.

Thinking about *heaven*

What we think about life after death shapes how we live now.

by Sr. Maria Frassati, SV

As human persons, we are body and soul, and so that means that once we've come into being we'll never stop existing. Our identity cannot simply be reduced to our psychological components. We are our bodies. We are our souls. We are not the sum of spontaneous streams of endless thought. Nor are we the sum of our weakness and failures, but as St. John Paul II encouraged us: "We are the sum of the Father's love for us, and our real capacity to become the image of His Son, Jesus."

God made us for Himself, and we aren't ultimately satisfied until we have Him. "Our hearts are restless, O God, until they rest in Thee," St. Augustine famously wrote. Our human nature is imprinted with a ravenous hunger for infinite goodness — Who is God. And this hunger is ultimately met in the Person of Jesus, Who not only gives Himself to us, but tells us who we are. In fact, Pope Benedict XVI described heaven itself as union with Jesus: "Jesus Himself is what we call 'heaven'; heaven is not a place but a person, the person of Him in Whom God and man are forever and inseparably one. And we go to heaven and enter into heaven to the extent that we go to Jesus Christ and enter into Him. In this sense, 'ascension into heaven' can be something that takes place in our everyday lives."

Eternal life begins now. Our Baptism is how we first received God's very life in us, making it possible to live in union with God now, in this life, readying us for a life to come. Indeed, every one of us will eventually leave this world behind, and with it, our whole collection of material and intellectual goods. Our accomplishments will fade away, remembered by some but forgotten by most. An awareness of our thoughts can serve as a temperature gauge: are we placing priority on what really matters? We can learn a lot about ourselves when we take stock of our thoughts and reflect, "What is it that I really want? Do I want heaven?"

Our thoughts remind us that we're not made for this world. Ultimately, we don't jump from random thought to random thought,

but from one good to another, in constant effort to slake a thirst for this greatest good we were made for. We think of relationships because we were made for communion, to give a total self-gift that prepares us and others to receive God Himself. We think about performing at work because we long to be unconditionally loved, seen, and to have our gifts valued. We think of rest because we are made for eternal joy and peace. If we have the courage to uncover our layers of thoughts in the context of silence and prayer, we'll learn that our thoughts are like a train moving from one good to another, in hopes of attaining the glory of God, of which earthly goods are only a fragment.


Right now, we're walking in the valley of tears, and this place isn't our homeland. No — this life is only the beginning of, as Pope Benedict XVI said, the plunge "into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time—the before and after—no longer exist," where we finally taste the fulfillment of this desire for the fullness of God we've been aching for. The Father's Eternal Word, Jesus, speaks the promise that because our hearts and thoughts ache for goodness constantly, it's because we're made for it. "Fear not, little flock," Jesus encouraged His disciples, "for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32).

Heaven is worth living for. St. Augustine wrote, "The Kingdom of Heaven, O man, requires no other price than yourself. The value of it is yourself. Give yourself for it, and you shall have it." If we spend this life seeking Him as the greatest good, Heaven will be for us the radiance of glory, the flowering of what we believed and lived. The infinite good we've searched for our whole lives will be ours. If we only ask, He will forge us into strong vessels to prepare us to receive His fullness, now. His promise to St. Angela of Foligno applies to us: "Make yourself a capacity, and I will make myself a torrent."

Heaven is not
a place but a
person, the
person of
Jesus.



As Sisters, we are meant to be an eschatological sign; that is, a reminder that every person is made for heaven. Our habits are meant to help others think about God.



PAIN IS NOT THE END OF MY STORY

WHY I'M NOT CHOOSING

MEDICAL AID IN DYING

by Charles Lewis

It was a Saturday afternoon in December. I was getting dressed in our bedroom to go out for a birthday lunch with my wife. I had just turned 61 a few days before, but I wasn't feeling my age. The two kittens we recently adopted were leaping around on our bed. Outside it was clear and cold — my favorite kind of weather.

At that moment, my life was very good. All the struggles over the years were finally paying off. I was married to a wonderful woman, and I was a well-known journalist who loved his work. In the year leading up to that fateful Saturday, I had been to Italy, Israel, and spent time hiking in the Rockies. We had paid off our house, giving us a measure of financial security. More important still, I was also getting more immersed in my Catholic faith, a true blessing.

