IMPRINT

A PUBLICATION OF THE SISTERS OF LIFE / FALL 2026 ISSUE



Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

FEAR NOT

therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Mt 9:29-31

While serving as a Navy Chaplain, our founder, John Cardinal O'Connor, endured a terrifying trial of faith during the Vietnam War. Far from home and all that was familiar, the air was heavy with the anxiety of the men. In the midst of this, Fr. O'Connor experienced a deep interior emptiness. He said, "I felt no joy … I felt no faith and felt no hope."

There are times in all our lives when fear seems insurmountable and our faith seems small. Our own family might not understand, friends pull away or resources fail. It is in these times in our lives when support is crucial and belief in God's love most pressing.

In the demands of war, Fr. O'Connor found a way to endure. It wasn't a matter of strength or changing his circumstances; instead, he remembered the power of love. He recounted: "Love remained, the Love saved, the Love purified, but I had to let it become active again within me…. I had to remember that the Eucharistic Christ is not simply the presence of Christ, but the presence of Christ Who is Love."

When we remember God who is Love and His promise to us, "I will be with you always until the end of time" (*Mt 28:20*). Life and even joy become possible again, in the most unthinkable places.

As Sisters of Life, we have the privilege of accompanying women who live with radiant faith in some of the darkest circumstances. Faith moves us beyond feelings.

Every human person is loved by God in a way that is both infinite and exclusive. No matter what trial or triumph we find ourselves in, we can choose to receive His love in the way He makes possible.

May God, Who makes all things new, remind us of His love and power to save. May He, Who holds us in being and walks with us in the darkest valleys, fill us with His love which "casts out all fear" (*1 Jn 4:18*).



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

Mother Mary Concepta, SV

God never leaves us alone.



Communion is the answer to fear

Why just trying to be braver doesn't satisfy our hearts

by Sr. Mary Margaret Hope, SV

It's a funny thing: as human persons, each of us longs to be loved and to love, but when we're afraid, we can find ourselves fleeing from the communion and love we actually desire. Instead, we can tend to isolate or try to white-knuckle our way through life. Why? Because, as psychologists point out, our personalities may be marked by basic fears which are often rooted in childhood experiences. As adults, this tendency towards particular fears can become a barrier to authentic communion. It can be helpful to name four core fears we might experience:

1. **Fear of intimacy:** We might tend to view others, even subconsciously, as a threat to our personal identity. We want to maintain absolute boundaries, a solid wall of defense against the world. Sometimes this means we are afraid to let others in, and sometimes it means we are afraid to let ourselves be known. Sadly, the price we pay for our perceived "safety" is the loss of real, authentic relationships.
2. **Fear of individuality:** On the other hand, we can be so afraid of rejection, of losing the relationships on which we depend, that we hesitate to assert ourselves. We live in a kind of helpless passivity, relying on others' opinions to define us. The natural emotion of fear is meant to move us to action, but when excessive fear keeps us from acting, it frustrates its own purpose and results in ceaseless anxiety.
3. **Fear of freedom:** We can become so reliant on external structures to preserve our identity that we are terrified of any change. This permits us to experience control, but the rejection of change is often a rejection of our own interior freedom. We narrow our interior world for the sake of material stability instead of living out of the freedom of the children of God.
4. **Fear of dependence:** Another fundamental tendency is to lash out at anything or anyone which threatens to limit our freedom. We refuse to accept that we are finite, dependent creatures on whom others also depend. When others place demands on us, or we have to rely on others, we see ourselves as victims instead of seeing our human neediness as a gift. We fear the necessity and limits which also belong to our humanity and are the instruments of communion.

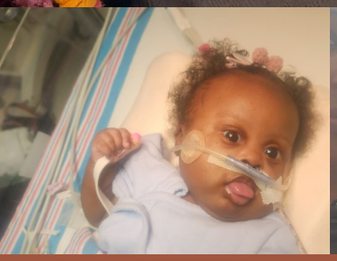
> The only answer to your fear and anxiety is the knowledge that Jesus is here, intimately present with us.
>
> -Dr. Bob Schuchts

Though we may be disposed to one of these particular fears, all of us experience each of them at different moments in life. Naming them helps us to recognize that they are all ultimately fears of the wrong things. **Real communion never threatens our integrity. True love is never conditional.** Individuality and dependence are not incompatible, and our interior freedom is neither threatened nor limited by our finite, needy existence.

Our weakness, need, and desire for relationship is the stuff of connection and communion with others. Total self-sufficiency only isolates. Every child knows what to do with fear — run to Mom and Dad for protection. This remains the best strategy for adults, too. As Dr. Bob Schuchts urges those struggling with anxiety: "You don't need to muster more courage right now. Courage is not the opposite of fear. The opposite of fear is communion. The only answer to your fear and anxiety is the knowledge that Jesus is here, intimately present with us."

Let us name the truth about our fears, but then bring them straight to His Heart and His Mother Mary's heart. God has given us our freedom, He has given us to ourselves, but He never leaves us alone. Instead of letting fear drive us away from communion with others, let's allow communion to drive away fear. Whatever threats we face, whether real or mistaken, it is only His perfect love, experienced in Himself and through the love of others, that has the power to cast out all fear. We can pray: *Jesus, I give you permission to love me. You see me; You know me. Speak truth into my fears, and bring me into communion with You and with others.*







Love is stronger than fear

An interview with Gevone
by Sr. Miriam Bethel, SV

I left it all in God's hands.

When Gevone received news that her baby girl had a prenatal diagnosis of Down Syndrome, she courageously chose life, despite continual pressure from her doctors to have an abortion. She reached out to various groups for support, and received a call back from the Sisters of Life. From that point forward, we accompanied Gevone, walking alongside her as she navigated the many appointments and conversations throughout her pregnancy.

Can you share your story with us?
There were obstacles all the way through until Violet was born. Most people weren't in support of me continuing the pregnancy. It was a hard time. All those weeks, the doctors offered abortion. I told them, "I don't want that." I just wanted the information for what my child was facing — I didn't feel like I was being treated like other pregnant women. One doctor just kept telling me what could happen, and I was thinking, "Those risks run with every pregnancy." You really have to learn advocacy from the beginning!

