

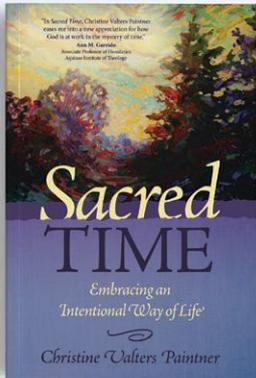
# U.S. Catholic

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## Sacred cities

From Augustine to Ignatius,  
Catholics build cities for justice

# NEW BOOKS for Every Catholic



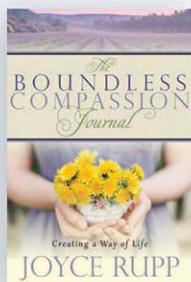
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Catholic Theological Union

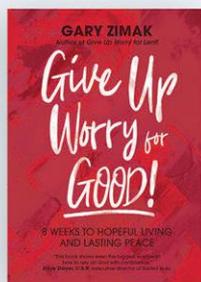


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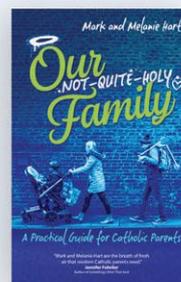
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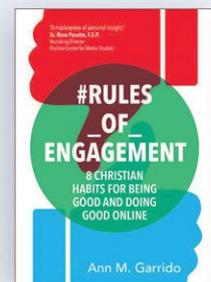
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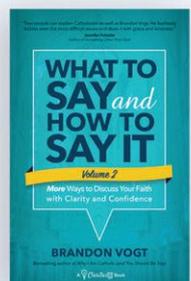
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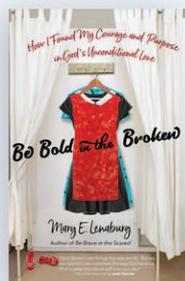
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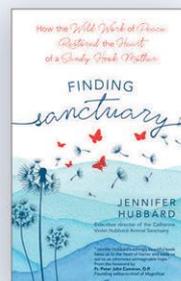
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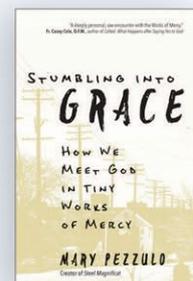
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**Feature** Feast for the eyes  
by John Christman, S.S.S.

Contemporary art brings new meaning to the Eucharist.

**Feature**

A tale of two churches  
by Peter Feuerherd

Is liturgical pluralism around the United States growing hard-rock division in the church?



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## The fellowship of believers



Leonardo da Vinci's 15th-century painting of the Last Supper is the most recognizable depiction of the Passover meal between Jesus and the disciples. Just as the original painting is on display in the dining room of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, its replicas hang in the dining rooms of many Christian homes—including

my own since childhood. Depicting Jesus and the disciples in a festive meal, da Vinci shows the consternation that ensued among the disciples when Jesus reveals that his betrayer is actually one of them (John 13:21–24).

Da Vinci's painting and others like it represent the meal that binds us to Jesus Christ. They give meaning to the meals we share with others and draw us closer in fellowship and intimacy. The revelation of Jesus' impending betrayal puts a damper on the convivial atmosphere that a Passover gathering would have generated for Jesus and the disciples. But St. Peter welcomes the connection established with Jesus through this meal and pledges his support to die with Jesus (John 13:37). The Passover meal incentivizes St. Peter's pledge to stand by Jesus as his arrest looms.

John Christman, S.S.S. makes a similar pledge to follow Christ in this month's feature "A feast for the eyes" (pages 10–15). Calling our attention to a variety of paintings of the Last Supper, Christman invites us to see the Eucharist, the center of our liturgical spirituality, as a celebration of encounter, solidarity, healing, and life-giving love between Christians. As the ritual meal that unites us with Christ and one another, the Eucharist invites us to commit to the ministry of Christ in the world and to justice. And in this month's *Testaments* ("You say you want a revolution," pages 47–49), Alice Camille reminds us that just as Christ is revolutionary in his life and ministry, likewise our fellowship with Christ invites and mandates us to continue the ministry of justice and to be committed to revolution.

Our favorite Last Supper paintings—whether by da Vinci or one of the artists Christman mentions in his piece—should not only hang in our homes and in the halls of museums, but should also serve as the basis of our Christian lives and lead us to see God's goodness beyond the majesty of buildings and public spaces and in persons, especially the marginalized, as Jamie Kralovec counsels in this month's *Expert Witness* ("Sacred cities," pages 16–20).

Happy reading!

—Father Ferdinand Okorie, C.M.F.

# U.S. Catholic

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U.S. CATHOLIC believes that Catholicism is a spiritual path that leads to a richer life. We help our readers explore the wisdom of our faith tradition and apply that faith to the challenges of 21st-century life. We celebrate the vibrancy and diversity of contemporary Catholicism and aim to inspire readers with a positive vision of the Catholic faith. We conduct our mission with the conviction that the Catholic faith responds to humanity's deepest longings and aspirations.

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# Home sweet home

Thank you, Gloria Kempton, for reminding us that no person is less than a beloved son or daughter of God, and we have to entrust our loved ones to God when they are missing from our lives (“My blessed son,” March). My mother’s oldest brother disappeared after an accident aboard a Navy ship. Years later, a landlady at a boarding house returned to his family a duffel bag with possessions he had left behind.

Only recently, through the use of genealogical websites, have I learned that he made his way to Portland, Oregon, worked for the railroad, died at age 74, and is buried in a national military cemetery there. I know little more about him except what I can glean from public records and make of his inch-thick accumulation of military records, including a letter in his beautiful handwriting he wrote to the Navy in 1939. My mother always felt the pain of a missing brother, but he was loved and prayed for.

—Linda Weirather

What a wonderful reflection by a wonderful mom. It isn’t easy having our hearts out there, not knowing where or what they’re



March 2021

doing, but they come back to touch base and say I love you and let us say it back!

—Lynnel Miller

via [uscatholic.org](http://uscatholic.org)

## A SCRIPTURE A DAY

Not all of us can afford to spend the time and money to become biblical scholars (“A skeptic tries out ‘The Bible in a Year’ podcast,” [uscatholic.org](http://uscatholic.org)). This is the best way to bring us into God’s Word. I tried multiple times to do it myself, but it always seemed intimidating. Breaking up God’s Word into digestible chunks doesn’t cover all the core aspects, but it allows us to enter in, stay motivated because we don’t feel like we’re alone in this endeavor, and want more. If this podcast reignites Catholics’ love of their Lord and brings people back to the church, we should rejoice.

—Ruth May

via [uscatholic.org](http://uscatholic.org)

## SHOTS, SHOTS, SHOTS

The pope has been vaccinated and has said vaccines should be available to all,

what do  
you think ?

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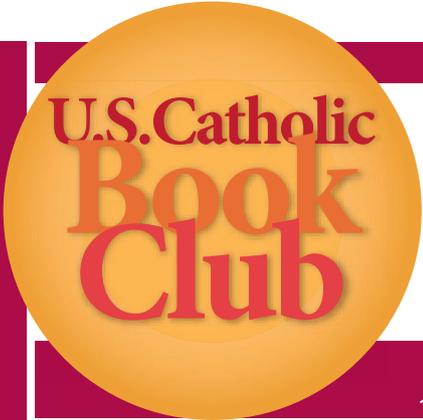
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\*Letters may be condensed due to space limitation.



This month we are reading

# Sacred Time

by Christine Valters Paintner

## Join the discussion

There never seems to be enough time to do anything. We all too often find ourselves looking back on hours, days, months—even years—and wondering, “Where did it all go?” In *Sacred Time: Embracing an Intentional Way of Life*, Christine Valter Paintner reexamines and reinvents the ways in which we structure and think about our time. She imagines a new world built on rest and growth rather than hurry and stagnation.

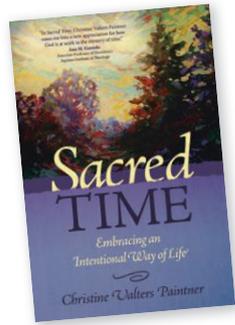
In each chapter, Valters Paintner reflects on the spiritual meaning and rhythms of different units of time. Starting off small—with just a simple breath—and gradually building up from there to days, years, lifetimes, and millennia, *Sacred Time* is filled to the brim with spiritual and scriptural reflections, prayerful practices, and engaging prompts for creative self-examination that will effectively guide even the most overstressed reader toward a deeper appreciation of every moment.

—Nathaniel Hunter, assistant editor

# Sacred Time

## Embracing an Intentional Way of Life

by Christine Valters Paintner



We live in a world where there never seems to be enough time for all we want and need to do. In *Sacred Time*, Christine Valters Paintner guides us as we move beyond our own lives and embrace a world that urges us toward rest, reflection, and growth.

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especially those who are in the highest risk groups (“Do Catholics have to get the COVID-19 vaccine?” [uscatholic.org](http://uscatholic.org)). Also, the U.S. Catholic bishops support people getting the vaccine due to the worldwide gravity of COVID-19.

—Jay  
via [uscatholic.org](http://uscatholic.org)

### TRICKLE UP

Raising the minimum wage just raises the price to everything, destroys businesses, and creates less jobs (“Franciscan macroeconomics,” *Margin Notes*, March). People think a \$15 minimum wage will solve society’s woes, but business owners will be faced with short staffing. It’s a whole debacle.

—Lonny Libera  
via Facebook

Christians should be promoting and demanding a federal \$15.00 minimum wage. The current \$7.25 minimum wage is extreme poverty. It has been the same for 12 years instead of increasing with the cost of living. A \$15 minimum wage would help put food on the table, maybe buy a family clothes, and pay rent. Christians need to let their representatives know they want a \$15 minimum wage now. Christians don’t let people suffer because we may have to pay 25 cents more for a hamburger. In states where they have raised the minimum wage, prices only went up slightly and jobs were not lost. Consumers don’t suffer, but low pay hurts everyone.

—Stephanie Romero  
via Facebook

### SHARED HARVEST

Gleanings also feed wildlife (“Glean and gather,” March). After all, we’ve taken the land from them: It’s a way of giving something back.

—Virginia Bell  
via [uscatholic.org](http://uscatholic.org)



# The gift of welcome

A creak in the old floorboard announces my presence. The blue-haired cashier twists from her perch behind the counter as I enter the co-op. Her young eyes warm above her mask when she sees it is me.

“Hey Jessie!” she exclaims with an energy I haven’t mustered in months. “Good to see you. What are you shopping for today?”

Her simple greeting warms my weary heart.

What a gift it is to be welcomed in.

I hope I will never again take such gifts for granted. What I once labeled “ordinary encounters” have become lifelines during lonely pandemic days.

As the pandemic slows,  
remember simple hospitality.

I live by myself, and I work where I live. Loved ones and colleagues view me most often from the shoulders up. Too often I feel like a talking museum portrait.

After long days on Zoom, I slump away from the screen and sputter out a reminder that would have seemed bizarrely obvious in 2019: *I have a body. God created me with a body. Bodies matter.*

God created human beings as embodied people. There is no getting around it. We are not souls floating past one another at the movie theater. We are not two brains sitting across from each other at dinner. Every one of us is made to be a fully embodied person—and we are made to be in relationship with other fully embodied people.

As womanist theologian M. Shawn Copeland writes in her book *Enfleshing Freedom* (Fortress Press), “The body constitutes a site of divine revelation, and thus, a ‘basic human sacrament.’ In and through embodiment, we human persons grasp and realize our essential freedom through engagement and communion with other embodied selves.”

Why is physical presence so essential? What makes something as basic as a grocery store greeting so meaningful, particularly during times of isolation?

For insight, let’s join Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus.

The popular Easter story features two distraught disciples trying to process the trauma of Jesus’ death. As they tread along, they encounter a man who asks to be let into their conversation. “What’s going on?” the mystery man wonders. He notices the pair looks sad.

He notices them.

Cleopas unloads the pain of the previous days: The chief priests killed Jesus. They thought he was the one who would redeem Israel. Now they don’t know what to think.

The mystery man listens. He stays close. Then he welcomes Cleopas and the companion into his own stories.

He welcomes them in.

The man tells stories from scripture—stories of prophets and pilgrims, of suffering and death, of hope and new life. As he speaks, flames flare within the disciples. Later they marvel to each other: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32).

But in this moment, Cleopas and his companion do not know the man standing beside them is Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. They know him only as a fellow traveler, a wise person who notices their needs and welcomes them in.

May we do the same for others.

As the pandemic slows and sharing space becomes safe once more, may we treasure every ordinary encounter with strangers, store clerks, and whomever else we meet. May we not forget the many among us who remain isolated and hungry for human connection. May the risen Christ stoke the flames of communion within us, so that in the presence of everyone we encounter, we too cannot help but marvel: “Are not our hearts burning within us?” **USC**

---

By Jessie Bazan, the editor and coauthor of *Dear Joan Chittister: Conversations with Women in the Church* (Twenty-Third Publications).



## Superfan sister

If you haven't heard an elderly nun shout "And one!" from the stands, then you haven't experienced the pinnacle of college basketball. Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt, the 101-year-old chaplain of the Loyola University Chicago Ramblers, has been with the team since 1994 and became a cultural icon during March Madness in 2018, the first year Loyola made the Final Four since 1963. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some wondered if she would make it back into the stands in 2021. Thankfully, in March, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that Sister Jean would attend the Ramblers' opening game in Indianapolis. Sister Jean, who had already received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, had earlier told the *Tribune* that she "want[s] to go so badly" and later let slip that she had backup plans in case the university wouldn't take her. "[One] couple said they thought they would like to kidnap me and Loyola would have to search for me," she said. "But Loyola didn't know."

Flickr.com/MGoBlog

## Help wanted

Do you love peace and quiet? Do you want to deepen your relationship with God? How does behind-the-scenes access to one of the world's finest craft beers sound? If you're asking yourself how any-

one could possibly pass up that kind of deal, you're not alone: The Trappists are wondering the same thing. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, despite a long history of both contemplation and fermentation, vocations to the Trappist order have continued to dwindle. Some abbeys, like St. Benedict's in

Hamont-Achel, Belgium, have even been forced to give up their brew's "authentic" label, as they have no monks left to supervise production. The Trappists continue to seek new members and offer world-class training in the art of brewing but with little success thus far. Maybe their deliciously malty beers disappearing from shelves will be the wake-up call that reinvigorates these storied operations.



Pexels.com/Eva Elijas

## youfollow?

LOLs and hashtags from Twitter

In fifth grade I did a project on Ignatius of Loyola and made a clay model of his severed leg that the teacher called "upsetting."

—@AChillGhost

A priest, a pastor, and a rabbit enter a blood donation clinic. The nurse asks the rabbit: "What is your blood type?"

The rabbit replies: "I'm probably a Type O."

—@MollyRatty

February 22 is the feast day of a chair. Catholicism is so weird and interesting.

—@mabowes402

My 7-year-old son creeps up to a room where I am praying this morning, whispers: "I bet you're telling God you are preeeeetty lucky to have me." Followed by evil laughter and wind sprints up and down the hallway. He gets me. He really gets me.

—@KatecBowler



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# Angels in blue



Mikhail Solunin/ZUMA PRESS/Newscom

**NIZHNY NOVGOROD, Russia**—A dog with blue fur peeks out of the snow at the Zoozashchita-NN veterinary clinic. He is one of 13 stray dogs with bright blue fur recently found and caught at the Dzerzhinsk Glass factory, which produces acrylic glass and prussic acid in the city of Dzerzhinsk. The dogs' fur tested positive for the Prussian blue pigment, and now they are under supervision at the Zoozashchita-NN vet clinic. The BBC reports that the dogs are healthy and eating well, seemingly unaware of their vibrant new coats.