Then in a flash, everything changed. It started with extraordinary pain. I felt I'd been hit in the back with an ice pick. I remember falling to the floor from shock. I thought that the pain would pass but it grew worse by the second. Any movement caused my body to go into terrible spasms. I had suffered, I soon found out, an attack of spinal stenosis, a narrowing of the spine that squeezes the nerves causing continual jolts of pain. Why it happened in that instant I don't know.

I spent the first 11 months from that moment in and out of delirium, hallucinating most of the time from huge doses of morphine. The morphine itself made me sick to my stomach, and at times the pain in my gut was worse than my back. I lived life minute to minute, trying to find new ways to ease the pain, hoping to find a position that would give me relief for even a few precious moments.

The days were awful, but the nights were worse. In the dark, the pain seemed to magnify. My dreams were mainly nightmares — a result, I believe, of drugs and fear. I counted the hours till sunrise.

In November 2012, I had surgery. I was on the operating table for eight hours. In the months that followed, the pain did not improve as fast as I hoped. I felt like a total wreck. I ended up leaving my job, which for me was a bitter pill. Over the next few years, the pain eased, to the point that smaller doses of morphine could make it tolerable. But even now, there are days when all I can do is lay in a fetal position and pray the pain away.

In the years leading up to this attack, I had been writing about euthanasia for the *National Post*, in my role as religion and ethics reporter. I had come to the conclusion that euthanasia would descend on Canada, and when it did, it would change our society in a profound and dark way. Unfortunately, I turned out to be right.

The polls showed that the vast majority of Canadians wanted legal euthanasia. In June 2016, Parliament made it legal for those whose death is foreseeable. In the first year of legalization, 2,000 people chose to die through the assistance of their physicians. Today, we've reached over 100,000 deaths.

The main reason people choose euthanasia is because of the fear of pain. Pain, in the popular imagination, also means a loss of autonomy and dignity. As a Catholic, I felt that autonomy was a misreading of the purpose of our lives. We are meant to live in communion with others — especially with those who are suffering and need our help. Dignity is not something imparted by man, but by God. We have it no matter what. The great Olympic swimmer and the young man wheelchair-bound all have dignity.

I soon realized that I was being called to be an even greater witness in the battle against euthanasia. I could not write for my paper, but I could speak. At least I could tell audiences now that pain for me was not a theory — I had lived through the worst of it, and I was coming out on the other side a better person for it.

You know, according to Canadian laws, I could have my life snuffed out today. Chronic pain as a category is here. Death for teens and the mentally ill is now being discussed.

My life belongs to God, not me. I will not be defined by what I can't do. Instead, I will find joy in what I can. I still want to be engaged in life and its myriad battles. I still want to write and enjoy music. I still want to see my wife, my family, and my close friends. Work is no longer the epitome of everything. Prayer has an entirely new meaning. I live in communion with millions of others for whom each day is a battle.

Most of all, I want to warn people not to be seduced by the promise of a “dignified death” through euthanasia, which treats people as if they are burdens, and pain as if it is the final word. I take great comfort in the words of St. John Paul II. He taught me that pain is holy because it is connected with Christ's passion. “Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of Redemption,” he wrote. “Thus each man can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of life.”

Charles Lewis is a friend of our community. He is former religion editor for the major Canadian newspaper, the National Post, and lives in Toronto with his wife, Kathryn Maloney. Watch one of his interviews at: dyingtomeetyou.com, a website dedicated to educating on the truth of euthanasia and assisted suicide.

UNDERSTANDING HOW I MOVE THROUGH LIFE

The Four Temperaments and How We Think

by Sr. Lumen Gloriam, SV

God has created each of us uniquely and intentionally. He has created every aspect of you, thought of you, and desired that you be. God didn't make a mistake in creating you. "If God wanted you to have characteristics other than those that you have, if God wanted you to have a different personality, a different temperament, God would have given you those characteristics, personality, temperament" (*John Cardinal O'Connor*).

But we can still be a mystery to ourselves. Sometimes we might wonder, "Why do I react that way?" or "Why do those kinds of thoughts come up so often?" or "Why do I prefer this over that?" Our reactions can cause us frustration, especially when we're trying to grow in virtue, but "just can't seem to get better."