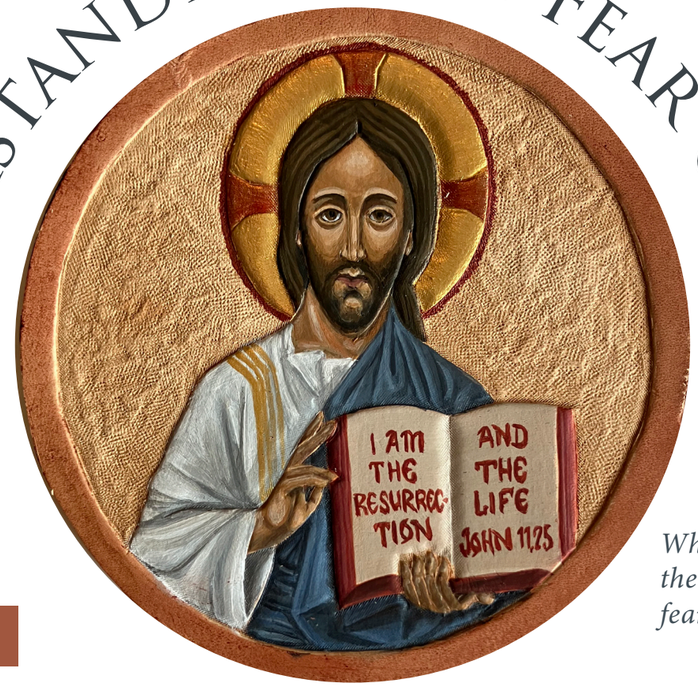
How has God helped you face your fears in this journey?
I left it all in God's hands. I had faith that she was going to be okay; otherwise, she wouldn't have been placed with me! Prayer — it's the reason that Violet is here. I didn't feel alone in the process, and that was the most important thing.

How have you seen perfect love cast out fear in your story?
It was scary, but love is stronger than fear. I found strength in others who prayed and were positive. Prayer works! After Violet was born, she was taken to the cardiac unit and she had an ostomy bag. The doctors said that she would need to get a permanent feeding tube. But I said, "I know her. I believe in her." I had so much faith in God and His care for her. They did a swallow study, a test to determine if she could swallow without aspirating or choking. When she did the test, they had low, low expectations for her. But she did better than most babies! The speech pathologist who took her in said there's only been one other baby in her whole career that did as well as Violet in the swallow study. She could not believe that a baby who was in the NICU for six months, who had undergone heart surgery, was able to pass the swallow study like that. And I said, "You don't understand how big my faith is!"

What would you say to another mom who has received a prenatal diagnosis for her child?
People say a lot of things: "The baby is going to suffer," or "This child's life isn't going to be as good as another child's." I don't find those things to be true. It's hard to tell somebody who is pregnant and getting a diagnosis that everything is going to be okay, because you can't say it with certainty. But, I would say, "You're going to love your child like any other mom is going to love her child." It was really hard for me to imagine what it would be like on the other side of pregnancy — I got so stuck on the diagnosis, I couldn't imagine the joy it would be to bring a new baby home!

I can say now: This child is going to be a joy and light in your life. You are going to love your baby so much! This baby needs your love more than they need you to be an expert on their diagnosis. You were chosen, and God gave you this baby because maybe He saw something in you that needed this baby.

UNDERSTANDING THE FEAR OF GOD



Original artwork by Sr. Lilia Consolata, SV

Why is fear a gift of the Holy Spirit? Isn't fear a bad thing?

by Sr. Maria Frassati, SV

Fear often has a negative connotation to it. We don't like how it feels. And most of us have seen how self-destructive it can be when we let it run rampant. But let's name what fear really is: it's an emotion that's part of our human nature, helping us to obtain the good and avoid evil, especially in hard times. Fear moves us to avoid a present evil that threatens us. It's inherently good; when well-ordered, it does its job. Fear is what makes us move out of the street so we don't get hit by a car. Fear propels us to run away from a rabid raccoon. Fear moves us to protect ourselves and others — a natural good.

However, we often bring this earthly fear into our relationship with God — where it doesn't belong. God becomes a danger worth avoiding when we reduce Him to a traffic cop, waiting for us to step a single toe out of line and holding on to all our mistakes. Or, we imagine Him repulsed in anger at the sight of our brokenness and sin. But holy fear — a gift of the Holy Spirit — can serve as a remedy for our disordered fear of God by transforming our vision to see God as He truly is: a loving Father Whose love is worth everything.

While natural fear moves us away from evil to seek a greater good, like self-protection, the fear of God orders our hearts to seek God as the greatest good of all — so much so, that the real fear is to be separated from Him. Archbishop Luis Martínez describes it as that gift through which we cry, "Everything, except to be parted from Him: everything, except to lose our close union with the Beloved!" This gift increases our hunger to remain with God at heart, even when worldly goods tempt us elsewhere. And abiding with Him, especially through life's storms, changes us.

> Fear of God as a gift of the Holy Spirit heals the distortion caused by an earthly fear of God.

Think about it: we naturally become like those with whom we spend most of our time. We can take on their mannerisms and become attentive to things they love and hate — even their favorite colors or their pet peeves. But more profoundly, we take their heart into ours. "Fear of the Lord is the first stage of wisdom" (*Ps 111:10*) because staying by our Lord's side teaches us to see as He sees and love what He loves. Our eyes adjust to see His loving providence, wisely ordering all things for our ultimate good. We're filled with awe and wonder at His infinite goodness, beauty and truth. At the same, He enlightens us to know how precious we are to Him. In coming to know Him, we come to know ourselves. For this reason, Pope St. John Paul II said, "He who seeks the Kingdom of God finds himself." Grounded in a true vision of our dignity, we can help others know theirs.

Fear of God as a gift of the Holy Spirit heals the distortion caused by an earthly fear of God. Shockingly, we learn He's not looking for our least mistakes; He's constantly giving us every help we need to know His love and care for us. And He's not repulsed by our brokenness. He doesn't move away from us in our sins; instead, He draws even nearer to us in our misery, for as Jesus told St. Faustina, "The greater the sinner, the greater the right he has to My mercy." The Spirit's healing work invites us beyond ourselves to gaze with wonder upon His glory, with a profound childlike confidence that we are held by Him. In this, we are drawn up into the eternal praise of heaven, giving us a foretaste of the joy that awaits us.

We need each other

An interview with Taylor Hyatt

by Sr. Léonie Thérèse, SV

What's your story, and what drew you to become involved as a spokesperson against euthanasia?