## “ verbatim

**“That sense of mastery over nature has been so seriously challenged by this pandemic.”**

—Drew Gilpin Faust, a historian and former president of Harvard University, saying that many Americans believed we were ready for anything before the COVID-19 pandemic (New York Times)

**“Prayer. Prayer. Prayer. One step at a time. No junk food.”**

—Lucia DeClerck, a 105-year-old nursing home resident in Southern New Jersey, answering the question of how a person can live to be 105. She also recommends eating nine gin-soaked raisins a day (New York Times)

**“We Jesuits hold Peter Claver up and hide behind him.”**

—Christopher Smith, the only Black American Jesuit in formation, pointing out the church's use of the work of St. Peter Claver to avoid ministering to the current needs of Black Americans (America)

## goodnews .....

**TOULON, France**—At age 117, Sister André, Europe's oldest living person, has conquered COVID-19. In January the virus swept through the Ste. Catherine Labouré nursing home where she lives, infecting 81 of 88 residents and killing 11, the *New York Times* reports.

Sister André isolated for weeks and at times felt “off-color,” but meanwhile she slept, prayed, and ultimately remained asymptomatic.

Sister André remains peaceful and optimistic. David Tavella, spokesperson of the nursing home, said, “She kept telling me, ‘I'm not afraid of COVID because I'm not afraid of dying, so give my vaccine doses to those who need them.’”

Sister André celebrated her 117th birthday with baked Alaska and champagne, reports the *New York Times*.

## ..... badnews

A new survey by the American Enterprise Institute reveals that 29 percent of Republicans and 27 percent of white evangelicals believe the QAnon conspiracy theories, reports Religion News Service (RNS).

In the study, 18 percent of white Catholics and 11 percent of Hispanic Catholics also said they believe the conspiracy theories.

Jared Stacy, a pastor at Spotswood Baptist Church in Fredericksburg, Virginia, told RNS that he is concerned about the effects of conspiracies on future generations. “My fear . . . is that Jesus would not be co-opted by conspiracy theories in a way that leads the next generation to throw Jesus out with the bathwater, that we're not able to separate the narrative of taking back our country from Jesus' kingdom narrative,” he said.

# Feast for the eyes

A serving of contemporary eucharistic art gives witness to Christ's kingdom.

by John Christman, S.S.S.

**W**hat does Eucharist call us to be? How does Eucharist shape our lives? Scripture scholar and Blessed Sacrament Father Eugene LaVerdiere wrote an influential book with the evocative title *Dining in the Kingdom of God* (Liturgy Training Publications) in which he explores Jesus' meal ministry and proclamation of the kingdom of God in the Gospel of Luke. The eucharistic message is clear: The Eucharist is not simply a thing to be worshipped or consumed but an action powerfully linked to God's transformative presence in our world. Eucharist calls us to work toward building the kingdom of God, especially in areas where we encounter suffering and injustice. But how often do we see eucharistic art that witnesses to a true encounter with the prophetic Christ and the kingdom he proclaimed?

## **Julie Green Communion**

We can find one such profound instance of this in an ongoing series titled *The Last Supper* by Julie Green. For more than 20 years Green has been memorializing the last supper requests of prisoners on death row in an artistic act that protests the death penalty. The food requests are profoundly personal. They reveal a life history, unique taste preferences, and memories of what was once good about life. They humanize the moment and make the person present while at the same time they reveal an absence. These empty plates remind us



*The Last Supper*, Julie Green: Arkansas 20 April 2017: Communion, 6 x 9 inch platter, one from a series of 895 painted and kiln-fired ceramic plates of final meals, 2018 (began series in 1998). *The Last Supper* series is on view at Bellevue Arts Museum through fall 2021.

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John Christman, S.S.S. is editor of *Emmanuel*, a magazine of eucharistic spirituality, and often writes on the subject of art and theology.



Uplor Gallery

*Thank God I'm Home* said Marcel Brown, Julie Green, 2019, 35.5 x 46 inches acrylic on Tyvek, one from the series titled *First Meal*, a collaboration with exonerees and the Center on Wrongful Convictions, Northwestern University.

that through the persistence of capital punishment we are still far from realizing the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed. Yet these plates also point to the possibility of communion and redemption. One such powerful example is of an exceptional meal request titled *Communion*. This artwork depicts two overlapping plates ornately decorated with intertwining flowers. In their centers, painted in brushy blue, are a cup and a host. We may be reminded here that Jesus, after his last supper, was executed with criminals, one of whom repented. To that criminal Jesus offered communion and the kingdom. Do we do the same?

On more than one occasion, Pope Francis has stated that he opposes the death penalty, partially

because he believes it robs people of the opportunity for repentance and redemption. This painting not only highlights this possibility but also challenges us to recognize with whom we share the Eucharist. Are we truly in solidarity with the convicted criminal with whom we are united in this sacred meal?

### **Julie Green**

#### ***Thank God I'm Home* said Marcel Brown**

More recently Green has expanded her series to include “first supper” images. These show the first meals of prisoners who have been exonerated. Here again faith looms large. One striking image depicts a corned beef sandwich in the foreground

and a church-like house in the background. Emblazoned across its surface are the words spoken by the exonerated man: “Thank God I’m home.” If our Eucharists are to be truly a foretaste of the kingdom, then this “first supper” witnesses to God’s liberating love and the hard work of those who help free the wrongly accused. This sense of joy, gratitude, and liberating love should also be at the heart of our Eucharists. Green’s plates are a call to action. They remind us of what Eucharist calls us to be.

**Scott Erickson**  
***Trinity***

Eucharist as a window into the life of the divine is something the icon tradition has long excelled at conveying. In this regard, Andrei Rublev’s famous icon of the Trinity easily comes to mind. Scott Erickson’s series titled *New Icons* opens this up in thought-provoking ways with his dynamic print titled *Trinity*.

Like in Rublev’s icon, Erickson’s *Trinity* presents three persons sitting at a table.



*Trinity*, Scott Erickson,  
[scottericksonart.com](http://scottericksonart.com),  
[@scottthepainter](https://www.instagram.com/scottthepainter).

Unlike Rublev's subjects, however, these figures' faces are hidden. While they're clearly human in "image" and "likeness" (Gen. 1:26), their faces are obscured, giving us the ability to see God as both personal and transcendently other. Another deft choice in this regard is the stylization of the figures' garments. Their large, flowing forms keep us from identifying male or female traits. Thus, everyone can see themselves in these divine figures. Yet Christ's wounded hands still reveal his sacrifice and post-resurrection identity. We also

recognize the Spirit through a feather-patterned cloak.

Importantly, as in Rublev's icon, hospitality is a central message of this artwork, and it's profoundly generous and selfless. We see this unfold in a number of ways. Each person fills not their own cup but the cup of the person next to them. These are abundant cups! The figures pour generously and freely without any concern of overflowing. The three chalice-like cups then come together at their bases, overlapping like a Venn diagram, echoing the unity and uniqueness of each person of the Trinity. This print is an inspiring example of what our Eucharists could be. It's a vision of mutuality and graciousness.

It shows a Eucharist that witnesses to the hospitality, communion, and abundant love in the heart of God's inner life, and it is a model for us all.

## Emmanuel Garibay

### *Emmaus*

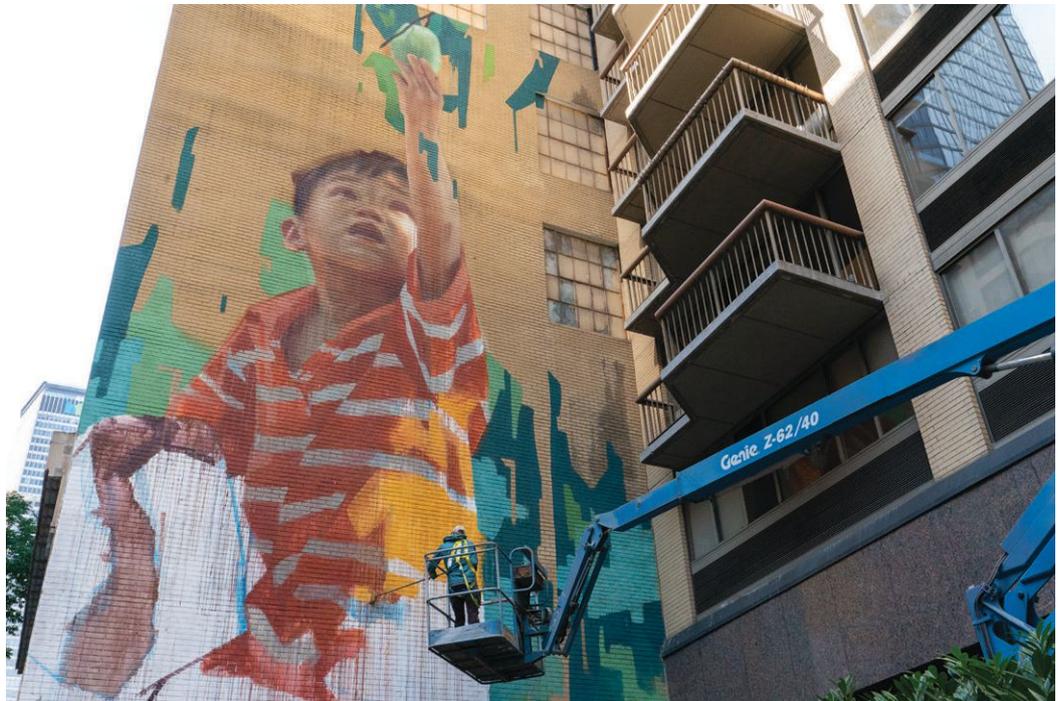
Eucharist is life-giving, yet eucharistic art can often be overly solemn and weighty. This is not so in Emmanuel Garibay's euphoric masterpiece *Emmaus*. Other famous paintings that depict this scene from Luke's gospel convey the surprise of this revelatory eucharistic moment (for example, Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus* or Arcabas' *Emmaus*). But Garibay's *Emmaus* is unique in conveying not only the real surprise but the wonderful delight and joy of this "breaking of the bread."

Here we encounter warm, inviting colors. Gesticulative, elongated arms with enlarged, expressive hands enhance the mood of surprise and wonder. A swinging light bulb and an upturned table prepare us for the upturning of expectations. Garibay employs a classical artistic device, using a finger to point to a key element within the painting: the nail marks in Christ's hands. The moment is captured like the delivery of a perfectly timed punch line. Red-cheeked laughter ensues with looks of recognition and delight. The sight of Jesus as not only resurrected but also female is truly "eye-opening." It's not met with fear or resistance but with laughter



*Emmaus*,  
Emmanuel Garibay,  
2000. Oil on canvas,  
24 x 36 inches.

Street Artist Emmanuel Jarus works on a mural, Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020, near the United Nations headquarters in New York.



AP Photo/Mary Altaffer

and joy—as if to say God is filled with surprises! Observe also that this looks like a gathering of friends, people who actually know and like each other. Garibay’s Emmaus meal portrays a Eucharist that not only brings healing to a community that is suffering the loss of its beloved spiritual leader but offers a life-giving future unlike anything they imagined. As in the words of the prophet Isaiah, “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isa. 43:19). Are our Eucharists open to God doing something new?

### **Emmanuel Jarus** ***Zero Hunger***

How do we end hunger and food insecurity? This lofty goal is inspiring a series of murals around the world in honor of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations and its goal to end world hunger by 2030. This mural by artist Emmanuel Jarus is striking for what it is and what it isn’t. Instead of seeing a heart-wrenching image of a starving child on the brink of death, we see an image of hope bathed in gentle light. A young Asian child is shown reaching for a piece of fruit. The boy looks up in earnest. Nourishment is within his reach, provided by nature. Anyone happening upon this scene would likely empathize with the child, hoping he satisfies

his hunger. In fact, many would likely wish they could help the boy.

What has this to do with Eucharist? Well, imagine that after receiving the Eucharist and being sent forth, you were to see this mural on your way home. What would you think? Eucharist isn’t simply to nourish us but to strengthen us to nourish our world and continue Jesus’ work of building the kingdom. This entails not just responding to the spiritual hungers of humanity but the physical hungers as well. This is a work of charity *and* justice, because a world that allows people to starve, especially the most vulnerable, is systematically flawed and sinful.

### **Ioan Chisu** ***The Dove***

Eucharist is inexhaustible, and eucharistic art should likewise have inexhaustible expressions. Many of us seek the peace that only Eucharist can bring. We gather around the eucharistic table to experience the peace of the body of Christ in our midst in a myriad of ways. Ioan Chisu’s meditative yet dynamic abstract painting *The Dove* presents us with such an opportunity.

Here we discern a flat, almost minimalist altar. Contemplative grays and cool blues add an air of



*The Dove*, Ioan Chisu, 2012. Oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches.

thoughtful calm. An unadorned chalice attracts the eye with its circular, host-like form elevated above. A geometric design in white and black evokes a piano key and its concomitant music note as an abstract dove crosses the plane of vision surrounded in warm, vivid blue. These subtle converging elements present the viewer with a liturgical evocation of *epiclesis*: the Holy Spirit's grace-filled action making true Jesus' promise to be present

once again in the breaking of the bread. Chisu's painting has a musicality that comes with maturity, expressing exactly what needs to be said, no more and no less. There is life-giving peace here for an all-too-troubled, confusing world. There is clarity without the loss of holy mystery. We need this reassuring aspect of Eucharist as well. Eucharist "ever ancient and ever new," to borrow from St. Augustine. Eucharist as Christ's abiding presence. **USC**

# Sacred cities

Urban planning offers opportunities to shape communities for justice.

**G**rowing up Catholic in Chicago, urban planner Jamie Kralovec has made the study of cities his life's vocation. For him, it's a vocation that combines the practical discipline of urban planning with a deep Ignatian spirituality.

Kralovec attended a Jesuit high school and learned about the Jesuit order's origins as an urban ministry. "This stuck with me," he says. "The connection between the earthly city and the spirituality of realizing God's call for us, of realizing justice and building the kingdom of God on Earth—I've always seen that naturally in the city."

After high school, Kralovec earned a bachelor's degree in political science at the University of Notre Dame and a master's degree in urban planning at New York University. He served in roles with Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good and the U.S. Department of Justice before joining the White House Council on Strong Cities, Strong Communities under the Obama administration in 2013.

Currently, Kralovec lectures in the urban and regional planning program at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., where he also serves as associate director of mission integration of the school's Jesuit values. *U.S. Catholic* talked with Kralovec about the long connection between the church and cities and how the practical discipline of urban planning can function as a bridge to realizing a deepened spirituality and a greater call to action.

## **What is urban planning?**

A simple way to describe urban planning as both an idea and a practice is the way in which communities come together to intentionally envision the future of a place. Urban planning takes place within many contexts and scales of place, whether at the most local level such as a neighborhood, something smaller such as a large-scale site, or as big as a comprehensive plan for a whole city or region. Urban planners work at various scales, but common across all of urban planning is some kind of intentional, comprehensive, and community-engaged process of envisioning the future of places.

## **Is there a historical connection between urban planning and Christianity?**

There's a rich spiritual history of cities in the Christian tradition. There's the city of theology we think of with St. Augustine's *The City of God*—that metaphorical city of the world and the city of heaven. There's a long line of thinking around the earthly city that goes back to ancient philosophy.