One thing that can help us to grow is knowing our temperament. Our temperament is a collection of our natural tendencies and preferences, how we see and experience the world, and how we react to it. It is a small, but important, piece of our overall personality.

Knowing your temperament and understanding how you tend to react and interact with the world around you sets you on a path to both appreciate the good about your particular temperament and to engage virtue where you would tend to struggle most with vice or weakness. Knowing and understanding ourselves and others allows us to be compassionate and gentle when we find ourselves struggling with the same things over and over again.

Our temperaments aren't meant to be a "box", but a springboard. Even two people with the exact same temperament aren't the same person. When we acknowledge our preferences and patterns, it can be a helpful aid along the way towards knowing ourselves and letting ourselves be seen by others. Self-knowledge is always meant to lead us to self-gift, and we are capable of giving of ourselves when we are loved as we are.

But what are the different temperaments? Most people are a combination of temperaments, but the ancient Greeks generally divided them into four groups that we still use today: choleric, sanguine, melancholic, and phlegmatic. These are traits that might help you recognize which temperament might be yours:



CHOLERIC

Examples of choleric saints:

*St. Paul,
St. Jerome,
St. Catherine of Siena*

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it" (1 Cor. 9:24). Those with a choleric

temperament tend to have strong, quick, and yet lasting reactions to the external world. They are often leaders and like a good challenge, and they tend to flourish in action and competition, with enthusiasm and energy. They have the capacity to easily grasp the big picture and are confident in themselves, sharing their thoughts freely. They can often expect a lot from themselves and others, and tend to be rational and task-oriented. They take initiative and rise to challenges, but they can sometimes make quick judgments and act in impatience, pride, or anger. They may also be more cautious of developing intimacy with others.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Mt 5:9). Those with a phlegmatic temperament tend to

have slower and short-lived reactions to the external world. They are very receptive and capable of listening to, empathizing with, and loving others. They are often calm and help diffuse difficult situations by their easy-going personality. They won't typically volunteer to lead, but they have a thoughtfulness and clarity in everything. They appreciate harmony and security, avoid conflict with others, and accept rules without confrontation. They will steadily persevere when they make a commitment. Tending to "sit on the sidelines" and often refraining from sharing their thoughts, they can be complacent in sharing truth. They will often choose to steer clear of more demanding activities and can appear less emotional and more detached, which may cause them to struggle in engaging relationships.



PHLEGMATIC

Examples of phlegmatic saints:

St. Thomas Aquinas, St. John XXIII



“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Mt 5:6).

Those with a melancholic temperament tend to have initially gentler reactions to the external world, but those reactions increase in intensity over time and are long-lasting. Those with a melancholic temperament measure the world and others by the ideal and seek perfection. They are deeply reflective, and appreciate time for solitude. They tend to be consistent and organized, noticing details, creating order, and acting with precision. They are usually calm and collected when life gets hard, but they tend to take longer than others in making decisions and sometimes can become paralyzed in acting. They will often see negatives in both situations and people (including themselves), and can experience difficulty working in teams. Valuing fidelity highly, they can struggle to initiate relationships and are slower to trust others.

MELANCHOLIC

Examples of melancholic saints:
St. John the Beloved,
St. Thérèse of Lisieux,
St. Bernard of Clairvaux

“God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7).

Those with a sanguine temperament tend to have quick, but short-lived, reactions to the external world. They are very relational, accepting of others, and desiring to please those whom they love. They enjoy adventure and have a positive view of life and others. They learn quickly and are resourceful, and have an eye for detail. More easily living in the present, without dwelling on the past or the future, they are quick to admit fault and don't hold others' faults against them. They tend to be drawn by surface-level things and external pleasures and attractions, and they may struggle with depth and constancy in relationships. They can be tempted to let go of truth in order to please others or because of personal preferences; in their generosity and focus on the present moment, they can also struggle with imprudence, impulsive reactions, and forgetfulness.



SANGUINE

Examples of sanguine saints:
St. Peter,
St. Francis of Assisi,
St. Teresa of Avila

Our temperaments aren't meant to be a box, but a springboard. Self-knowledge is always meant to lead us to self-gift.

Read more about the temperaments:

Insights summarized from the book, *The Temperament God Gave You*, by Art and Laraine Bennett.