Because I was born prematurely and with a disability, I was immersed in a lot of medical settings as a kid, learning about the human body, going to all these therapies so that I could live with my body in the best possible way. So I was a bit of a nerd about medical things. I was raised in a nominally Catholic home, baptized out of tradition and placed in the Catholic school system, where they teach you the very basics: God exists and He loves you. This planted the seeds for my deeper conversion in middle school.

Two people had a really deep impact on my life and my conversion. The first is Tracy Latimer, a young girl with cognitive, mobility and communication disabilities. When she was 12, her dad ended her life because he thought she had a poor quality of life and he "couldn't bear to watch her suffer." I was born with the same condition she had, about a year and a half before she was killed. I grew up hearing her name in the news, and I've always felt a connection to her.

In February 2005, I came home from school one day and saw a story on TV about Terri Schiavo, a woman who had suffered brain damage and whose husband was fighting for her feeding tube to be removed. I knew what a feeding tube was. I knew people who used them. I kept watching and realized: "She's not comatose at all. She's responding to her family, even with her very severe physical and cognitive limitations, and the only life support she needs is a feeding tube. Don't we all need to eat?"

I started following her story, and I pondered these questions for myself: *Is there a God out there? Does He have a plan for Terri? Does He have a plan for me?* I watched the coverage straight through to when she died. When I found out what happened, I made a promise to myself and to God that I would stand up for people in her position.



Taylor is a good friend of Sr. Charity, and of our community.

> The Lord is with you. He made you. He loves you. He is going to be with you, no matter what.

Some of my roles so far have included working as a policy analyst for a disability rights organization and as an adviser to a Member of Parliament when euthanasia was first legalized in Canada. Basically, if there is some way for me to get involved, you can bet your boots I will be!

Are there any life experiences you can share that have impacted your own self-image?

A moment stopped me in my tracks a few years ago. I went to the emergency room because I was coughing and I couldn't catch my breath. My family and closest friends were out of town, so I was alone and tired and sick. When the doctor came to see me, she said, "We don't know what you have, but it's affecting your breathing. There's a chance you might need oxygen. Is that something you would want?" I said, "Yes!" And then the doctor asked, "Are you sure?" I wanted to say, "Do you know what I do at work every day? I read and I write about stories just like this one. I love my life! Darn right, I want oxygen!" But of course, I was polite instead.

That hospital visit left me quite shaken up. That was a wake-up call to how important this work is. I'm advocating for myself and others. We're all full, real people with real lives and unchangeable worth, even if the life of somebody with a disability might look different.

What impact do you think fear has on people considering assisted suicide or euthanasia?

There are a lot of misconceptions out there about what life with a disability is like, and if you don't see it, you fear it. The idea that "I would rather die than have a disability" is more common than you think, and it's at the root of a lot of support for assisted suicide and euthanasia. People fear living in nursing homes and other institutions where they might be isolated and mistreated, living with devices like a feeding tube or breathing supports, which are portrayed as limiting and scary. [But] it is possible to live well with these things, to plan, work, dream, hope, enjoy life, love, and be loved.

Do you have any words of encouragement against fear?

The first line of Psalm 27 is my favorite-ever Old Testament passage: "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid?" He is with you. He made you. He loves you. He is going to be with you, no matter what circumstances come into your path; it is almost a guarantee that some kind of illness or disability or suffering will be part of it. Don't shrink from those. Don't reject the gift of your life and that of your loved ones. He will be with you.

What truths do you think are important to convey about human life?

We need to remember that we all need each other and we belong to each other. No matter how old or young somebody is, whether they have disabilities, live on the street, or work as a businessman on Wall Street, each and every person we come across matters to God and should matter to each one of us. There is not a single person we encounter day to day whom God does not love and who does not have a story worth telling, as part of the great story that God is writing in the world.

overcoming the fear *of being a burden*

by Sr. Lumen Gloriae, SV

Each of us desires to know that we are loved. Each of us wants to know that we're valued, precious, and that others care about us. Ultimately, we're all longing to know: "Am I good? Really good?"

The knowledge of what we've done or what's been done to us in the past may lead us to wonder, "Could anyone love me if they really knew me?" Or, we might look into the future and know that we might not be physically or mentally capable of doing the very things that seem to give our life meaning now, which causes us to worry, "Will I just be a burden to the people I love?" Or we might just look at ourselves today and question, "Am I lovable right now, just as I am?"

Our world tells us that our goodness as human persons is dependent upon what we do, produce, or achieve. We might be tempted to believe that we're only good if we make ourselves good, that we can only be loved if we earn love. We can be afraid of being unlovable or of being a burden, when we most want to hear someone else say, "I love you just as you are, and not for what you do!"

The opposite of a burden is a good gift. You have been created by a good God to be a good gift. In Genesis, when God looked at His creation of the human person, He saw that it was "very good" — but the original Hebrew is more accurately translated as "exceedingly good" (*Gen 1:31*). You are exceedingly good. And "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (*Rom 11:29*), which means that God never stops speaking this truth over you: You are exceedingly good. We become secure in this identity when we look to Him who loves us unconditionally.

When I feel like I'm a trouble or a task, I can remember that God's "right hand upholds me" (*Ps 63:8*). My problems aren't too much for Him, and I'm not too much for Him. Even when I feel burdened or weighed down, *I'm* not a burden. God chose to create me. He has chosen me — I am here because He wants me to exist, and so my life is a gift and not a burden.

When we can't shake the fear that we're unlovable, we can look at Jesus on the Cross and know: "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (*Jn 3:16*). Nothing that we have done, or that has been done to us, can stop God from loving us. Jesus said, "Father, they are Your gift to Me" (*Jn 17:24*). You are loved by Infinite Love Himself, from before the foundation of the world and unto eternity (*see Eph 1:4*).

Precisely in times of suffering, loss, or diminishment, when we find it hard to believe in our own goodness, we still give the gift of ourselves and draw forth the gifts of others. "Suffering, which is present under so many different forms in our human world, is also present in order to unleash love in the human person, that unselfish gift of one's 'I' on behalf of other people, especially those who suffer. The world of human suffering unceasingly calls for, so to speak, another world: the world of human love..." (*Salvifici Doloris* 29)

And then, we'll be free to see the goodness in those around us, who might also feel like they are a burden or unlovable. We give each other a gift by participating in God's unconditional love for those we meet. When we look for the good, call it out, and rejoice in it, we help others to know and experience their goodness, too. Because we've all been created as a good gift, to love others as we've been loved by God becomes another source of "perfect love [that] casts out fear" (*1 Jn 4:18*).