But there's also a real practical place for the city in Christian tradition. The Jesuits were a decidedly urban order when they started. It's no coincidence that Jesuit schools across the world are, by and large, in urban places. When St. Ignatius of Loyola founded the Society of Jesus, he went to Rome and based it there. Some of the first apostolic works of the order were



Courtesy of Jamie Kralovec

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*The editors interview*

## **Jamie Kralovec**

Lecturer, Urban and Regional Planning Program, and associate director for mission integration, School of Continuing Studies, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

Program director, Urban and Regional Planning Program, Georgetown University (2014–2018)

Author and coeditor, *Evidence Matters*, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development quarterly research publication (2013–2014)

Program manager, White House Council on Strong Cities, Strong Communities (2013–2014)

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urban ministries such as caring for the poor. The city became the platform for a spirituality that is about finding God in all things. And where is God? God is in all things, but people are in cities—so that’s where God is.

I’m not biased against rural places, but the Catholic Church is very urban. When you think about where so many of the church’s ministries are located and the work the church does on issues related to supportive housing, homelessness, immigration, and employment, so much of that is in urban areas. I think that Christian tradition lives in the city, and we can meet God in the city. We find God in the majesty of buildings and public spaces, but we also find God in persons and communities that are struggling.

### ***Do you regard urban planning as a vocation?***

For me, urban planning is inherently a spiritual practice. I came to Ignatian spirituality through my love of cities. I grew up in a predominantly Orthodox Jewish neighborhood on the North Side of Chicago. Difference has always been a part of my experience. Growing up Catholic, I had to make sense of living in a Jewish neighborhood and learned a lot about my own faith tradition in that way.

I went to a Jesuit high school in Chicago, St. Ignatius College Prep, where my experience of difference magnified. My eyes were opened to the reality of racial divisions in Chicago but also to the beauty of diversity across the city. While going to school every day in these beautiful, gilded

buildings, I learned so much about social engagement, advocacy, social policy, and the needs of Chicago. At the same time, my high school was right across the street from Section 8 high-rises.

There was a dissonance between this gilded experience with its potential of education and the reality that across the street were families living in dilapidated buildings. I had to make sense of that in light of my education in Catholic social teaching.

Currently I teach urban planning in the graduate program at Georgetown University. But the movement in my life is also toward living out Catholic social teaching and the call to justice from that tradition. My vocation as an urban planner is to share with my

students and others how I think urban planning is more than just a technical discipline. When many people think of urban planning, they probably think of somebody sitting in a musty government office stamping documents. Part of the discipline is just that: traditional planning roles serving in municipal government, zoning enforcement, and design review.

But my own perspective, which comes in large part from my education in Catholic social teaching and my training in Jesuit spirituality, is that urban planning as a discipline offers an incredible opportunity to shape our cities and human communities toward sustainability and justice. It's a discipline to which I feel called and one that touches on so many aspects of life, a discipline of integration. Urban planning is an inherently Catholic practice when we think of holistic, universal integration or, as Pope Francis would call it, the integral ecology of daily life.

It comes from his practical experience of the city. He rode the buses of Buenos Aires and lived the experience of living in a city.

The beauty of *Laudato Si'* is that it hits all the marks when it comes to the principles that are baked into contemporary urban planning. The American Institute of Certified Planners, the professional organization that governs planning practice in the United States, has a code of ethics, and there are a lot of similarities between the principles of ethical urban planning and *Laudato Si'*.

In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis is obviously talking about environmental sustainability. You can't run a planning program these days if you're not talking about how to integrate sustainable practices into urban planning. Planners think about this in the environmental sense but also in the social sense. How do we make communities sustainable?

Transportation is an example. Pope Francis makes a very insightful point

There's also something rich in *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship) about what is at the root of our human interdependence and connection. There's this brilliant section about the local and the universal. Pope Francis talks about the innate tension between globalization and localization. He warns against a bland, abstract universalism and emphasizes the practical forms that connect us to one another at the local level. There's this theme throughout his papacy on the dangers of enclosures, the dangers of walls.

In urban planning there are lessons on whether we are thinking about the whole city when, for example, we're making comprehensive plans for creating affordable housing. Or are we just thinking about some parts of the city? There's an invitation in *Fratelli Tutti* to get really practical about what it means to build interconnection. Planning offers a resource to do that.

**Should there be criteria for vetting buyers when a diocese is selling or repurposing assets?**

I don't think there is an absolute off-the-shelf recommendation, nor do I think there should be one for the same policy in all places. Urban planning is always context-specific in relating to the particular needs and opportunities in a place. Certain places have different challenges than others.

But I do think there are some best practices on how big institutions tend to approach the process of consolidation or selling off assets. A good process typically involves many stakeholders, both institutional stakeholders and the people impacted by such a choice. How can a process be designed so that the church is welcoming lots of people and communities into that process and doing it in a way where voices are heard with a special emphasis on the most vulnerable and marginalized? What are they most

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## Urban planning is an inherently Catholic practice when we think of holistic, universal integration.

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**How does Pope Francis address integral ecology in terms of urban spaces?**

As an urban planner, I feel seen by Pope Francis. He uses the language of urban planning in *Laudato Si'* (On Care for Our Common Home). The language he uses to describe the city is better than that of most urbanists I've read. I assign *Laudato Si'* and its paragraphs on cities to my students because it's a brilliant, insightful reading on urban places.

that public transit is a way to reduce car dependence, but no one's going to use public transit if the system isn't very good. Practically, how do planners encourage more sustainable forms of public transit? Pope Francis also talks about public space. How are we thinking about public space? Are the green spaces just in the affluent neighborhoods that no one can get to? Or are we integrating green space and public open space all over the city?

challenged by? What are the issues of injustice that are most in need of addressing? How are we meeting diverse human needs in this particular place?

**Gentrification is another hot issue in urban planning. Is gentrification inherently bad? Is there such a thing as good gentrification?**

Gentrification is a complicated issue. Most of the students I teach who are committed to social justice especially want to work in the big city context where planning happens at all levels, and this is overwhelmingly the issue that motivates them. The topic is one that divides researchers: What is gentrification? How do we define it?

I think the gentrification question is really one of a fear of displacement, which is a slightly different thing. Displacement is the process by which existing residents, typically people of color in inner-city neighborhoods, can no longer afford to live where they've resided for a long time because of the upward pressure on housing prices. They are forced to leave their neighborhoods because of economic vulnerability. In some other cases the displacement comes from physical displacement, such as a new development that causes existing residents to have to leave a neighborhood.

Some research shows that gentrification tends to bring new amenities to a community: new health care facilities, commercial opportunities, public spaces, and parks. One question that researchers struggle with is: How do we understand that gentrification improves local amenities while at the same time being worried that it pushes existing residents away from where they've lived?

Pope Francis talks about this quite insightfully in *Laudato Si'*. He talks about how, despite the dilapidated conditions in some overcrowded urban

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The language [Pope Francis] uses to describe the city is better than that of most urbanists I've read.

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spaces, there's still a great sense of place and identity and community. He's certainly not endorsing slum housing as the way to produce identity and community, but the bigger question is around gentrification. Are we creating a city where there are opportunities for encounter between people of difference? Are we creating spaces where people can come together to share in the life of the city? Or are we reproducing forms of exclusion?

Sometimes the structural injustice is not obvious. It often happens through land use control in the form of zoning. For example, Washington, D.C. is a strong market city. So much of its land was zoned for single-family housing. There's an incredible need for affordable housing, but you can't meet that need unless you build more multi-family developments. How do you do that? You do it through zoning reform that makes it easier to build more affordable housing.

In Minneapolis there's a move toward getting rid of single-family housing as a land use category. In some cities land is at such a premium that planners have to do whatever we can to build as much housing as possible to address the systemic need for affordable housing.

Good processes that involve opportunities for local participants to share their visions and concerns, or multisector processes that involve both government and nonprofit organizations, philanthropies, and religious organizations, tend to

have a better impact in addressing the concerns of gentrification.

**How can Catholics who aren't professional urban planners engage with these justice issues that affect people living in urban spaces?**

This is sometimes an unglamorous recommendation but an important one: Go to meetings. Go to a zoning meeting and pay attention. Some of the decisions that happen at the county or town level about how land can be used are critically important to larger commitments of racial justice, social justice, and the inclusion of immigrant families in our communities. What decisions are being made about land use in your community?

Pay attention to the process of development in your local place and proposals for development. Who's involved? Is there a nonprofit developer? Has there been an existing conditions analysis using data to assess the needs? Who's been consulted in this process? Who's being ignored?

My encouragement is to participate in the nitty gritty of policy at a land use meeting or a zoning meeting or sit in before a committee taking testimony on a comprehensive plan document that's going to govern maybe 20 years of the city's development. Ask the important questions about how we realize a community that is diverse and committed to justice by including people rather than excluding them. How can you bring to

the conversation a distinctly Catholic understanding of what *integral ecology* means? Of what it means to live in diverse communities where we share in the gifts of creation and where we're not excluded from one another because of barriers in law and policy?

Everyone should pay attention to urban planning, in part because urban planning is inherently about inviting people to participate in the process of forming the future of their environment, the future of their places. For Catholics, there is an important lesson about urban planning related to Catholic social teaching. We talk about rights and responsibilities in Catholic social teaching. Urban planning invites everyone to the table of decision-making to envision a future for a place, with a special focus on those least likely to participate or most likely to be excluded from the process. It invites a call to active participation.

**How can people's relationships with one another and their urban surroundings be deepened by Ignatian spirituality?**

Ignatian spirituality is a very practical spirituality. It's a very urban one as well. In one of the meditations in his spiritual exercises, St. Ignatius of Loyola is constantly inviting a retreatant to a composition of place. As an urban planner, that sounds very much like an existing conditions analysis to me.

The dynamic of the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius is about how our practical experience of life encourages a deeper union with God. In the lived practical experience of the places where we live, our interactions in them, and our feelings toward them, we better understand how God is meeting us in the world.

There's a rich opportunity to make a connection between spiritual exercises such as walking the city—allowing

oneself to create the city by walking through it and taking in the beauties of the city, our neighbors, and our favorite places to go—as a way to encounter God and for God to communicate to us through the practical lived experience of the city. Use your imagination, use all your God-given senses to create the scene in which you meet God. In creating this place, pay attention to the details of our urban surroundings: the kinds of things that give us joy, that challenge us or inspire us to justice.

Too often we reduce the city and spirituality to just the sacred places. Obviously, churches are sacred places, but all of these encounters in the city are potentially graced with God's presence and, to Pope Francis' point in *Laudato Si'*, the possibility of human fraternity. Neighborliness and human connection are possible when we make it easier to live and be together in a unity of place. **USC**

## Test your Catholic knowledge

Search for the answers to this month's quiz questions in articles at [uscatholic.org](http://uscatholic.org). The first reader to email all correct responses to [letters@uscatholic.org](mailto:letters@uscatholic.org) will be featured on U.S. Catholic social media.

1. **Is it morally acceptable to receive a COVID-19 vaccine?**  
"Do Catholics have to get the COVID-19 vaccine?"  
by Father Thomas Nairn, O.F.M.
2. **How old was St. Patrick when he was kidnapped and taken to Ireland?**  
"There's more to St. Patrick than shamrocks and beer"  
by Damian Costello
3. **What May 1 Irish festival plays a role in the story of St. Patrick?**  
"The real story of St. Patrick"  
by Damian Costello
4. **What was St. Damien of Molokai's birth name?**  
"The contagious spirit of Father Damien"  
by Daniel Murphy
5. **Finish this quote from Julian of Norwich.**  
"All shall be well, and all shall be well, and . . ."  
"Julian of Norwich and a life full of love"  
by Ellyn Sanna
6. **In which book of the Bible do we read about Pentecost?**  
"What is Pentecost?"  
by David A. Pitt
7. **From where does the title the "Greenest Branch" for Mary come?**  
"8 faces of Mary to call on in prayer"  
by Christine Valters Paintner

# Native prayer

The sacred act of praying with beads merges Lakota and Catholic tradition.



Mickey McGrath

When I think of the Lakota way, many sacred items come to mind. The Sun Dance tree. The *čhaynúŋpa*, or sacred pipe. The drum. The prayer flags.

And the rosary.

Many may be surprised to learn that the rosary is an authentically Lakota prayer. But if you hear the story of the rosary's origin with Lakota ears, you won't be surprised at all.

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By Damian Costello, the author of *Black Elk: Colonialism and Lakota Catholicism* (Orbis Books).

The story begins with St. Dominic (1170–1221), the founder of the Order of Preachers. Convinced that God called him to bring the Albigensians back to orthodoxy, he went to France and began preaching. Despite his oratorical skill and years of effort, he had no effect. Defeated, St. Dominic retreated into the wilderness where he fasted and prayed for three days.

A traditional Lakota wouldn't miss the parallel with the *haŋbléčheya*, the vision quest. In this Lakota ceremony, a supplicant goes to a secluded place to fast and pray for a number of days, crying to the Spirits for a vision. The Spirits often answer with gifts of power, some of which end up becoming new ceremonies.

That's how the rosary was born. Mary took pity on St. Dominic and gave him a new prayer ceremony. She told him that God initiated one of the greatest events in human history, the incarnation, "by sending down on it the fertilizing rain of the Angelic Salutation." So must your work begin with "Hail Mary"—50 times counted out on beads while you meditate on the mysteries of salvation history, each prayer a single rose that together form a crown for our Blessed Mother.

Catholic theologian Karl Rahner made popular the practice of calling well-intentioned people of other faiths "anonymous Christians." A traditional Lakota elder may chuckle and call St. Dominic an "anonymous Lakota."

The Black Robes (as the Lakota called the Jesuits) and the Lakota wore their rosaries like pieces of regalia. Regalia aren't just pretty objects. They also have deep, symbolic meaning. In an oral culture, regalia often serve as memory aids. The rosary fit right in, with prayers linked to each bead and interior meditations that cycle through the entire life of Christ, a particularly useful learning tool for those new to the faith.

Many people associate the rosary with private devotion, but in the Lakota way it is a communal prayer. Families such as Servant of God Nicholas Black Elk's pray it together daily and with the community in church. A beautiful snapshot is from Decoration Day, when people visit the dead by adorning their graves and leaving offerings of food. On the way to the cemetery, they pray the rosary. This is a fitting example, walking as a community to honor the ancestors as you walk through the life of Christ with the eyes of Mary.

The rosary also had an important healing role. Black Elk was one of many who shifted from traditional healer to catechist. Instead of visiting the sick to sing healing songs, he prayed the rosary with the family.

The power of the rosary bled into mainstream Lakota society. Traditional healer Pete Catches revitalized many Lakota ceremonies starting in the 1960s. A longtime Jesuit remembers Catches attending a wake at a small Episcopalian chapel. The church was full when Catches walked in. "Is there going to be a rosary?" he asked. Happy to hear that the prayer would be said for the journey of the deceased and for those who mourned, Catches sat down and joined in.

Today, the rosary is less visible in Lakota Country than in the past. The Lakota, like all Americans, are wrestling with secularity, modern society, and the meaning of their Catholic inheritance, but with a massive complication: the legacy of cultural genocide. Yet the rosary is still there, still part of the vibrant Lakota spiritual way of life.