From fashion design to the *convent*

by Sr. Tirzah Mariae, SV

When I was a little girl, all I wanted was a grand adventure and a great love. I grew up with my parents and older sister in a rural town of south Louisiana, and I was most satisfied when I was off exploring, or dragging my easel into the woods, painting in the quiet and solitude. I was raised Catholic, but I fell away during my adolescent years. As a young person and an artist, I needed guttural truth, concrete beauty and reality — nothing less. The Lord captured my attention in my freshman year of Catholic high school. I had followed a boy whom I liked into the school chapel. As the boy left, Jesus revealed His presence in an unforgettable way. My heart awoke to the wonder of life — that there is a God out there who knew me, more than I knew myself. I later came to know Jesus more personally through a night of Eucharistic adoration, where my whole life took a 180 degree turn by the joy of encountering His love for me. I studied fashion design in college, with the dream to help women remember their beauty through clothing that reflected it, and after graduating I moved to New York City and worked for Broadway and later for Ralph Lauren. And I loved the beauty of my life — I attended the opera, hiked, swing danced at jazz clubs, yet at the same time, my heart grew restless. Through prayer, I had the sense that Jesus was the adventure that I sought, and nothing else would satisfy me. While living in New York City, I knew of the Sisters of Life and thought they would be an easy, local, way of exploring this question of religious life. When they explained their charism of life — which is a gift given by the Holy Spirit to help people realize the beauty and worth of their hearts and life — I realized this was the very passion that was leading me in the fashion industry. In this, God invited me, not to leave this passion behind, but to belong exclusively to Him and to help Him in His work of clothing people with the truth of His vision of love for them.



Photo credit: Sean McCullough

Thinking Through Something Yourself

The Trouble with AI



Sr. Mary Margaret Hope, SV

Which phone should I buy? What's the fastest way to get downtown? How should I respond to that angry email? Should I break up with my boyfriend? Asking questions is part of what makes us human. We want to understand the world around us, and we want to know the best path forward. Today, it's easy to turn to artificial intelligence (AI) for answers to questions that range from the mundane to the deeply personal. AI is very good at coming up with fast, often accurate solutions. But can AI really help us think?

Human thought is driven by the desire for truth. We want to know what actually is so that we can actively engage with reality. The AI chatbot, on the other hand, does not live in the actual world, but rather, it operates in a virtual world of data and statistics. This "world" has rigid horizons limited by the model's training and available information set. The AI "bot" is not seeking to discover the truth, but it is seeking the response that will most probably satisfy you, its user, based on the data it has been given. It calculates its "replies," word by word, using weighted probabilities with a bit of randomness thrown in to make it appear more natural. If AI can't find a satisfactory answer, it will simply guess, and sometimes it gets things spectacularly wrong. These AI "hallucinations," such as when chatbots invent historical events that never actually happened, can be both funny and dangerous. Now, the chatbot is generating answers from a series of algorithms and probabilities, packaged in the style of a human response. The problem is, there is an immense gulf between what is probable and what is actual — a gulf that no artificial intelligence can cross.

Of course, we ourselves often reason using probabilities, especially when making decisions where the outcome is unknown. When we lack the full picture, we need to make an educated guess. But what the chatbot is doing is fundamentally different: it's not using reason, but is giving you the response that will most likely please you. Whatever you tell it becomes part of its dataset, whether it corresponds to reality or not. So when the truth really matters, it is much better to think things through with a real friend.

We are part of reality and contribute to it, but on its deepest level, reality must be received from God.

A friend might give bad advice at times, but a true friend does not seek to foster your delusions, even when that might temporarily gratify you. A good friend has contact with the source of reality, God Himself, and is therefore capable of knowing what actually is. Reality — what is — is not something we can create or manipulate to satisfy our own desires, or the desires of our friends or "users."

Only God truly creates reality, and everything that is ultimately comes from Him. That is why reality can never be reduced to a set of data. Our capacity to know truth is part of the gift of our human nature; it permits us to know and love God, which a probability calculator can never do. Made in God's image, we have been given the ability to transform the world around us, cooperating with Him in a kind of co-creation. But even though we can imagine just about anything, we cannot necessarily make it true. Accordingly, even if the virtual world of AI advances to the point that it seems indistinguishable from reality, that won't make it real. We are part of reality and contribute to it, but on its deepest level, reality must be received from God, the source of all being and actuality.