I don't have to grasp at my own goodness.
I can simply receive it.



"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will hear you. You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart."
- Jer 29:11-13

THE FEAR OF COMMITMENT

by Sr. Cora Caeli, SV and Sr. Marie Veritas, SV











Our Sisters were accompanying a young woman who found herself unexpectedly pregnant. Fear was paralyzing her decision-making. One day, out of nowhere, she sent us a message with the link to a popular praise and worship song: "Fear Is Not My Future." She had been listening to it on repeat. It was getting her through this tough time, reminding her of a deeper love that goes beyond the daily fears.

Fear is not your future; Jesus is. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will hear you" (*Jer 29:11-12*). At every moment and with every breath, God is extending His life to you — which is full of hope, not fear.

Fear can hold us back from making commitments on a variety of levels — from saying "yes" to a weekend event, taking a job across the country or engaging deeper discernments of relationship or a vocational call. Stepping out of our comfort zones can be difficult, especially when the threat of uncertainty, the worry of abandonment, the possibility of suffering, the fear of failure, or the sheer amount of possibilities is overwhelming. But if left unchecked, fear of commitments can lead to isolation, loneliness and a disordered view of freedom. Why? Because love that is conditional doesn't satisfy our hearts, and absolute autonomy only breeds anxiety. We're ultimately made for everlasting communion, friendship, relationship — a love that says, "I won't leave."

God is love; He never changes and He never stops loving (*see Heb 13:8*). Inviting Jesus into the root of our hesitations, fears and anxieties can help us get unstuck. "Perfect love casts out all fear"(*1 Jn 4:18*). The truth of our being is we are not alone, even if we feel like it sometimes. Each of us is held in existence by God right now and at every moment, cared for and chosen by the Lord.

Making a commitment requires trust in this truth, especially because we can't see how everything will unfold. Commitment is an act of faith in God's goodness and in our own dignity; as St. John Henry Newman wrote, "Therefore, I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away.... He knows what He is about."

Commitment means using our freedom to choose the way of love, in truth. "Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought" (Pope St. John Paul II). We can think about making a decision all day long, but at some point we have to act; we have to take a leap in one direction or the other, following the lights the Lord has given us as best as we can. In making a commitment, we let go of other possibilities, which gives us the space to love more fully and simply.

Providing we have chosen in accordance with God's commandments and the natural law written on our hearts, we can put our whole selves into the good choice we have made. Instead of being tossed by "what ifs" and "shoulds", we can trust that God will be with us and guide us, especially when we encounter the Cross. Commitment might demand sacrifice and lead to suffering, but suffering doesn't mean failure. Ultimately, we find ourselves when we make a sincere gift of self — which is most clearly exemplified in Jesus' death and Resurrection (*Gaudium et Spes, 24*). Sin does not have the final word. Darkness is not dark for Him, and everything — past, present, and future — is known to His sight (*see Ps 139:12*). He tells us with confidence and peace, in the midst of our day, in the midst of decisions that need to be made: "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid" (*Mt 14:27*).

May He help us choose to commit to His love, and let us allow this commitment to anchor and free us to love deeper, richer and more fully. "Take courage! Dare to make definitive decisions, because in reality these are the only decisions which do not destroy your freedom, but guide it in the right direction, enabling you to move forward and attain something worthwhile in life" (Pope Benedict XVI).

Fear is not your future; Jesus is.

FINAL VOWS 2026



August 6, 2026 / St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York

Left to right: Sr. Maria Annunciata of the Holy Spirit, SV; Sr. Elena Marie of the Glory of the Cross, SV; Archbishop Ronald Hicks of New York; Sr. Eden Marie, Spouse of the Word, SV











"My heart always longed for an authentic, total and beautiful love – one worthy of my whole heart and life. In Jesus is the fulfillment of all my hopes; it is my greatest joy to belong entirely to Him forever."

-Sr. Elena Marie, SV







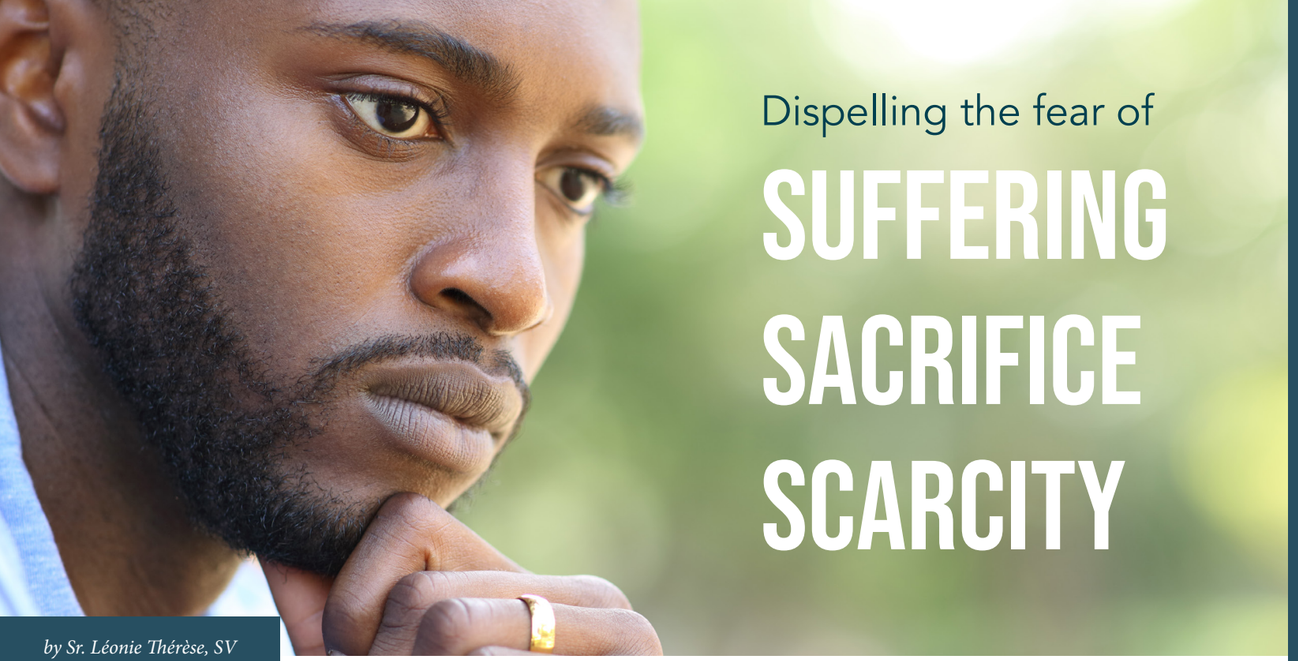
"The person who opens her heart, her mind... to the Word of God, will find that nothing again will ever be casual or small, but everything will be invested with light and overspilled with divinity, because the Word is the light of the world." - *John Cardinal O'Connor*