Like with so many spiritual teachings, Black Elk weaved these strands of his Lakota inheritance and the gospel message into a seamless tapestry. As an elder, he is remembered saying the rosary with a friend as he walked to church. At the same time, he prayed with his feet. The Earth is our Mother and sacred, he taught in *The Sacred Pipe* (University of Oklahoma Press). Therefore, "every step that is taken upon Her should be as a prayer."

This is already beautiful, praying with your feet as you pray with beads, but a final detail brings this practice full circle: Black Elk measured his steps not in miles or time, but by the number of rosaries you could say on the way.

May we too learn to walk in such a sacred manner. **USC**



Damian Costello

**Holy Rosary Cemetery at Red Cloud Indian School, Pine Ridge, South Dakota**

The rosary, like many aspects of Catholic spirituality, often intrigued Native peoples because of its embodied, tactile nature. Beads were highly valued in Native societies and became an important trade commodity. The earliest missionaries, such as the Jesuit Pierre-Jean de Smet, who crossed the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains numerous times, handed out rosaries to the nations with which they counseled.

One such encounter was with the great Lakota chief Sitting Bull in 1868. During the Great Sioux War, de Smet tried to bridge the warring parties. He and his Native guides sought out Sitting Bull's band without the protection of the U.S. Army. De Smet made an offering of tobacco and was brought into the camp. After smoking the sacred pipe and counseling about peace terms, de Smet gave Sitting Bull his rosary. Sitting Bull kept it for the rest of his life.



Unsplash.com/Brooke Davis

# Gather the roses

Small gestures grow great joy.

*If I give you a rose, you will not doubt God.*

*—St. Clement of Alexandria*



A decade before he died, in my front yard my dad and I planted one deep red tea rose. I haven't tended it as well as he would have in his prime, but it has survived and graced the block with three blossom spurts each year: mid-May, early August, and early October.

In its autumn cycle, it supported one full bloom, facing east, toward the Pentagon or Jerusalem, depending on your view of the world. But the next morning the flower was gone, clipped, not a red petal left behind in the dirt or surrounding grass.

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*By Evelyn Bence, the author of Room at My Table: Preparing Heart and Home for Christian Hospitality (Upper Room Books).*

My neighbor and I surmise it was plucked by a passerby in the night. Yes, stolen. At age 30, I would have fussed at the thief. Even now, if this had been the first May blossom, I would have been irritated.

But with the equinox past and days growing short, I didn't much mind. I assume someone needed it more than I.



In my early 40s, before I could envision my mother bedridden and my father lost on the roads of New York's Southern Tier—say nothing of silent in their graves—I attended a younger friend's small at-home wedding reception. In lieu of throwing her well-wishing bouquet, the bride pulled two or three roses out of the table vase, looked around the room, and with a hug handed one to each of the few unmarried female guests. I waited for my rose until it was obvious that I wasn't going to get one.

She thinks I'm too old. Or . . . ? I couldn't think of another or. I grew agitated, reminiscent of the night when I was 5 and my family insisted that I was sleepwalking. I was not.

I thought of taking matters into my own hands, moseying up to the table and surreptitiously slipping a tulip-shaped bloom into my purse. No. It felt like a thou-shalt-not violation calling for confession. I couldn't steal a rose. I needed permission or collusion.

So I sidled up to another guest, a few years older than I. "Don't bring the bride into this and make her feel guilty, but . . ." I looked her straight in the eye, listen to me, listen. "When I leave later tonight, I need a rose in my hand."

With her help, I brought one home, preserved it dry. The color of pickled beets, it was the first of dozens of roses I've gathered in before the killing frost.

Some have been gifts. From family, such as the single red from my sister Alice for the publication of my third book. From friends, such as the six yellow from my college girlfriend, Suzanne, for the publication of my fourth. Small ensembles when I had surgery. Large funeral baskets at the time of my folks' deaths.

Some have been found. The October after Mother died, I discovered two dozen, count them, 24, on the top of a trash can at the end of the street. White and pink. Still fresh and fragrant, neither tightly closed nor fully open. Still protected in a vendor's cellophane. Amazed, grateful, and curious—a rose receiver angry with a rose giver?—I brought them home and gave half of each color to my neighbor.

Some have been, uh, stolen. After Dad died I let down my guard and went through a phase of impulsively slipping or snipping roses without permission. None that would be missed. One bent over and dragging in the garden dirt at the National Cathedral. One from a wedding reception winding down. Another from a lavish funeral bouquet left at the church. I hid each in my deep purse and hoped it would perk up when watered in a bud vase in my dining room.

I think I've gotten beyond that stage, pinching public roses because I need their promise, though I did recently steal just one more, the afternoon of a predicted frost, on my dad's birthday. Needing to get out of the house, I took a few hours off and drove to a county park that features an extensive rose garden. To read a book a friend had liked and lent about making order of chaos, I set myself up in a lawn chair on a strip of grass between two rows of deep reds. I'd been there an hour when two middle-aged daughters walked past, speaking Spanish to an older woman, presumably their mother, in a wheelchair.

When they stopped near me to inhale the wafting fragrance, the older woman reached out to grab a stem. I smiled. "You like roses?" I asked.

The mother smiled and waved, eager to be friendly though she did not understand my question. The daughter spoke: "She wants to pick one, but I told her it's not allowed."

When they left my company, I returned to my book until I got chilled. As I walked toward the car, I saw the three at the south end of the garden, still enjoying the last roses of summer.

I decided to take a final tour up and down the north-side rows. And I found what I was looking for: a perfect small bud, bright yellow, on a short stem. To save it from the coming frost, I snipped and slipped it into my purse. Not a bountiful gathering in, but a colorful symbol of contentment.

I got to the car and put my lawn chair in the back seat but wasn't quite ready to drive away. Behind the wheel I sat and continued to read in my solar-heated Chevy, refreshingly womblike and warm, until I saw the two daughters approaching and loading their car, Mother to the front seat, wheelchair to the trunk.

On this, my father's birthday, I knew what I needed to do. From my purse I picked up the bright flower. I opened the car door, walked toward the strangers, and handed the old woman the rose she'd wished for.

We both were smiling. It wasn't too late to enjoy. **USC**



Unsplash.com/Mladen Borisov

Oh worker bees, patron saints of practicality, models of common sense and community, builders of home. Propolis binds up, creates protection, seals in and out. The wonders of pollen which becomes nectar which becomes honey which will feed you all in the dark, short days that are coming. Audacious am I to harvest some—this sticky delight which I will strain and store to drizzle on top of a late summer farm stand peach or stir into a steaming mug of tea.

Bees, speak to me, to us—from your intricately designed hexagonal circles, circular hexagons. With your gentle buzz, with the power of sting against which I wear a veil, with your all-female organization, with your care for the queen, with your circles of birth and service and building and dying.

Make me like you with your saddlebags to carry pollen. Bright yellow on your hips . . . if you do *indeed* have hips. (Thorax, abdomen?) To travel and pollinate, to gather raw material of nourishment and home-making and then share it with others to make something new, to build elemental dwelling, to create fragrant food.

Swarm, mob, colony . . . you bear witness that we do not do this alone. Maybe wrongly maligned as in “busy as a bee” for certainly you are industrious, but this is not gray, dreary, assembly-line labor. I have a sneaking suspicion that there is joy in your tiny apian hearts when you discover a pollen-drenched stamen and dive into the fine perfumed powder like swimming into springtime. It is not simply labor and toil . . . delight as much as duty, duty as much as delight.

Be praised oh God for sister bee for her gifts of collaboration, generosity, generativity, sweetness and delight,

Sweetness and delight.

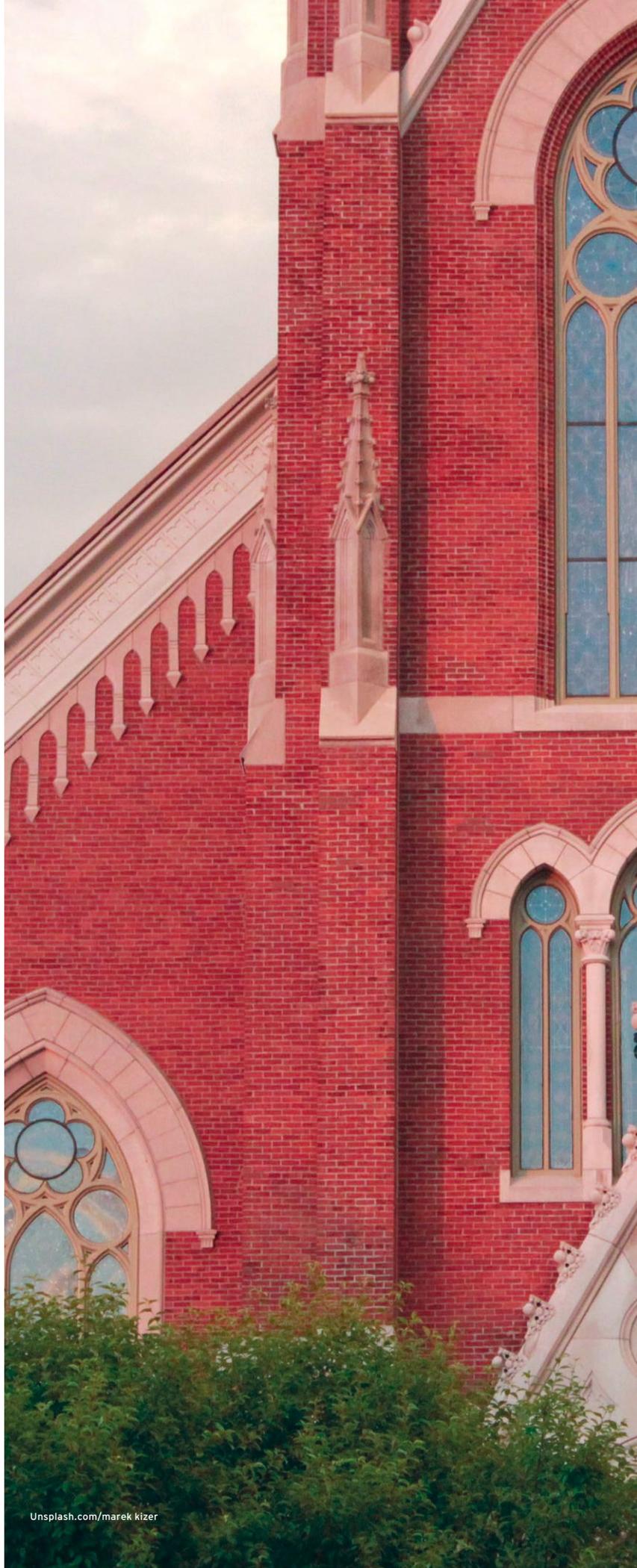
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*By Rhonda Miska, a preacher, writer, spiritual director, and lay ecclesial minister currently based in Minneapolis. Read more of her work at [rhondamiskaop.com](http://rhondamiskaop.com).*

# A tale of two churches

Two very different parishes in  
Charlotte, North Carolina point to  
divisions in the church at large.

*by* Peter Feuerherd





**T**wo Sunday morning Masses in Charlotte, North Carolina, seen via video posted on each parish website, tell a story.

At St. Peter Catholic Church downtown, a Jesuit community, Mass goes on much like it does in most of the country. Jesuit Father James Shea, the pastor, faces the congregation. A female lector provides a reading. The homily brings in the gospel reading for the day, which describes Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law. There's a lesson there about women's service, says Shea.

"Our church will be much better off if more women had more authority and more leadership roles," he says in the homily.

Ten miles northeast, near the University of North Carolina campus, St. Thomas Aquinas Church offers another kind of liturgy. The vestments and costuming are elaborate, with a few dozen participants near the altar. Everyone serving at Mass is a male cleric, and they are accompanied by male altar servers. The women in the congregation are bedecked with head coverings. Communion is on the tongue, a practice questioned by some during the pandemic.

The homily focuses on issues such as preparing "spiritual weapons" for the upcoming season of Lent and decrying a recent Pew study that indicates a minority of Catholics accept the fullness of church teaching on the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

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*Peter Feuerherd is an adjunct professor of journalism at St. John's University, New York. He is the author of The Radical Gospel of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton (Orbis Books).*

Charlotte, a region of more than 2.5 million people, the home of the Billy Graham Library and Billy Graham Parkway, is a classic booming New South city. It is still overwhelmingly Protestant and evangelical, but Catholic transplants from the North have created their own inroads. The Catholic Diocese of Charlotte encompasses western North Carolina and includes more than 235,000 Catholics. In many ways, the liturgical diversity of the diocese reflects that of the U.S. church as a whole. However, upon closer look at these two parishes—and others like them—it is unclear whether St. Peter and St. Thomas Aquinas are just two examples of the diversity of our faith or reflect growing hard-rock divisions.

## Some church insiders argue this is nothing new, merely liturgical pluralism in action.

### Culture clash

The two parishes described previously illustrate a tension that is going on across the country between parishes that see themselves as living out the legacy of the Second Vatican Council and those that have become known as *rad trads* (shorthand for radical traditionalists), a movement that is quietly transforming parishes around the country.

A prime example is St. Matthew Catholic Church, another parish in the Diocese of Charlotte, that once boasted a congregation of more than 30,000 and claimed to be the largest Catholic parish in the United States.

It may not be so large at the moment, as the parish reacts both to COVID-19 and a change in parish leadership.

Jane Francisco, a former parishioner at St. Matthew, moved to Charlotte from the Philadelphia area and immediately gravitated to the parish. Led by Msgr. John McSweeney, who retired in 2017, Sunday Mass at St. Matthew routinely filled the 2,000-seat sanctuary, with rollicking music that combined Gregorian chant with contemporary Christian evangelical pop.

The parish was huge, but McSweeney offered a small group for just about everyone. Some 7,000

parish volunteers participated in 103 different ministries. There were small groups for every available interest, from scripture study to social justice ministries to support groups for those who were divorced and remarried.

“Father McSweeney could make the parish seem small,” says Francisco. However, since McSweeney retired, she says, the parish no longer has that welcoming vibe.

One homily earlier this year declared that only Catholics could expect to go to heaven. Another argued that Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez should be made a cardinal for challenging newly elected President Joe Biden’s stance on abortion. The music has a more formalistic tone. While the Mass is still in English, parishioners expect that Latin will be incorporated soon.

A similar drama is happening all over the country: In come the smells and bells, out goes an emphasis on inclusion and social justice. Former parishioners may leave for another parish, or even another denomination, but their ranks are often replaced by new parishioners, often from miles away and often wealthy and more likely to give large sums to the church.

Some church insiders argue this is nothing new, merely liturgical pluralism in action, a necessary counterreaction to folk guitar and tambourines, a reclaiming of the riches of church music and chant. They are also quick to note that the *rad trad* parishes are often filled with young, large families, replacing aging Baby Boomers who came of age during Vatican II but whose vision of church renewal, they say, has largely passed.

*Rad trads* fill social media insisting that they are instigating a cultural renaissance. It’s about offering a worship haven removed from a coarsened culture, proponents say.

However, not everyone feels that the changes are beneficial. Father John Hoover, a priest of the Diocese of Charlotte who lives in a contemplative community in Mount Holly, North Carolina, says that post-Vatican II Catholics in the Diocese of Charlotte often feel like spiritual orphans, left adrift as parishes transform themselves into traditionalist models. The region is known for parish shopping as Catholics seek out amenable spiritual and religious communities.

At St. Gabriel Catholic Church, a parish just to the south of Charlotte, the church’s Just Life group,

a chapter of a social justice advocacy organization which attracted interest from around the area, was disbanded by the pastor for not being Catholic enough during one of these transitions. “We didn’t know what that means,” says Francisco, a former member of the group.