Only a fellow dweller and knower of reality is capable of entering into truth, love, and relationship. AI is useful for performing certain tasks, but nothing can replace the full richness of human experience or human thought. The data accessible to AI does not exhaust reality, and a random number generator does not permit creativity. Thinking things through ourselves, in relation with other people, is both in keeping with our dignity and the best way to reach our true goal, knowledge of Truth Himself.

Reference: Antiqua et Nova: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence (28 January 2025)

Tips for remaining humane while using AI:

Take "device-free moments" throughout your day. Reflection is key — make time for quiet pondering, whether it be while commuting or stopping by a church. Give yourself permission to not have to know everything instantly. Let yourself enjoy wondering and thinking deeply.



How your *imagination* can lead you to God

By Sr. Fidelity Grace, SV and Sr. Rose Patrick O'Connor, SV

One day, Swiss engineer George de Mestral examined burrs sticking to his dog's fur after a forest hike and wondered whether something similar could become a fastener. His brilliant system of nylon hooks and loops became the global success known as "velcro."

Every life-altering invention in history has begun with an idea sparked from the capacity for creativity known as the imagination. Imagination is the distinctly human power that allows us to form new ideas and images beyond what is accessible through our senses. When we imagine, our brains pull together past experiences, combine them with current thoughts and emotions, and conjure up future possibilities.

Imagination is a gift from God; but like any other gift, it can be used for good or evil. It can draw us closer to God or further away from Him.

In a certain sense, "you are what you eat" in the world of imagination. If we read about the lives of the saints and heroes, it can help us flourish. But stories with dark or twisted narratives can warp how we see ourselves and others. Indeed, our imagination can easily be used in ways different from how

God intended it — such as through pornography, which distorts the way we see others, looking at them as objects instead of free persons. "The problem with pornography is not that it shows too much of the person, but that it shows far too little" (Pope St. John Paul II), and that it misuses the power God has given us to know. Our imagination is designed to be oriented towards the good, the true, and the beautiful, and to draw us to experience and participate in God's creative work.

Jesus constantly invited His listeners to use their imaginations for good, using parables to help them fathom the mercy of God. So conformed were the minds of His disciples to "an eye for an eye" legalism, that the stories about the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son would have been completely revolutionary. But such was the essence of the Incarnation! God becoming man was, for us in our fallen state, something totally beyond our wildest dreams.

The Incarnation provoked endless fodder for art, music, drama, and literature. In fact, the very nature of Christianity — a religion of history and mystery — demands the use of creative mediums. As Pope St. John Paul II asserted in his *Letter to Artists*, "in order to communicate the message entrusted to her by Christ, the Church needs art."

Why? Because art and stories — fruits of imagination — connect us to the deeper meaning of life. Some philosophers have tried to understand the human person through strictly scientific or logical accounting. But there's a mystery and depth to us that's beyond human explanation. The fact that we can think abstractly and wonder about a life beyond what we see and know already speaks of our capacity for something eternal. Stories of tragedy and "happily-ever-afters" give us a glimpse of this "something more" by explaining the human person in a fuller way.

That's why great literature can help illuminate our human experience, correct our blind spots, and sharpen our view of reality. For example: though occupying the library's "fantasy" shelves, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* opens our minds to the reality of sin and redemption, sacrifice and hope; the kindly bishop in Victor Hugo's epic *Les Miserables* stirs our hearts to imitate his compassion; the brilliantly-devised tale of shrewd master and novice demons in *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis moves us to examine our consciences in a new way; the brilliantly grotesque and shocking nature of Flannery O'Connor's short stories can put words to the raw experience of a person overwhelmed by trauma or grief and can articulate the radical nature of redemption.

We can invite God into our imagination, not just through literature and art, but in prayer. St. Ignatius of Loyola became known for his method of imaginative prayer in which we enter a Gospel scene and "become" one of the characters in the story. Envisioning myself on the boat with the disciples, I can imagine the storms in my own life and let Jesus look at me with love, casting out fear in my heart. I can even allow healing to come into painful personal memories when I enter that memory and imagine Jesus there with me. God can, and wants to, work powerfully in and through your imagination to lead you to truth and life, present in His Body, the Church. Let Him lift your mind to Himself. Be not afraid!

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