FIRST VOWS 2026



July 4, 2026 / Sacred Heart Parish, New York

Left to right: Sr. Perpetua Rose, SV; Sr. Anna Simeon, SV; Sr. Esther Hope, SV; Sr. Colleen Eden, SV



Dispelling the fear of

SUFFERING SACRIFICE SCARCITY

by Sr. Léonie Thérèse, SV

As human persons, we have a natural aversion to suffering. We fear the unknown "what ifs" of life. We spend time worrying about things that could happen. We fear that if we do choose God, then we will lose the things we love or somehow be diminished.

In Francis Thompson's famous poem, "The Hound of Heaven," he chronicles his fearful fleeing from the pursuit of Love, a love which was terrifying because of what it could ask in return. This fear is captured with the lines, "For, though I knew His love Who followed, Yet was I sore adread, Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside." There is a part of each of our hearts that does not fully trust that God is enough. We fear that in following Him, something will be lacking. And so, the poem continues: "I fled Him, down the nights and down the days…"

But the truth is that God doesn't hold anything back, and He never leaves us to face suffering alone. Jesus is not a stranger to our pain. He understands our suffering from the inside out. He has experienced for Himself our ache, anguish, and anxiety. Jesus has entered into our suffering and redeemed it. It is not without purpose.

> Jesus is not a stranger to our pain. He understands our suffering from the inside out.

With His Cross and Resurrection, Jesus brought life out of death. He took what is otherwise meaningless — suffering — and transformed it to become an unexpected powerhouse, when united to Him. Jesus lives His own life in and through us. United with His love, our suffering takes on a redemptive quality. He gives us a share in both His Cross and His Resurrection, which open the doors of heaven to us.

Jesus tells us, "Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (*Mt 16:25*). The Saints are witnesses to this paradox. St. Maximilian Kolbe said, "Let us remember that love lives through sacrifice and is nourished by giving. Without sacrifice, there is no love." St. Maximilian proclaimed this in action when he offered his life for a fellow prisoner in Auschwitz, an act of sacrificial love that was a tremendous light in a place of much darkness. During their time in the starvation bunker, he led the other men in hymns and prayer, transcending the degrading and inhumane conditions in which they found themselves.

Countless Saints have lived lives marked by joy even in the midst of sacrifice and suffering. We can think of: St. Teresa of Calcutta living through years of spiritual darkness; Pope St. John Paul II enduring physical ailment at the end of his life; St. Damien of Molokai succumbing to leprosy after ministering to those with the disease; St. Faustina suffering misunderstanding from her Sisters; the North American martyrs heroically giving their lives in the face of brutal torture; St. Gianna Molla suffering the end stages of cancer; or St. Jeanne Jugan experiencing humiliation and detraction from her own community. Each of these Saints united their sufferings to Christ's, and so were united to Jesus in His Resurrection. These holy men and women lived from the depths of who God called them to be, and what they suffered, they suffered for love. Love imbued their sacrifices and sufferings with meaning and unleashed grace in the world.

You were made for greatness. Your love is powerful. Let us not be afraid to live fully, to make a gift of ourselves in love. As Pope Benedict XVI urged us, "Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away and gives you everything! When we give ourselves to Him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open wide the doors to Christ — and you will find true life."



A Life Offered for Life

Servant of God Claire de Castelbajac (1953–1975)



by Sr. Maris Stella, SV

Claire was a young, passionate, and talented French artist who offered her life for the cause of human life. Her childhood was immersed in the beauty of nature on her parents' farm, where she tended animals, wandered through fields and played board games at night with her family. As an art student, living in Italy, she wrestled with God and confronted temptations to abandon her faith; she begged God for the grace to remain pure and chaste. Through contemplating sacred art, her interior storm subsided and a new vibrant faith sprang up. She announced, "I believe that I was chosen by God to be the happiest of my generation."

In 1974, as the French parliament moved to legalize abortion, Claire campaigned to defend the unborn alongside Servant of God Jérôme Lejeune. Ten days after abortion was legalized, on December 30, 1974, Claire made a pilgrimage to Lourdes, France, where she offered her life to God.

Mysteriously, on January 17, 1975, the day the abortion law was promulgated, Claire was diagnosed with meningitis, which would end her life in a matter of days. Those who attended her funeral were astonished by the joy and sense of holiness present. People began to pray to her and have experiences of her miraculous intercession, especially regarding vocations to religious life. Though she only lived to the age of twenty-one, Claire de Castelbajac leaves a legacy of a life filled with purpose and meaning, even in the midst of trials and suffering. Her life radiates the joy of one who has been touched by divine beauty and transformed into light.

Walking in the Dark

"Even the darkness is not dark to You; the night is bright as the day." Ps 139:12



by Sr. Maris Stella, SV

I was eleven years old when I landed my first job delivering newspapers. I would wake up before sunrise to distribute the papers around my neighborhood. Then, one day a week, I would walk the route and knock on the doors of my customers to collect payment, and oftentimes generous tips. Late one wintry afternoon, I found myself a few streets away from home as darkness set in.

As I walked along the quiet road with no streetlights to guide me, fear began to creep into my heart. I reasoned that I had walked the path many times and the next house was close by. Though afraid, I put one foot in front of the other. Then suddenly, unexpectedly, as quickly as the darkness came, I was strengthened by a sense of peace — something I could not have generated on my own. Even though I was immersed in a thick darkness, I knew I was safe, and that I was not alone. I would soon arrive home where I was expected and awaited. I knew then as I know now: God is with me.