In response, Francisco and other Diocese of Charlotte parishioners formed a chapter of Voice of the Faithful, which grew out of the sex abuse scandals in the early part of the century in the Archdiocese of Boston and is dedicated to changing the church from within, particularly in the areas of scandal response, financial accountability, and lay input into parish and diocesan decisions.

Others feel like the new rad trad parishes are less open to lay ministries of any kind.

Don and Janet Garbison were parishioners at St. Matthew for 24 years, and they describe a parish that was alive with lay ministries. St. Matthew was once known as a model parish, able to pull together tens of thousands of parishioners and make them work as one. Now, they say, projects are consigned to either clergy or parish staff and lay input is no longer considered.

Don Garbison once toured the country visiting parishes attempting to emulate the success of St. Matthew, including St. Monica Catholic Church in Santa Monica, California. “Nobody is asking for that anymore,” he says.

“It used to be our opinions mattered. They listened. Most of the time they treated us like we were important. Today they don’t know who we are,” Don says. People have left, he says, in part because of COVID-19 restrictions, in part in reaction to the changes.

Janet Garbison is a convert. Fifty years ago, she felt the excitement generated by Vatican II. Now she speaks forlornly of a church that used to invite lay participation but is now, she says, dominated by clericalism.

“If it wasn’t for Vatican II I would not be a Catholic. It has been tremendous for me. I bought into Vatican II,” she says. But now, she says, “it’s totally changed. It’s not what Vatican II spoke of.”

### “Men of nobility”

Father Hoover believes that one reason for this shift is seminary recruitment and education. Pastoral leadership, says Hoover, should emerge from parish life rather than being imposed from outside.

Hoover describes a diocesan clergy racked with divisions between those formed in a post-Vatican II consciousness, mostly older, and younger rad trad priests.

Bishop Peter Jugis of Charlotte rarely talks to the media and did not respond to inquiries for this article. But Hoover, who is 76, says the bishop welcomes rad trad new pastors, sometimes from dioceses outside of Charlotte. They provide the steady stream of clergy necessary to minister in Charlotte, which is grappling with a growing number of Catholics and a declining number of clergy.

“Seminaries are a big part of the problem,” says Hoover. “They are institutional, cold, and ineffective,” and, he says, expensive to run. He suggests they be dismantled in favor of an apprentice system, much like the system in the church before the Council of Trent established a seminary training system featuring institutions often spiritually and physically apart from the rest of the community.

Bishop Jugis has put extensive diocesan resources into a new junior seminary to train and welcome this new generation of priests. The focus, according to a diocesan appeal, is to create “men of nobility.”

While some find comfort and meaning in the certainty of the rad trad movement, others feel befuddled by the change.

Jesuit Father James Martin, popular spiritual writer and editor-at-large for *America* magazine, also notes how some U.S. seminaries have taken a lurch rightward in recent years. A pattern has emerged: More young men are entering intent on creating a pre-Vatican II style of priesthood they may have read about but never personally experienced. Some gravitate to the online world of Catholic conservative websites, a kind of parallel magisterium led by writers and preachers from Church Militant, Lifesite News, and EWTN.

“It is an important story in the church that nearly everyone is missing: A wave of priests formed in this way who will, in a few years, become

pastors, often at odds with what their parishioners have appreciated at parishes that have welcomed their participation,” says Martin.

“In many cases I have heard of newly ordained priests simply disbanding parish councils, removing women from roles of leadership, renovating liturgical settings, and upending the entire life of the parish, all without consultation from their parishioners. It leads to feelings of betrayal, isolation, and anger and often makes some of the most active Catholics leave their parishes,” he says.

## The purpose of the parish

Chase Jackson is a 26-year-old Catholic convert who is married and a father of two. He regularly attends the Tridentine Mass at Our Lady of Grace Church in Greensboro, part of the Diocese of Charlotte, and says there is an intensity of faith he experiences at the traditional Mass community.

“I feel like everyone going there has strong faith. They believe in what the church teaches and in making it a priority in their lives,” he says.

The preaching, he says, defends church teaching, particularly on issues such as abortion. There is little effort to be deferential to those who might disagree, and that’s a good thing, believes Jackson.

“Being like a real father, calling you to something higher—it makes you evaluate what you need to change,” he says about the preaching at his parish. “It’s a real faith, not wanting to hold back.”

The ancient liturgical rites, he believes, convey a simple message: “God is present. This is serious, this is sacred.” For him, small symbols convey that message, such as altar rails and kneeling at communion.

Pope Francis, says Jackson, remains a contentious concern among traditionalists. Many are concerned that he is too willing to accommodate modern culture. He points to the pope’s famous question—“Who am I to judge?”—a response to a question about homosexuality, as sowing confusion.

“A good Father would be willing to say that there is a right way to live and a wrong way to live,” says Jackson.

While some, like Jackson, find comfort and meaning in the certainty of the *rad trad* movement, others feel befuddled by the change. For this latter group of Catholics, an integral part of belonging to a parish is lay involvement in social justice and

other parish ministries, and they are unsure how to navigate belonging in a parish community without these opportunities.

At St. John Fisher Chapel University Parish in Auburn Hills, Michigan, a part of the Archdiocese of Detroit, new parish leadership resulted in some 150 parishioners leaving the church, according to 70-year-old John Smyntek, a parishioner who went through the exit.

What was an active parish ministry outreach to Central America and to local food charities has been disbanded. The contract of the former music director, a woman married to another woman, was not renewed. Homilies focus on damnation.

“I prefer something more hopeful,” says Smyntek. He acknowledges there is a small cohort of younger people—the parish is affiliated with the campus ministry of nearby Oakland University—that revels in the assertion of a counterculture Catholicism, complete with elaborate rituals.

“It doesn’t appeal to me. I don’t understand it. I did it in high school,” says Smyntek.

It is something heard about all over the nation, says Donna Doucette, executive director of Voice of the Faithful, based in Massachusetts.

“We hear this often. New bishops come in and toss out multiple lay-led initiatives and lay leaders, replace Vatican II pastors with less-experienced traditionalists and with conservative religious order priests, and support the more rabid extremist pastors,” she says.

Tensions rose during the 2020 election cycle as some *rad trad* priests preached regularly from the pulpits about what they said was the Catholic imperative to reelect Donald Trump, says Doucette.

But for Jackson, the radical traditionalist movement is being unfairly maligned. He, for one, has no desire to deny others the post-Vatican II Mass if they want that. “We are being seen as the oppressor,” he says. “But it’s not to belittle or kick anyone. It’s a way to get everyone out of the cultural mess.”

By contrast, St. Gabriel’s Francisco says that it isn’t enough for *rad trads* and more progressive Catholics to stay in their own separate parish bubbles. She is determined to encourage a church that is more inclusive, inclined toward addressing issues of social injustice, and welcoming to all.

“I am 76 years old,” she says. “And I am going to die fighting.” **USC**



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## Called to justice

Anti-racism work is a vital part of parish ministry. Why are so many Catholics uncomfortable with it?

When a young woman in an Alabama parish heard that Jesuits in formation in St. Louis were organizing a solidarity stand vigil, she was inspired to arrange something similar at her parish. She consulted with women religious who guided her to Leslye Colvin. Colvin, a longtime social and racial justice advocate, supported the idea but suggested the need for a complementary educational component. An educator and facilitator for JustFaith Ministries, Colvin recommended the parish participate in JustFaith's new Faith and Racial Equity program.

Initially, the parish's pastor agreed to both the vigil and the program but then received pushback from the parish council. When he withdrew his support from the vigil, Colvin suggested they move it to the courthouse. For two months Colvin and others have met there for an hour each

week in a prayerful vigil culminating in a litany of names of those murdered in acts of state-sponsored violence.

Colvin was not surprised by the pushback. "After the glitch with the vigil," she says, "I decided to personally pay the parish's registration fee for the Faith and Racial Equity program. When the pastor rescinded his support after promoting the program in the parish bulletin and on social media, we had to find another way to move forward. The pandemic has revealed new ways for us to be and form communities of faith beyond the walls of the parish. This led me to reach out to women involved in Catholic Women Against Racism with hopes of finding participants. Within less than 24 hours,

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*By Rebecca Bratten Weiss, a writer, lecturer, and gardener residing in rural Ohio.*

enough women responded to form our first group beginning in January as well as a second group to begin in the spring.”

Anti-racism action seems to be such a vital component of Christian witness in our culture, so why do so many Catholics seem uncomfortable with it?

“Raising the issue of racial injustice within the context of the church or within other social systems that identify with the dominant culture will result in pushback from the majority,” Colvin says. “People who benefit from living in white bodies are challenged by discussing the privileges they’ve received from having white bodies. The desire for white body privilege was the impetus for the flawed social construct of race.”

“Even with the context of American Catholics,” she continues, “there are differences in how those of us with Black bodies process scripture. When we hear the story of bondage in Egypt and God telling Pharaoh to free God’s people, we hear the same words spoken to those who have and continue to oppress us.”

Colvin’s experience is representative of a broader issue in the U.S. Catholic Church. Recent years have brought us to a crisis moment. We as a culture and as individuals must ask ourselves how we will meet the challenge of racial injustice.

Catholic responses to this question vary. Many Catholics seem content to carry on our prior legacy of complicity with racism, even going so far as to silence anti-racist activists of color or oppose racial justice initiatives.

Yet Catholics of color continue to speak out, and some of their white brothers and sisters are listening.

It has become clear to many that working for racial justice is part of a life of Christian faith and morals that transcends political and theological divisions. Solidarity stand vigils are just one way Catholics are addressing the need for racial justice reform. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops formed its Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism in 2017. Georgetown University, which once owned and sold slaves, started its Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation as part of its atonement and reparation. Loyola University Chicago has begun an anti-racism educational initiative, and the Academy of the Holy Cross established an anti-racism and social justice advocacy team.

However, anti-racism programs in parishes are an especially important part of the racial justice movement among Catholics. They take place where

individuals and families interact communally and where so much racism and bigotry have taken place, in the past and the present.

Every parish’s agenda should include anti-racism programs, but how to implement such programs and determine what will work best for each parish is an ongoing process.

St. Vincent de Paul Church in Philadelphia recognized the need for racial healing on the parish level as early as 1997. The parish provides an account on Catholic Common Ground Initiative of the painful process it went through as parishioners began addressing racial justice issues. Its testimony is a reminder that anti-racism work is not likely to be easy. Indeed, if it feels as though it’s going too smoothly, it might be a good idea to ask what’s being left out.

Anita Foeman, a Black diversity trainer, presented St. Vincent de Paul with materials detailing the process of anti-racism collaboration.

“The first stage is superficial pseudo community—polite niceness, where no one steps on anyone’s toes or raises difficult issues,” she says. “People want to avoid conflict or the perception by others that they are prejudiced or overly angry.”

The second stage, she continues, “is chaos and emptiness. This comes when people determine to break through the superficiality, voice their opinions, and face the real issues that racism raises. Conflict emerges. Emotions of anger and trepidation come out. Participants feel that they are going backward, away from a loving community. The problems raised seem overwhelming or unsolvable. But if people can hang on through the ‘chaos’ stage, undergo self-examination, share fears and vulnerabilities, admit prejudices, express willingness to change, and speak the truth in love, chaos can give way to stage three—real community.”

Those involved in the collaboration at St. Vincent de Paul, initially upset and inclined to quit, eventually understood that the pain they were experiencing meant they were moving in the right direction. Any parish or community engaged in similar collaboration would do well to keep this in mind.

Anti-racism action in parishes is more common now, thanks largely to the activism of Black Catholics and their allies.

Christ the King Catholic Church in Nashville instituted an anti-racism initiative, which includes providing media resources to parishioners and forming a reading group that discusses such works as Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* (The

**53%**  
of *uscatholic.org*  
readers  
surveyed have  
not heard  
a homily that  
discusses  
oppression.

New Press) and Bryan N. Massingale's *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Orbis Books).

The testimonies about racism the parish shares on its website are especially powerful. However, all the authors are white or non-Black people who realized their own complicity in white supremacy. As a white Catholic, I found that these witnesses compelled me to work better at my own ingrained inclinations toward racism—but I also felt Black voices should be centered more.

In Seattle the historically Black Immaculate Conception Church recently collaborated with Jesuit St. Joseph Parish to create the *Say Their Names* visual installation, which raises awareness of and protests the many Black and brown people murdered by state-sanctioned force across the nation. The installation consists of 30 signs, each bearing the name of someone killed by the Seattle police.

The Church of the Transfiguration in Pittsford, New York has extensive anti-racism resources available on its website, including visuals, links to stories about Black saints, educational material for parents of children and teens, and links to videos and articles. For Catholics who are frustrated with parishes in which racism is never or only rarely addressed, it's encouraging to see such a diverse array of material from both religious and secular sources.

Donna Becher of Blessed Sacrament Parish in South Charleston, West Virginia says that she found her involvement with anti-racism work hard but rewarding. Becher says that her parish is mostly white but has a few Black, Latino/a, and Filipino families as well. A women's restorative justice group in her parish organized a reading group to study Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* (Beacon Press), and Becher participated.

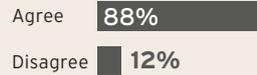
"I think it was effective," she says. "The book was hard to read for some, but we were very honest about it. In our honesty, we acknowledged our difficulty with Robin DiAngelo's material and tried to sort through our own individual fragilities."

However we go about the project of undoing racism, it's vital to recall that for Catholics the issue of racial justice goes beyond the social or political. It touches on our obligation to bear witness to the gospel in our personal lives and in how we choose to shape the culture around us.

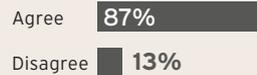
It's not enough simply to not engage in acts of overt racism. We must be vehemently and creatively engaged in collaborative work to oppose racism in all its forms, wherever it is found—including within

## and the survey says .....

1. Working for racial justice is a necessary part of Christian faith life.



2. I understand the difference between not being racist and being anti-racist.



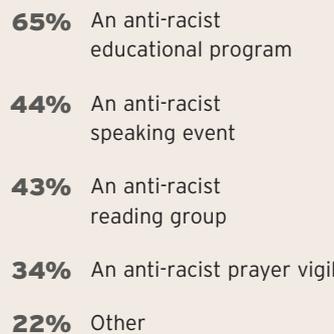
3. My parish participates in anti-racist programs and initiatives.



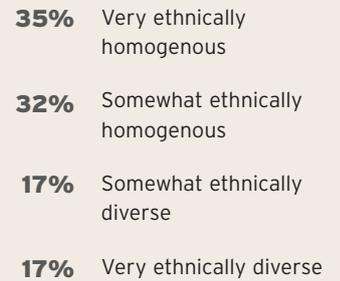
4. Anti-racism programs need to be a part of every parish's agenda.



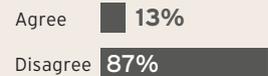
5. I would be most interested in:



6. My parish is:



7. Racial justice, racism, anti-racism, and/or white privilege are issues commonly discussed in my parish community.



8. I have heard a homily that discusses oppression.



9. I have heard a homily that discusses racial justice, racism, anti-racism, or white privilege.



10. There should be a prayer about racial justice in the prayers of the faithful at Mass.



Results are based on survey responses from 142 USCATHOLIC.ORG visitors. A representative selection of their comments follows in *Feedback*.