This vivid childhood memory flashed through my mind as I pondered the experience of spiritual darkness. In my spiritual life, I have not infrequently found myself walking in the dark. At first, it's disorienting, confusing and discouraging, and I grasp for ways to find light. I know that, as human beings living in a fallen world, it's normative to experience times of shadows and dryness, when it seems like God is absent or not interested in our lives. These times of desolation are opportunities to choose God (even when we don't feel like it), and thus to grow in faith, hope, and love.

Sometimes, however, the darkness we experience is different and more intense than ordinary desolation. In these periods, God's wisdom permits particular darkness and emptiness to purify and sanctify us in a deeper way; spiritual writers assure us that, in these "dark nights", God draws us closer to Him and unites us to Himself. Saint John of the Cross explains that this kind of darkness can result from an experience of an overwhelming, excessive infusion of light that blinds our senses — like moving from a dark room out into radiant, brilliant sunlight so that our vision is blinded, and we can't see. Christ is this sunlight Who radiates in the darkness of our lives and our hearts, which transforms us and purifies us. And so, we are called learn to trust, to hope, and to believe more deeply.

When I find myself in darkness, I remember the lesson I learned as a kid walking along a quiet street. I can put one foot in front of the other and move forward because in faith I know I am not alone; there is One who walks beside me. He knows the way because He is the way. There is no need to be afraid.



Conquering the fear of failure

by Sr. Fidelity Grace, SV

It was Thanksgiving Day. In an effort to express personalized gratitude, someone had created signs affirming each Sister. Right next to the "Compassionate Sister" sign and the "Good Listener" sign was this sign: "Sr. Fidelity Grace: Lover of Turth." Yes, I love truth. I cringe when I see typos. The magnificent irony still causes me to chuckle.

I was your typical overachiever growing up. The motto of my 4-H program was: "To make the best better." Combine that with the slogan of a traveling poet at our school — "You're *never* done!" — and you get an endless cycle of striving for perfection. I spent summers creating elaborate projects for the county fair, my eyes set on the Grand Champion prizes. At school, I wasn't satisfied with anything less than an A. As editor of the school newspaper, I carried that same critical eye throughout the rest of life. I was first chair trumpet in the top band as a freshman. The few times a performance didn't go well, I felt like the world was coming to an end. In college, I was active in numerous clubs and jobs, striving for a robust resume, and graduated *Summa Cum Laude*.

> Perfection in God's eyes is not flawlessness but fullness …of Him!

But as I entered the working world, my "successes" became less noticeable. Teaching became a thankless task, and I questioned whether I was doing it well. There were no trophies to be obtained and I was often met with indifference or rejection. The "tyranny of the shoulds" (as psychologists deem these negative thought patterns) haunted me. I struggled to accept myself as God had created me and to love myself as God loved me, because without any achievements and accolades, I didn't think I was enough.

A priest I knew would preach about "Mind the Gap", the sign in British train stations warning passengers to watch out for the space between the train and platform. He said there is a "gap" between who we are and who we are created to be. I tried to fill this gap myself, believing I could make myself holy by praying more, fasting more, or doing bigger things for God (to impress Him or earn His love). I later came to understand this behavior as dangerously close to the Pelagian heresy which holds we can achieve salvation on our own.

I was in the midst of this "identity crisis" of sorts when I encountered IMPRINT magazine and felt a kind of magnetic pull to the charism of the Sisters of Life. It was freeing to read that my being is more important than my doing; that my value doesn't change when I make mistakes. I felt called to share this message with the world because I first needed to receive it.

Over time, through several powerful retreats, I came to understand that I wasn't merely gifted; I was a gift. I let God speak this truth over me and realized how much He delights in me. Worldly perfectionism is simply not His standard for me and is actually an obstacle to growth in holiness. Perfection in God's eyes is not flawlessness but fullness…of Him! The Lord even put "Grace" in my name, lest I fall into the illusion of thinking I can earn salvation myself. We are fundamentally dependent on God for all things and can only cooperate with the grace that He sends.

But even so, I still didn't enjoy going to the Sacrament of Confession, even in the convent — not because I was embarrassed to say what I did or thought I would get a long penance, but because I was upset at myself for making the same mistakes over and over again. *Why couldn't I get it together?* But I came to see that Confession is not a solitary look at a progress report; it is about restoring a broken relationship. We confess our sins, yes. But then we are called to meet the gaze of Jesus, who is not a cosmic referee but a loving friend. At the center of every sin is "I". In Confession, and in all authentic prayer, we move from living in the "I" to living in the "we" of authentic relationship. When I began to approach the Sacrament in this way, everything changed. I will never forget the most powerful advice a confessor gave me over 10 years ago: "Let Jesus be your Savior. He wants to work miracles out of your mistakes."

The English mystic Caryll Houselander said, "The ideal of our perfection that we set up, and often go through torture to achieve, may not be God's idea of how He wants us to be at all … what seems like a failure to us may really be something bringing us closer to His will for us." Such was the case on Easter morning when the epic "failure" of the Cross was revealed by the Risen Lord Himself as the greatest victory of all time.

When Jesus says, "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect (*Mt 5:48*)," He isn't referring to having the perfect outfit or perfect pitch or a perfect game. (Christ certainly did not have everyone's approval or meet worldly success when He walked and preached in Israel!) He is talking about loving your enemies: perfect charity, which is only possible with His help. Flip through any book on the lives of the Saints, and you'll see that everyone canonized is an imperfect person, whose former life of sin was redeemed by God. That is hope for you and me!



Recently, a small child at a grade school mustered up the courage to ask me a great question. While other kids posed the more typical, "How long is your rosary?", this little guy sheepishly asked, "Do you ever make mistakes?", to which I declared a resounding, "Yes! All the time. And then I begin again!" I have never been more grateful for the perpetual white veil we wear as Sisters of Life — traditionally the sign of a novice, but which Cardinal O'Connor wanted us to retain throughout our lives. It's a reminder that we're never done learning and growing.

A few days after speaking to that little boy, I was taking a bowl of bean salad out of the fridge for lunch and accidentally dropped it. The nice ceramic bowl was ruined. The salad, inedible. Yes, it was unfortunate. But I didn't cry as I might have years ago. I didn't beat myself up. I grabbed a can of tuna and made a different lunch while Sisters jumped in to help clean up. Growth is possible. I'm still a work in progress; we all are. But God wants to take the broken pieces of our lives and make stunning mosaics. Messes become masterpieces when we let go and give them to God.

Sr. Fidelity Grace, SV, professed her final vows in 2023, and serves as a formator on the Novitiate team.

Maggie's story*

Interview by Sr. Fidelity Grace, SV
**names changed for anonymity*

I've always been a people-pleaser and always did what was expected of me growing up. We were wishy-washy Catholics, but when I got to college, my faith really grew. A religious Sister and priest made it exciting to be part of the Catholic center. But somehow I believed that I had to earn God's love. During this time I was quite judgmental about people who "failed" in big ways. I remember thinking of women who had abortions, "How could anyone ever choose that?"

I ended up marrying a man from college. We had our first child and everything started off okay, but in time it became apparent that something was not right. Mark's way was the only way to do things. He was extremely controlling. Just over a year after our daughter's birth, I got pregnant with identical twins. We lost one of our sons at delivery. It was devastating. Mark and I handled grief very differently. I wanted to talk about it and cry, and he wanted to forget about it and move on.

> Wherever you are, you're not beyond God's grace.

Shortly after that, on his way home from work, Mark struck and killed an 88-year-old pedestrian. The family of this woman lost their loved one that day … and I lost Mark. His license was revoked and he had to go to court. His whole personality changed; he became angry and withdrawn, and struggled in a dangerous interior place. Around this time, I learned I was pregnant again, but discovered that Mark had been unfaithful. I hid all of this from my family and friends. When I was alone, I sobbed and sobbed, but with the kids, I put on a smile and all was okay. It was my sense of overwhelming darkness and pressure from Mark which led me to terminate that pregnancy.

I was burdened by shame. I believed that, because of my sin, I was no longer worthy of being under the umbrella of God's love. I feared people finding out about my abortion. I thought that no one could ever love me if they knew the truth — that I'd be judged, humiliated, and rejected. I abandoned my faith for a number of years. One day, I was driving by my home parish with no intention of going inside. I felt like the Lord took the steering wheel and pulled me into the parking lot. The pastor said, "When people tell me their life is a mess I first ask them 'Are you praying?'", and I just started crying, because prayer had been so important to me.

I had never been to Eucharistic Adoration, but something compelled me to go. I was moved by the beauty of Jesus in the monstrance. It was in Adoration that I found the religious Sister who had been my spiritual director in college! We reconnected after many years and she shared an article that brought forth a massive line of healing, bringing me to Confession, Madonna House in Canada, Rachel's Vineyard, and eventually the Sisters of Life.

Each place I found myself, I braced for judgment and condemnation, but instead, I found compassion, kindness, open arms, and love. If mere humans could still love me even after knowing my abortion story, then I realized that God could still love me, too! Through prayer and all the people He placed in my path, God's unconditional love healed my heart. I realized that I do not have to be perfect for God to love me. I learned to better embrace the limitations of my humanity and accepted that I am flawed, vulnerable, and weak, which is why I need God every day.

I was in a pit of despair, yet God broke through over and over again. I thought He was far away but He showed me that He was with me the whole time. Wherever you are, you are not beyond God's grace. Your worth is not based on what you've done or haven't done. Your worth is that you are a beloved child of God.

For more information about Hope & Healing after abortion, visit sistersoflife.org



BIG GOD, little devil

An interview with Dr. Sean Tobin, by Sr. Marie Veritas, SV



Former atheist Dr. Sean Tobin is now a Catholic psychologist and author who works in the arena where psychological wounds and spiritual affliction overlap. Dr. Tobin is the author of Big GOD, little devil: A Radical Shift in the Approach to Spiritual Warfare and Deliverance.

How did you begin your work in healing ministry?

I was praying one day with a Bible passage where the Lord delivers a demoniac, and afterwards I noticed a quiet anxiety in me about the devil's presence. Nothing dramatic. But it struck me that what I was feeling didn't line up with what I'd been reading, especially where it reads, "those that are born of God, God protects, and the evil one cannot touch him" (*see 1 Jn 5:18*). My theology said one thing and my nervous system was saying something else.

So I stayed with the feeling instead of arguing with it, and a memory came up: I was young, watching *The Exorcist*, back when I didn't believe any of it. What frightened me was the thought of being out of control, dominated by something I didn't understand, and some part of me believed it could actually happen to me.

While I was sitting there with that memory, a line came up in my heart: "He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge" (*Ps 91:4*). I wasn't hunting for it. It was given. And that was the first time I understood that a fear like that doesn't get argued out of a person. You get covered, and then the fear isn't running you anymore. Most of what I do now started right there.

How should we understand the devil?

The enemy is a liar. That's what the Lord calls him — the father of lies (*Jn 8:44*). He's also a creature. He isn't God's opposite number, and he isn't standing a half-step behind the Holy Spirit with the two of them straining at either end of a rope. He never created anything. He can only twist what God made, and he only ever operates inside what God permits. He's on a short leash. God even puts him to use. We don't win spiritual battles by out-pulling the devil. In a natural fight, you pick up a weapon. In this one, we get taken up into a fight Christ has already finished, and where we're standing is what settles it. We're standing in Him. Most days, for me, it looks like a lot less arguing with the enemy and a lot more looking at Christ.

How can we internalize and live out of Jesus' victory?

The victory is already His. Fighting *for* victory means the outcome is still open and I'm the one who has to go close it. Fighting *from* victory means it was settled at the Cross and I'm living inside something already accomplished. Same battle, completely different job description. The fight of faith is laying hold of what's ours in Him. A lot of it is just knowing the Gospel. Not knowing about it. Knowing it. St. Paul says the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and once that lands, your posture changes (*see Rom 1:16*). Jesus tells us to turn and become like children, little and dependent, small enough to be carried (*see Mt 18:3*). When we're afraid, our instinct runs the other way. We try to become more of an adult about it, more competent, more in control, worried about many things. That instinct is exactly what keeps the anxiety running.

I used to ask Jesus to take the fear away, or to move whatever was pressing on me. Now I ask Him different things: *What do you love about me? Who am I to you?* Those questions put me back in front of Him. That reconnection is the battle. The accusation meant to flatten you sends you to the mercy of God instead, and you come out knowing that mercy in a way you didn't before.

> The victory is already His.

What does it look like to reconnect with Jesus?