*Sounding Board* is one person's take on a many-sided subject and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of *U.S. Catholic*, its editors, or the Claretians.

our own hearts. Failure to do so is a failure to follow Christ.

So, how can Catholic laypeople and religious start to engage in this work? Here are several suggestions.

- **Start with prayer.** If you anticipate animosity from your pastor, parish council, or fellow churchgoers, an invitation to prayer might be the best opening. This might be as simple as requesting that prayers for racial justice be included in the prayers of the faithful. You could also organize prayerful vigils or suggest that parishioners join in novenas to end racism.
- **Write to your church leaders.** Especially if racial justice issues are in the news, contact your parish and diocesan leaders and ask them if they are willing to make a statement in favor of racial justice. You could request that petitions for racial justice be included in your parish bulletin.
- **Write to your diocesan newspaper.** Make your appeal to church leaders public with a letter to your diocesan newspaper. Should the newspaper opt not to print your letter, consider making it public using social media or contacting a sympathetic journalist to help raise awareness of the need for racial justice in parishes.
- **Distribute materials.** Even if you're uncomfortable approaching parish leaders directly, you can still access materials about anti-racism work and share them either online via your social media platforms or physically in the form of pamphlets or informational sheets.
- **Join educational programs.** The kind of program needed may depend on the nature of the parish. Diverse or predominantly nonwhite parishes may want to focus on programs that can help them raise community awareness of anti-racism as a Christian obligation. White-dominant Catholic parishes likely need to start with working on anti-racism in their own circles. See what anti-racism educational programs are available online or via communication media.
- **Organize reading groups.** White parishioners organizing these programs should consider asking nonwhite Catholics to take leadership roles. However, they must also be wary about asking people of color to educate white Catholics out of their racism. Consider taking a collection to reimburse any nonwhite Catholics involved in organizing or leading these events.
- **Invite speakers of color.** If possible, bring in speakers and influencers who can witness to the gravity of racism and the gospel calling to oppose it. Actual personal encounters can be valuable in helping others understand that racism affects real living human beings, our fellow children of God. **USC**

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LET US KNOW AT [USCATHOLIC.ORG/SURVEY.](https://www.uscatholic.org/survey)

**To me, engaging in anti-racism work means...**

Being involved in ending systemic racism. Not being afraid to put up a sign saying BLM to God and to us. Having a social justice commission and then focusing on something specific and taking action.

*Maureen Garvey  
Deerfield, Ill.*

First learning what it truly means to have white privilege and then working to dismantle all of the embedded white systems in our laws and social communities.

*Liz Jennings  
Shoreview, Minn.*

Developing a sense of solidarity with those who have not had access to the opportunities I have had. Speaking out when others voice assumptions and stereotypes. Making space for BIPOC leaders in our parish organizations. Educating ourselves.

*Maureen Lahiff  
Oakland, Calif.*

**I work to end racism in the church by...**

Supporting Catholics and priests who speak and act in ways to end racism.

*Carole Morales  
El Cajon, Calif.*

Being present and upholding the dignity of African American existence.

*Sheila Sockwell-Thompson  
Lanham, Md.*

Observing my own attitudes, reactions, and ideas carefully to see if there are areas where my own racism is an issue.

*Karen Karn  
Golden Valley, Minn.*

Cofacilitating JustFaith's Faith and Racial Equity program; presenting anti-racism opportunities to my parish council and pastor; and sharing information, personal experience, and reflections in informal conversations with fellow Catholics.

*Theresa Hathaway  
Dothan, Ala.*

**Something I wish my parish would do to work toward racial justice is...**

Talk about it, address it from the pulpit, mention it in the prayers of the faithful, and, ultimately, bring in speakers or plan an event to educate ourselves.

*Emily Jamberdino  
Rochester, N.Y.*

At least talk about our culpability in moving out of urban areas in order to avoid people of color.

*Maureen McCarron  
Conesus, N.Y.*

Speak about human dignity and ignore race. God does not define us by our skin color and neither should we.

*Marie Olinger  
Owatonna, Minn.*

Preach more on the works of Christ—if his message is truly lived there would be racial justice, no question.

*Christy Antonio  
Parkland, Fl.*

**I think there is often conflict surrounding anti-racism work because...**

It is easily politicized.

*Pat Fox  
Huntington Station, N.Y.*

People of color, especially Black people, are dehumanized in the minds of many white Catholics and deemed unworthy of dignity.

*Andrew Lyke  
Matteson, Ill.*

Of a combination of poorly trained individuals who argue for anti-racism and individuals who have never been educated on all aspects of racism.

*Dave Buckley  
San Diego, Calif.*

It's rooted in anti-Christian thought.

*Greg Hutchinson  
Murrieta, Calif.*

**General Comments**

*White Fragility* is a book with serious anti-Christian theories, and I believe it is dangerous to refer to it as an example of what being "anti-racist" is.

*John B.  
Newport, R.I.*

As long as we continue to focus on our differences, we will continue to be divided. When we focus on our commonalities, we can move forward toward actual equality.

*Suzanne Harris  
Spokane, Wash.*

There were people actually hostile to my idea of my bringing speakers to the parish to teach folks about white privilege, the history of racism in the church and society at large, and how to be anti-racist.

*Stephanie Riccobene  
Cleveland, Ohio*

While we have some parish clerical support of our anti-racism initiative, we have yet to hear homilies devoted to our faith's foundational understanding of the sin of racism. We believe clergy participation in the initiative's activities would draw more parishioners to at least investigate the initiative's offerings.

*Cindy Bauer  
San Juan Capistrano, Calif.*

**ontheweb**

To take our latest survey, visit [uscatholic.org/survey](https://uscatholic.org/survey).



Courtesy of Amazon Studios

## Shake things up

*One Night in Miami* gives us a stirring debate about the battle between faith and fear.

For the past 21 years, I've taught at historically Black colleges, and several times during those years the theater department has either hosted or produced a 1987 play called *The Meeting* by Jeff Stetson. It depicts a fictional encounter between Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. The appeal for college drama is obvious. Two men, representing the historic nationalist and integrationist streams in Black politics, meet in a hotel room, argue about religion and ethics for an hour, and then go their separate ways. Small cast, one set, big ideas—what's not to like?

I'd bet that writer Kemp Powers saw *The Meeting* when he was a student at Howard University. But he was reading a biography on Muhammad Ali when he stumbled upon the real-life "meeting" that inspired *One Night in Miami*. On February 25, 1964, after the young boxer still called Cassius Clay won the world heavyweight championship, he went

back to his hotel to hang out with his friends—Malcolm X, NFL star Jim Brown, and pop music superstar Sam Cooke. You couldn't make that up. It really happened. There are pictures. However, Powers couldn't find any information about what went on with the four men in the room, so, like the author of *The Meeting*, he made it up.

*One Night in Miami* is now streaming on Amazon Prime Video. It is written by Powers and directed by Regina King. And, in the course of its imagined meeting, it gives us a stirring debate about the value and burden of celebrity, the tension

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*By Danny Duncan Collum, a writing teacher at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of four books, including the novel White Boy (Apprentice House).*

between individual autonomy and social responsibility, and, at least in the case of Clay and Malcolm X, the battle between faith and fear.

In February 1964 these four princes of African America are all at the top of their respective games. Clay is the new champ, Cooke has started his own record company, Brown has just set the NFL season rushing record, and Malcolm X, as spokesperson for the Black separatist Nation of Islam, is the African American leader that white America most loves to hate.

Brown, Clay, and Cooke are all, in their very different ways, artists. They are each supremely skilled at a craft they love and have perfected through years of hard work, and they have grown into confident men who want to control their own destinies. Malcolm X, however, wants them to see their individual destinies as inseparable from the collective quest of an oppressed people.

He comes down especially hard on Cooke, who, he says, is pandering to a white audience instead of using his music to deliver the message of Black freedom. It's an argument that artists and revolutionaries have been having since the dawn of time but not one we're used to hearing in Hollywood movies. Meanwhile, Cooke insists that he is serving the cause by owning a company that allows Black singers and songwriters to profit justly from their creations.

Brown also insists that economic power, through Black-owned businesses, is the key to Black power. This is a position the still-living Brown maintains to this day, and it led him to endorse Richard Nixon in 1968 and Donald Trump in 2020. Malcolm X, meanwhile, pushed the Black capitalism strategy as a member of the Nation of Islam, but in the last year of his life seemed to be moving past it.

Anyway, money isn't mainly what's on Malcolm X's mind. To him the other three men are friends whom he admires and respects, but, as an activist, he also pushes them to use their fame and influence for a larger purpose. At one point Malcolm X tells the others that they are Black America's strongest weapons for freedom. Brown looks him straight in the eye and replies "We are not anyone's weapons, Malcolm."

Cooke started his career as a gospel singer, but by 1964 he is living the fast life of a pop star. Brown is frankly irreligious and would later be accused of downright predatory behavior toward women. Malcolm X and Clay-turned-Ali, however, are

shown to be men of genuine faith. We see Clay joining Malcolm X for Muslim prayer before his championship bout, and we see Clay struggling with the sins of the flesh that he'll have to forgo as a Muslim. He also knows that public condemnation awaits him when he announces his conversion. Malcolm X, however, has recently learned of pervasive corruption at the very top of the Nation of Islam and is secretly laying plans to leave it and establish his own African American Muslim organization.

In the closing minutes, we see Clay go bravely before the media, with Malcolm X at his side, and announce his conversion. We also see Malcolm X, back home in New York, rushing his wife and daughters out of their house that has been fire-bombed, presumably by members of the Nation of Islam.

Throughout the film, Malcolm X badgers Cooke about his failure to write songs for the freedom struggle. Later in 1964, Cooke did release "A Change Is Gonna Come," a timeless anthem of longing for freedom and dignity. The film ends with Cooke, played by Leslie Odom Jr. of *Hamilton* fame, singing it on *The Tonight Show*.

Still, while Cooke wrote a really, really good song for the movement, Malcolm X and Clay/Ali would go on to present real challenges to America's Cold War empire. At the time of his death in 1965, Malcolm X was marshalling support from Third World governments in the United Nations to have the United States condemned for its human rights violations against African Americans. A couple of years later, Ali sacrificed his career by refusing conscription into the U.S. war on Vietnam.

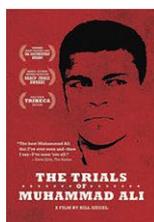
In the end, it was the men of faith who really shook things up. **USC**

Brown, Clay, and Cooke are all, in their very different ways, artists.

quicktakes

What came after that night in Miami . . .

The Trials of Muhammad Ali  
(Kino Lorber Films, 2014)



The Two Killings of Sam Cooke  
(Netflix, 2019)



Malcolm X: Make It Plain  
(PBS, 1994)



watch

**JUDAS AND THE BLACK MESSIAH**

Directed by Shaka King (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2020)



It has been more than 50 years since the FBI conspired with the Chicago Police Department to murder Black Panther leader Fred Hampton (Daniel Kaluuya) in his sleep. Shaka King's *Judas and the Black Messiah* focuses on the events leading up to Hampton's death, in particular the role FBI informant William O'Neal (LaKeith Stanfield) played in these events. When we first meet O'Neal, he is an ambitious, if hapless, car thief, offered a chance to avoid jail time if he agrees to infiltrate the Black Panthers and report his findings to FBI agent Roy Mitchell (Jesse Plemons).

For a historical drama, the movie is mercifully free of many of the usual signifiers directors use to telegraph time and place to an audience. No shots of newspapers heralding the moon landing or television broadcasts of a Nixon speech. One place where the film could have used a slightly stronger commitment to historical accuracy is in the age of its actors. Although the performances by Kaluuya, Stanfield, and Plemons are compelling, the three leads are in their late 20s or early 30s. In real life, Hampton and O'Neal were barely out of their teens, and Mitchell was a Korean War veteran.

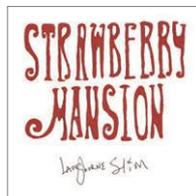
While Stanfield is excellent as O'Neal, an opportunist who realizes the devastating consequences of his actions way too late, the heart of the movie is the relationship between Hampton and his girlfriend, Deborah Johnson (Dominique Fishback). Hampton's charisma was apparent to anyone who heard him speak. He never hid his desire to form a multiracial coalition to speak up for oppressed people; the movie makes it explicit that Hampton's alliances with white and Puerto Rican activists particularly drew the ire of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover (Martin Sheen). Losing an activist of Hampton's capabilities would send any movement reeling. But seeing Johnson lose her partner makes the loss nearly unbearable.

— Kathleen Manning

listen

**STRAWBERRY MANSION**

By Langhorne Slim (Dualtone Records, 2021)



First, let's deal with the name. It's a self-deprecating joke. He's really Sean Scolnick, a nice Jewish boy from Langhorne, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. But somehow Scolnick came out of there playing and singing in a bluesy, folksy, rootsy style that sometimes even involves banjos.

*Strawberry Mansion* is a pandemic album. Those are starting to pile up now. But this one's not just what the artist did to earn some cash during the live music drought. It's actually about the pandemic. Over its 19 songs, we hear a troubled man finding the grace to turn forced isolation into a monastic meditation on detachment and surrender.

Slim could easily have become another pandemic tragedy. Early last year he was in rehab for opioid abuse. He got home to Nashville just in time for the tornado strike of March 3 and the COVID-19 shutdown 10 days later. The singer was in that end-of-his-rope state of mind recreated on the song "Panic Attack." But, as the song says, he "called a health care professional" who advised that he try playing music through the attacks. Meanwhile, a friend suggested he try the discipline of writing a song every day. And here we have them.

In an NPR interview, Slim claims to have never prayed before all this, but another friend had sent along a prayer that he read every morning, so he tried it. The result is "Morning Prayer," which the cognoscenti may recognize as a loose rendering of the Alcoholics Anonymous Third Step Prayer, with its opening line, "God I offer myself to Thee."

From there, Slim got the hang of the spirituality thing pretty quickly. The album's opener, "Mighty Soul," repeats the title phrase as an entity we simultaneously call out to, have in us, use together for the common good, and "pour love into." I think even our local Kentucky hero, Thomas Merton, would have approved that message.

—Danny Duncan Collum



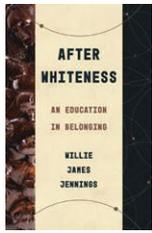
We are tattooed, engraved, lovingly written into the hands of the ALL-RECORDING. This divine name tells us that, to God, we are unforgettable."

—Brother David Steindl-Rast, 99 Names of God (Orbis Books)

read

## AFTER WHITENESS

By Willie James Jennings (Eerdmans, 2020)



It is safe to say most Catholics have never heard of theologian Willie James Jennings. That is not surprising. First, he is not Catholic. Second, the work of academic theologians rarely makes its way to everyday people. Sometimes that is a good thing. Academic jargon often can suck the soul out of an engraced and informed word about God.

Jennings' work, however, is different. His masterwork, *The Christian Imagination* (Yale University Press), was a gamechanger that explains how colonization was a theological endeavor that created the current racialized caste system. *After Whiteness*, his most recent work, builds upon this and focuses on theological education. It is a reflection on his 30 years as an educator—from professor to academic dean to consultant and beyond—and the obstacles presented by colonial and racialized sin embedded within theological education. For Jennings, “whiteness” has less to do with melanin content and more to do with an inherited way of attempting to arrange and control the world that is incompatible with the creative work of the Christian God. “All theological education in the Western world is haunted by [a paradigm]: a plantation at worship and an enslaved preacher,” he writes.

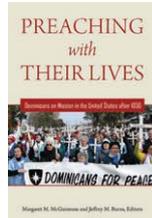
In some ways, Jennings' vision is very Catholic. He writes, “Theological education must capture its central work—to form us in the art of cultivating belonging.” The book calls for theological education to focus on *communion*, that is, the formation of communities in which intimacy, mutual self-giving, and the creation of a “new people” are the norm. Jennings weaves together personal poetry; anecdotes from teaching, advising, and administrative leadership; and logical argumentation to get his point across. Catholics would do well to learn from and listen to this great theologian.

—Kevin P. Considine

read

## PREACHING WITH THEIR LIVES

Edited by Margaret M. McGuinness and Jeffrey M. Burns (Fordham University Press, 2021)



Since St. Dominic founded the Order of Preachers more than 800 years ago, the Dominican family—comprising priests, brothers, sisters, nuns, and laypeople—has sought to live out his preaching charisma. Project OPUS (Order of Preachers in the United States) traced the beginnings of the U.S. portion of Dominican family history in *Dominicans at Home in a Young Nation*, edited by Mary Nona McGreal. In this second volume, spanning from the Civil War to the present day, their story continues to unfold.

The 12 essays in this book detail how, against the backdrop of much social and ecclesial change, Dominican women and men in the United States have preached from a multitude of “pulpits”: social action, the arts, advocacy, liturgical renewal, health care, education, missionary outreach, and more.

The book's second chapter, detailing the Dominican sisters' experience of and response to the 1870s yellow fever outbreak in Nashville, is particularly resonant in our COVID-19 pandemic context. Other chapters explore the development of Dominican ministries focused on immigrants and economic justice. The text closes with Kathleen Sprows Cummings' exploration of two U.S. Dominican would-be saints: Rose Hawthorne Lathrop and Samuel Mazzuchelli.

This book will be of interest both to those connected to the Dominican charisma and to those interested in U.S. women's history. Many of the chapters highlight the accomplishments of Dominican women religious.

With its companion volume, this sweeping and impressive history raises the question: What shape will the preaching charisma take in the future as Dominicans continue to respond to the signs of the times?

—Rhonda Miska

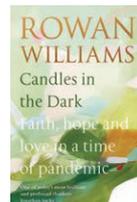
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**Sting and Religion: The Catholic-Shaped Imagination of a Rock Icon** by Evyatar Marienberg (Wipf and Stock, 2021)



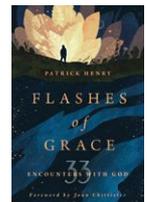
Marienberg uses historical research, analysis of Sting's lyrics, and an interview with Sting himself to explore how growing up Catholic influenced Sting's creative work.

**Candles in the Dark: Faith, Hope and Love in a Time of Pandemic** by Rowan Williams (InterVarsity Press, 2021)



This collection of meditations by the former Archbishop of Canterbury offers hope and encouragement as we endure more than a year of a pandemic.

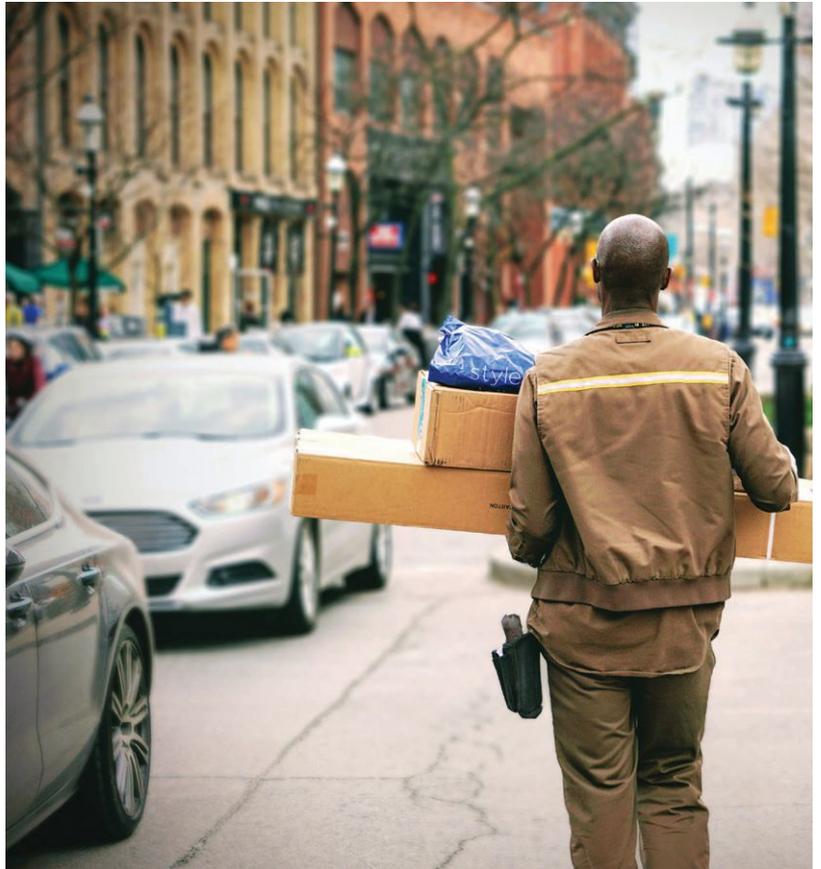
**Flashes of Grace: 33 Encounters with God by Patrick Henry** (Eerdmans, 2021)



Henry writes of finding God's grace in the most unlikely places, including Darwin's grave, airports, a baseball diamond, and on the Starship Enterprise.

# Make it work

As we rethink work, we must consider Catholic teaching about its value.



Unsplash.com/Maarten van den Heuvel

Modern Catholic social thought is typically dated back to Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (On Capital and Labor). It's not that Catholicism had never dealt with social ethics before, of course, but the pope's discussion marked a new level of reflection that considered particular ethical questions in the context of larger changes in social structures. The particular issue Pope Leo XIII spoke to was the "worker question": the effects of the 19th-century Industrial Revolution that sparked the rise of socialism in Europe.

Even since then, Catholic social thought has seen work as the "key to the social question." Today, work is facing a new crisis. Spurred by technological change and supercharged by the disruption of the pandemic, everyone is wondering about the future of work. News reports wonder, "Will the office disappear?" amid speculation that the new world of remote work could change

American settlement patterns as much as the advent of the highway system. Meanwhile, the impact of the novel coronavirus exposes divides: Categories of "essential workers" must continue to stock the stores and provide nursing home care while so many others have the privilege to continue their jobs from the safety of their own homes.

How should we confront these changes? In his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship), Pope Francis repeatedly says we cannot simply return to business as usual. He encourages us to "rise to the challenge of envisaging a new humanity. We can aspire to a world that provides land, housing and work for all."

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By David Cloutier, an associate professor of theology at the Catholic University of America and editor of catholicmoraltheology.com.

As we rethink work, we must make choices in line with Catholic teaching about its value.

First and foremost, work is a very good thing for us. Catholic social thought has always held that human beings are made for work and that work is a central aspect of human dignity. While we sometimes pay lip service to this truth, we also tend to imagine that avoiding work or doing less of it would be better. In his magnificent recent book *Getting Work Right* (Emmaus Road Publishing), Catholic theologian Michael Naughton outlines our tendency to view work as merely a “job” that provides us with money we can use for the real things we care about in life.

Indeed, our very economic system can seem to measure work as a “disvalue,” as employers seek to minimize their labor costs and workers seek various paths to minimize the work they have to do to gain a paycheck. Naughton also points out the mistake at the other extreme, a “careerism” in which we measure our entire worth by our work achievements. There is more to life than work, and Naughton argues that we get work right only when we get Sabbath rest right, when we properly understand and integrate work and genuine rest. In order to do so, we must come to understand work as a vocation, as a role in a larger purpose or calling to which we devote our entire lives.

This understanding of work can apply to all types of work and work structures. But we need to be careful: At least in our present circumstances, it’s clearly easier for some people in some professions to understand their work as vocation than for others. Our structures currently favor living out so-called white-collar work for vocation, but they leave behind the majority on whose “essential services” the few rely. How can we get work right for *all*?

Three key insights from Catholic social teaching can help us. The first is St. Pope John Paul II’s teaching about the purpose of business. He writes in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (Commemorating the Centenary of *Rerum Novarum*) that businesses, while they must be profitable in order to continue to exist, do not have profit as their primary, foundational identity.

Instead, a firm’s first purpose is “found in its very existence as a community of persons.” Work teaches us not simply to make products or services but to work together with others in order to do so. Consider the moves toward online commerce: The impersonality of solo delivery drivers running around, as quickly as possible dumping

packages silently so they can move on to the next block, hardly looks like a workplace of human communion. How can new technologies enhance communion rather than further diminish it?

A second insight also comes from the same passage by St. Pope John Paul II, who explains that this community of persons is meant to “form a particular group at the service of the whole of society.” We sometimes talk as if “community service” is not for work hours and settings. But most “service” is ultimately provided through work. Catholic social thought teaches about the obligation of businesses to provide “good goods,” serving real and genuine needs that help human persons flourish. How can we support work that truly serves genuine human needs?

Finally, in his encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), St. Pope John Paul II describes what he calls the “subjective value of work.” By this, he means that the work develops the person in their full humanity. This goes beyond communion and service. He identifies being created in the image of God with the idea of “dominion,” that work allows the person to become “capable of acting in a planned and rational way” and move toward “self-realization.” One of the least discussed aspects of the structure of work is that workers tend to value some degree of autonomy and control over their own work processes. Especially given the technological changes we are facing, how can people at workplaces develop into skilled, creative persons and not simply robots to be directed by others?

For a long time, we have run our economy aiming to maximize output for consumption. We’ve assumed that the basic economic problem is “not enough” and that efficiency means organizing things so as to make the most output at the least cost. We’ve now got a lot of stuff but also a subordination of the worker to this demand of maximum output. Increasingly, both liberals and conservatives recognize that this subordination of the worker underlies our increasing political polarization, widening the gap between those who have secure, lasting employment and those who are constantly on the edge, barely getting by.

As we reset our work lives after the pandemic, it’s genuinely possible to rethink policies to put work and workers first. But we also need more than policy. We need to recover the fullness of Catholic insight on how God made us for work—the right kind of work, in which we ultimately serve God and one another. **USC**

How can new technologies enhance communion rather than further diminish it?

## Life and debt



Flickr.com/World Bank Photo Collection

Just a few years back, historically low interest rates provoked a debt binge among governments in the developing world, one partly bankrolled by new geopolitical players like China or cheerfully packaged into new lending instruments by First World banks and investors seeking to maximize returns on capital reserves. By the time the debt bazaar closed, developing countries owed a record amount to foreign investors, banks, and governments, the *New York Times* reports.

More than \$2.1 trillion in debt was assumed by countries ranked as “low income” and “lower-middle income” by the World Bank, including unsteady states like Afghanistan, Bolivia, Chad, and Zimbabwe. The International Monetary Fund called it the “largest, fastest, and most broad-based increase in debt in these economies in the past 50 years.”

Strictly adhering to Murphy’s Law, billions in payment on those debts came due in 2020 and 2021 just as the COVID-19 crisis threw a monkey wrench into the global economy, throttling tax revenue

Forgive overseas loans to extract developing nations from the COVID-19 crisis.

that developing world borrowers were anticipating. COVID-19-shuttered and vaccine-bereft Sub-Saharan Africa is heading into its

deepest recession in 50 years. In November Zambia became the first among the nouveau indebted to default, reneging on a \$43 million Euro-bond payment. More than a score of other African states are considered in grave peril of default.

The issue may be obscured by accounting jargon, amortization formulas, and numbers, numbers, numbers. Yet in the end the matter is relatively simple: Will the world’s poorest nations be forced once again to choose between saving lives and paying off debt? In the past, nations that opted to put people first were locked out of development loans for years, a decision that meant a different kind of prolonged suffering for their people.

In a joint letter in February, the interfaith religious development group Jubilee USA Network and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops urged the Biden administration to take

the lead in preventing such lamentable trade-offs. Their appeal calls for a short-term response to address immediate humanitarian needs this year, freezing debt servicing, and forgiving some loans outright. But the letter writers also argue that long-term reform of global lending practices has to be a part of a rational response to prevent a rinse and repeat of such crises. Too often resource-rich-but-capital-poor states accept debt deals that promise prosperity but just as often deliver economic and social catastrophe.

There are of course practical reasons for government, banks, and private investors to rebalance debt terms or accept modest losses on unpayable debt. Analysts at the International Monetary Fund called the global pandemic a “once-in-a-century shock that merits a generous response” with an eye on “preserving the global trading system and helping countries weather debt problems.”

The subtext here is that allowing the COVID-19 debt crisis to spiral out of control will in the end rupture even advanced economies. No one wants to see the golden goose of international lending and borrowing choke to death on bad paper. It’s worth noting that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, wealthy states have been on a debt binge of their own, raising almost \$20 trillion in government and corporate bonds to get their nations through the crisis.

Cornering poor counties into trading emergency spending on public health for debt payments will definitely mean a higher death toll and the likelihood that the pandemic will continue longer than it has to. In that sense a merciful response on debt is a wise investment for all, helping economies around the world return to normalcy faster and with fewer casualties. No one should be forced to choose between life and debt. **USC**

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By Kevin Clarke, chief correspondent for America magazine and author of *Oscar Romero: Love Must Win Out* (Liturgical Press).



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# Thanks for everything

A toddler's enthusiasm for giving thanks encourages a parent's practice.

**W**hat do slides, cashews, grandparents, undies, and the color yellow have in common? Well, besides their contributions to the good life, they're all regularly featured in my daughter's nighttime prayers.

Esther just turned 2, and to say that it brings my director-of-faith-formation heart joy to hear her request "prayers please" does not do justice to the emotional overwhelm I experience in the moment when she clasps her chubby hands. In addition to providing a glimpse into the wonderland of my toddler's mind and assuring me that I'm not completely failing as a parent, praying with Esther has taught me important lessons about prayer.

Our evening ritual looks like this: Once teeth are brushed, books are read, and Esther is cozily nestled between her favorite doll and bear, we offer a lengthy litany that leaves no stone unturned. We bless and give thanks for the activities of the day, for her

favorite toys, and for all the people—every last one, by name—whom she knows. I silently give thanks, as the prayer inches along, that the pandemic has limited her social circle. The prayer ends when she squeezes her eyes shut and whispers an earnest "Ayyyyyeee-men."

A nap time or bedtime has not occurred since Esther spoke her first words without the offering of prayers. This, I will tell you, has given me the longest prayer streak of my life.

While my spiritual practice has ebbed and flowed over the years, one consistent struggle I face

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*By Teresa Coda, who works in parish faith formation. She lives in Pennsylvania with her husband and two young daughters.*

is the propensity to avoid prayer when I'm not "in the mood." If enough days go by in which the daily readings leave me uninspired, and time in silence proves anxiety-producing instead of refreshing, I'm quick to take a break from scheduled prayer time. Time in nature is a prayer, I tell myself. God's presence is as active in my friends as it is in the Bible, I say.

These things may be true, and I believe them to be. Yet I also know that, for me at least, spending consistent and concentrated moments in meditation, reflection, and silence nourishes my faith life in a steady, if imperceptible in the moment, kind of way, a way that cannot be replaced with occasional traipses through the woods and bimonthly gatherings with friends. Esther keeps me in the habit of showing up and saying prayers regularly, whether I'm "feeling it" or not. The psychologist William James once observed that action and feeling go together and that "by regulating the action, which is under the more direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling." I think that this same idea applies to prayer. By keeping me engaged in the ritual action of giving thanks and asking for blessing, Esther keeps me open to the movement of God within my life.