My son was about six, maybe younger. He came home from school sad, and it took a while to get it out of him. At lunch, he'd been sitting at the benches and another boy spat on him and walked off and left him there by himself. He was embarrassed more than anything. We didn't try to talk him out of the feeling. We just asked Jesus where He was. And my son got quiet, and then he said he could see Jesus carrying the Cross. And then Jesus came over and sat down next to him on the bench and said to him, "People spit on Me, too." There was a little tear coming down his face while he was telling us. Nothing about the memory changed. The boy still spat on him. What changed is that he wasn't alone in it anymore. That's most of what this is. We go back with the Lord to a moment that's still sitting there, and He shows us where He was.

What does the devil tell us about our identity vs. what does God tell us?

The Father's children aren't for sale. I say it bluntly because a lot of people are quietly afraid that they might be. The enemy's accusation almost always has a price attached to it: "You're damaged"; "You did that"; "Something happened in your family line." And the implication underneath is that there's a claim on you now. So here's what I want people to hear: the Cross is not the revelation of our sin, but the revealing of our value, a value measured by what Jesus paid. Jesus canceled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, nailing it to the Cross, and He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them (*Col 2:14-15*). Whatever claim the enemy thinks he holds, even one that grows out of my own sin or out of something done to me, was broken right there, in public, on the Cross.

There's a line people always put in St. Teresa of Avila's mouth, and I go back to it constantly: "When the devil reminds you of your past, remind him of his future." God's providence covers everything. He permits the enemy, and He uses him to refine our faith and drive us into His arms. Which means deliverance is less about getting the enemy to leave than about living in union with Christ, who dealt with him while He was taking back ground. I've seen people who are convinced that something dark has a claim on them, and what surfaces after a while is that they'd already decided they were worth very little. The fear just gave that belief a shape. Once a person actually receives who they are in Christ, the lie about how much power the enemy has over their story loses its footing.

Can you speak about how winning spiritual battles is not about confrontation, but communion?

The devil divides and fragments. He splits you off from God, from other people, from your own body, from the parts of your history you can't bear to look at. Christ integrates and unites. So if the enemy's whole operation is fragmentation, the answer to it is communion, being gathered back together in the truth and in the light. In the Bible, when the enemy is confronted in heaven, the way it's described is that there was no place left for him (*see Rev 12:8*). That's the whole logic of it. Darkness can't occupy a place where there's light. It was never a contest between two equal things. You don't have to leave the light to go looking for it. Go to Mass. Go to Confession. Bring Him the part you've been keeping back. Darkness flees before the light of His face, and there are no shadows in the City of God, which "has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (*Rev 21:23*). Scripture says submit yourself to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you (*Jas 4:7*). Isaiah says the Lord gives a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair (*Is 61:3*). Praise moves things.

I worked with somebody who carried an intense fear of abandonment. Her prayer had been trained into self-reliance. Somewhere along the line it had become her responsibility to somehow reach God. I asked her why she was working so hard to get to Him, and whether she'd ever considered letting Him come to her. Because that's the whole Gospel, isn't it? It was never the story of people reaching God. It's the story of God coming to look for us. Getting through to God was never our job in the first place. That's the faith-based posture. We advance by resting in Him.

10 TIPS ON HOW TO LIVE *fear-free*



by Sr. Mary Grace, SV

Tip 1: Remember His victory. Fear is in the atmosphere, but as Christians, we have inherited the atmosphere of heaven. The age of fear ended when Christ entered. The devil is in a fit, but you need not be. The continuation of His kingdom lies in you, and you are called to keep receiving Him. Holiness lies in the refusal to cease seeking Him.

Tip 2: Keep the Bible open. Everything that Jesus did or said in Scripture is *for you*. There is not one detail of your life left outside the impact of His redeeming love. In the Gospels, God gave us the definitive assurance of the ending. His story is your story and you are not the exception.

Tip 3: Let temptation lead to salvation. Sin lies to you. Powerlessness before temptation does not equate to worthlessness. There's more to you than the battles you go through. We are strengthened in struggles by grace only the Sacraments can supply, and in them, the power of His Passion is applied to you. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin because our hearts are His home. Let temptation lead you not to desperation, but salvation.

Tip 4: Let your limits lead you to God. Limits can make us feel like we're off the mark, or damaged goods. But no one has the whole package and God designed it so. Our limits are no obstacle to God — they are His working space. Qualification is in the call, not in the equipment of the one called. Let your longings and lackings lead you to God.

Tip 5: Forget worrying about your future. God says, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow" (*Mt 6:34*). Astrology, fortune-telling or any form of new age practices will never give you the answers you ache to hear. Christ has answers to satisfy you. Future safety is in divine intimacy. Go to God about today and every other day.

Tip 6: Let go of the lead. God never imposed on you the responsibility to lead your life. Our fallen condition says: "I've got this." But the wild and trusting heart says to the Savior, "You've got this," and stays with Him. Seeking the Holy Spirit's lead is the antidote to boredom, because seeking is already a meeting. Give the Spirit the license to lead.

Tip 7: Forge friendship. More than a click, friendship requires a lifestyle of laying down my life and noticing not just my own needs, but those of others. Start with an invitation: ask a friend to Church, or eat meals with others. Community is the blueprint of the divine inside of you because it reflects the common life of the Trinity. Fear not to press into community or start community, and you will find life.

Tip 8: Live as a team. The Acts of the Apostles testifes that daily fellowship among believers was the first follow-up to Pentecost (*see Acts 2:46*). This isn't just wellbeing; this is necessary for the flourishing of souls. Eliminate activities that specialize in isolation, such as pornography and overindulging in social media — they're designed to divide. Christ was born into community, and established the community of the Church. God has set a standard, and if it's worthy of Him, it's essential for us.

Tip 9: Get Mary off the bench. When God speaks, Mary moves. Her every step bears His Word. Do what Jesus did. Go to her and entrust your vocation, job, worries; or simply say her name and get accustomed to saying it often. Jesus gave us Mary at Calvary because we all need a mother. Mary mastered the art of listening to God when He makes no noise. Call on her and watch her work in your life.

Tip 10: Praise on dark days. God alone is worthy of your fear — not a servile fear, but a response of awe and wonder, born from giving God first place in your life. Dislodge disorder by yielding to praise. In every fear that cripples you, God has a plan to liberate you. When fear afflicts you, God did not promise you a spirit of cowardice but of freedom (*see 2 Tim 1:7; 2 Cor 3:17*). Come first to Him. He will take care of everything (*1 Pet 5:7*).

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



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