Esther also helps me recognize the value of praying for others, which, admittedly, is something I never used to do. Whereas many people of faith send sympathy notes and get-well-soon cards with promises of prayers, I'm much more inclined to tell my grieving, ill, or otherwise struggling friends that I'm holding them in my heart. Because, well, that's the truth. My hesitation to pray for others—and for myself, for that matter—comes from my understanding of how God operates in a suffering world, or, in a word, theodicy. Philosophers, theologians, and seekers through the ages have wondered why God allows suffering and evil to happen. In his 1981 classic on the topic, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (Schocken Books), Rabbi Harold Kushner proposes that it is not in God's power to prevent suffering. While some people are uncomfortable with the idea of a God who is not omnipotent, I'm with Kushner: It makes more sense to me that an infinitely loving and merciful God *cannot* prevent evil than that God chooses not to. Truthfully, I don't think we are meant to understand the

workings of God, so I don't spend a lot of my mental, emotional, and spiritual energy trying to comprehend God's ways. But I hold the philosophy that God cannot prevent suffering strongly enough that it stops me from bothering to pray for others.

Rather, it used to stop me. Since I began praying with Esther, I pray for friends and family members regularly. This has caused me to change my mind about the value of such a practice, even though my views on theodicy remain the same. Praying for my husband, siblings, parents, friends, and in-laws may not reap transcendent results, but it changes me. Thinking of the people who bring joy and meaning to our days kindles a flame in my innermost being. By regularly remembering Esther's and my nearest and dearest, I'm more likely to reach out to them, send a birthday card, make a phone call, or even just text "I'm thinking of you." Praying for others increases the love I feel and the love I give.

Regardless of what God does with my prayers, a lot of good comes from saying them, from simply naming the people whom I hold in the tabernacle of my heart. This brings me to perhaps the most important lesson that Esther has taught me through her bedtime ritual: Prayers don't have to be intricate, long, or deep. They can be as uncomplicated as the uttering of a single word. While I've always known this on an intellectual level—in fact, I built an entire retreat around Anne Lamott's book *Help, Thanks, Wow* (Riverhead Books), the premise of which is that these three short words are the three essential prayers—I've let the feeling of being mentally fried, the absence of a long chunk of time, and the desire to avoid any sort of deep thinking stop me from praying on many occasions. Esther, with her buoyant enthusiasm and limited vocabulary, guides me out of that limited way of thinking and doing. Her prayers are as simple as you'd expect a 2-year-old's to be, and I have no doubt that they are pleasing to God and efficacious in nourishing her faith.

There will be a time when Esther stops praying for undies and I'm no longer privy to the inner workings of her soul, but I hope to never forget these lessons that she—full of jubilation, whimsy, and the breath of God—has taught me: Do it regularly, pray for others, and simple is fine. Ayyyeeeee-men! **USC**



## Lakota vision

Nicholas Black Elk was fully Lakota and completely Catholic.

“Good book. Did you know he was Catholic?”

You never know what questions will mark you for life, but there was no doubting the impact of this one. I had just walked into a required theology class the fall semester of my junior year. On top of my schoolbooks I had *Black Elk Speaks*, which I had been rereading for fun.

Catholicism was about the last thing I would have associated with Nicholas Black Elk. Like virtually everyone who has read the book since it was published in 1932, I read it because it is a beautiful Native story about a Lakota boy growing up hunting buffalo on the plains during the so-called Sioux Wars. At 9, he was given a great vision of the sacred tree with the calling to save his people. Black Elk recounts epic battles and miraculous healings and introduces the larger-than-life figures of Crazy Horse, General Custer, and Sitting Bull.

A big part of the book’s lasting influence is how the drama of Black Elk’s early life seems to so perfectly capture the whole drama of Native American history. The book makes the 1890 Massacre at Wounded Knee the final exclamation point of a continentwide tragedy. It then skips Black Elk’s adult life and leaves the reader thinking he was a broken old man lamenting the sacred tree that never bloomed. Through this image and the book’s epic tone, Black Elk became a kind of prophet that spoke to the seemingly intractable global problems we face now. I read my angst and fury into the story and saw it all through Black Elk’s eyes.

Above all, the authenticity of Black Elk’s spirituality spoke to me—the power of his great vision of the renewal of all peoples and his unending quest to live up to that calling. I found Black Elk’s other book, *The Sacred Pipe* (University of Oklahoma Press), an account of the seven sacred Lakota ceremonies, and it taught me about Lakota spiritual traditions. More important, Black Elk portrayed an authentic relationship with God outside of my usual stereotypes and spoke directly to an only partially identified spiritual longing: Black Elk connected deeply with every facet of creation.

My professor encouraged me to do a senior project on the topic. How could Black Elk be Catholic and Lakota at the same time? I embraced this educational opportunity like never before. I read everything I could find, completely immersing myself in the topic. In the process, I discovered a number of unexpected things about Black Elk.

First, Black Elk was thoroughly and completely Catholic. After his baptism in 1904, he taught himself to read the Bible in Lakota. Because of his zeal, the Jesuits appointed him to the position of catechist, which in Black Elk’s community functioned much like a permanent deacon does today. He became famous for memorizing scripture and

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By Damian Costello, author of *Black Elk: Colonialism and Lakota Catholicism (Orbis Books)*.

weaving passages into his oratory. He was a long-term missionary to other tribes and is credited with bringing over 400 people into the church.

Black Elk's Catholic faith had a traditional hue that I didn't expect. Devotions, such as the rosary and Sacred Heart, were important to his prayer life. Black Elk loved the Latin liturgy and sang his grandchildren to sleep with Latin hymns from the high Mass. He was comfortable weaving these into his Lakota spirituality, not replacing it.

What I saw then and even more clearly when I continued the project in graduate school was how Christianity addressed questions about the colonial situation the Lakota faced. Black Elk wasn't the broken old man that *Black Elk Speaks* portrays, and the Lakota world didn't end with Wounded Knee. The Catholic faith, despite the church's participation in the colonial oppression of the Lakota, was a key ingredient to proactively survive the upheaval.

On the one hand, Catholic teaching gave Black Elk's faith a new standard of justice to hold the invaders accountable. On the other, Black Elk's faith gave him the framework to understand the invaders as human beings suffering from similar issues as the Lakota did and to reinterpret traditional Native enemies as sisters and brothers in Christ. "We all suffer in this land," Black Elk writes of the Lakota, former enemy tribes, and settlers in a 1909 pastoral letter. "But let me tell you, God has a special place for us when our time has come."

It wasn't until unexpectedly finding myself living in Indian Country that the full depth of Black Elk's witness emerged. The final stage of his ministry was the revitalization of Lakota tradition. Lakota ways had been under assault by boarding schools, grinding poverty, American culture, and even the church circles he so eagerly embraced. The devastating effect on the younger generations was becoming clearer. Near the end of his life, Black Elk gathered the elders to help find new ways to pass on Lakota lifeways.

Part of the revitalization process was *The Sacred Pipe*. For almost everyone who first

"Black Elk's Catholic faith had a traditional hue that I didn't expect."

reads it—including me—the book appears to be a straightforward description of the old buffalo-hunting days. Dig deeper into Lakota tradition and you see how different *The Sacred Pipe*, a product of decades of theological reflection, is from earlier accounts. Black Elk subtly reread the tradition in light of Christ: smoothing out the problematic aspects of Lakota tradition to gospel standards and infusing the practices with a rich Christian spirituality of a loving Creator. Together, Black Elk's Catholic writings and *The Sacred Pipe* form a unified vision of all that

is, something like Thomas Aquinas' *Summa* for Native Christianity.

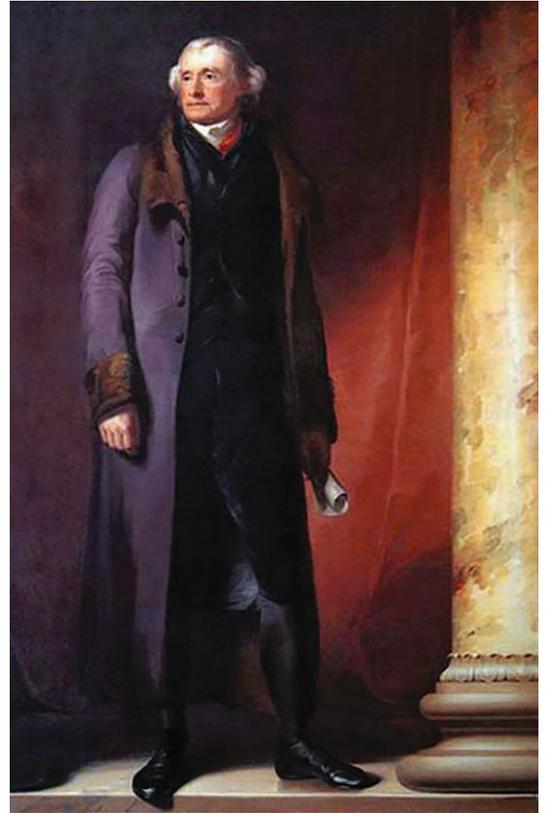
Black Elk states his purpose for *The Sacred Pipe* right up front: "God sent to men His son [to bring peace]. . . . This I understand and know that it is true." After this clear affirmation of his Catholic faith, he explains why we should all know the "greatness and truth" of Lakota tradition: "to help in bringing peace upon the earth, not only among men, but within men and between the whole of creation." That's what I saw in the living traditions of Indian Country.

Black Elk's cause for canonization began in 2017 and is now at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Not all Lakota fully support Black Elk's possible sainthood. A good percentage do, many in a straightforward Catholic way. Some add a particular Lakota twist, such as in relation to the mountain that now bears Black Elk's name. A two-year campaign to change the highest peak in the Black Hills to Black Elk Peak was finalized in 2016. The catalyst, Lakota Catholic elder Basil Brave Heart, sees the canonization and the name change as two sides of the same living spiritual presence: Black Elk's vision of the sacred tree extending out into the world.

Declaring Black Elk a saint is not just to rubber-stamp what happened in the past but is an event that changes the church and the whole world: a deep affirmation of Native ways that will help bring us back to our spiritual center and a step toward righting the wrongs that structure our world. **USC**

# You say you want a revolution

The tree of liberty needs  
constant attention to achieve  
its full fruitfulness.



Thomas Jefferson. Portrait by Thomas Sully, 1821. Wikimedia Commons.

Thomas Jefferson promoted a rather surprising idea: the need for a healthy society to make generous room for ongoing dissatisfaction. A nation's Founding Father might be expected to champion docile compliance among its citizenry, but Jefferson wasn't that kind of dad.

In a 1787 letter to John Adam's son-in-law, Jefferson observed that people too often confused revolution with anarchy. The British, to be precise, had persisted in calling the revolution in the Colonies by this more scandalous name, deceiving much of Europe and even many New World citizens still loyal to the throne of England. "Wonderful is the effect of impudent and persevering lying," Jefferson observed.

It was in this same letter that Jefferson made his much-quoted assertion: "God forbid we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion." He wasn't advocating rebellion for rebellion's sake. Even in the 18th century, Jefferson appreciated that fake news can derail a society, which could lead to the urgent need for dramatic action: "The people cannot be all,

and always, well informed. The part which is wrong will be discontented in proportion to the importance of the facts they misconceive." This sounds prophetic after a year of pandemic, in which misinterpreting and misrepresenting the role of science has led to such tragic results.

Regular rebellions keep a democracy on its toes, Jefferson argued: "What country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? . . . The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants."

The problem with Jefferson's approach to watering the tree of liberty is that it revolves around several key discernments. Who determines who's lying when opposing sides present alternative facts?

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*By Alice Camille, cowriter of the homily service "Prepare the Word" and other titles available through [alicecamille.com](http://alicecamille.com).*

What criteria should you and I use to determine when rebellion is justified?

What’s the distinction between a patriot and an insurrectionist—and who gets to make the call?

Your tyrant may be my admired hero; your spirit of resistance may be criminal behavior to me. Unless we can agree on the reality behind the terms we use, the call to rebellion can be taken up by any group to justify nearly any objection to an authority that’s unwelcome.

The lack of a shared platform from which to view social realities is nothing new, of course. The Founding Fathers, Jefferson included, were slaveholders who didn’t pause to consider that the enslaved members of their household saw the “tree of liberty” watered daily with their own bitter servitude. Native peoples, chronically displaced and casually slaughtered, learned that their attempts at rebellion were not perceived as part of the virtuous struggle toward the ideal of freedom. Uprisings by Mexicans in the Southwest were not seen as necessary aspects of liberty’s refreshment. When suffragettes committed civil disobedience in demanding that women be given the right to vote, not everyone recognized this as a distinctly American way to seek redress for social wrongdoing.

This makes it no surprise that contemporary rebellions are rarely welcomed in a Jeffersonian embrace of much-required political course correction either. The white suffragettes themselves didn’t fight for the rights of their Black sisters, who had to wait several more generations for privileges won by their white counterparts. Meanwhile our society has ever been skeptical of the patriotism of war protesters and civil rights advocates of every kind. It’s simpler to sweep all forms of protest into the common dustbin of anarchy and leave it to law enforcement to stop the unrest by whatever means necessary.

Jefferson would be pleased to learn that his nation hasn’t enjoyed a respite that long since the country’s founding. But would he evaluate all episodes of rebellion as created equal?

Would Jefferson view Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter in the same light as the storming of the Capitol building by those who rejected the 2020 election results as invalid or simply unacceptable? More important, what criteria should you and I use to determine when rebellion is justified? Or when the absence of a spirit of rebellion may be the greatest injustice of all?

The Catholic tradition offers clear tools for discernment in these instances and more.

Let’s admit up front that the church hasn’t always been on the side of the angels early enough when history required a prophetic voice to speak out. Clergy lined up comfortably on both sides of the Abolitionist movement, priests and bishops arguing passionately the biblical support for enslavement. Church teaching is still often awkward in its appreciation of women in leadership roles within its own structures. And although we have a pope who dares to ask “who am I to judge” the relationship of homosexual people to their Maker, that’s far from a complete acknowledgment that all people bear the image of God, just as they are. Liberation theology, meanwhile, still awaits its reassessment as a credible response to oppression.

Yet in the long arc that Martin Luther King Jr. insisted bends toward justice, the church has produced strong teachings affirming the rights of the oppressed to form unions, to organize, and to seek systemic change.

Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (On Capital and Labor) championed the rights of workers. St. Pope John XXIII’s 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (On Peace) summoned peacemakers and justice seekers to work together for the world they hoped to see. The U.S. bishops produced astounding documents like “The Challenge of Peace,” “Brothers and Sisters to Us,” and “Economic Justice for All,” arguing for a society that shuns the reflexive use of violence, accepts the dignity of all people regardless of sexual orientation, and actively seeks the common good for its most forgotten citizens. Pope Francis embraces a fierce advocacy for the rights of creation in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’* (On Care for Our Common Home) and pleads for “neighbors without borders” and “open societies that integrate everyone” as he reenvisions the global community in last year’s *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship).

It would seem protesting the deep imperfections of the status quo is an acceptable, even vital, component within the job description of religious leadership. The Christian spirit of revolution comes from revelation: the descent of the Holy Spirit, no less. Divine revelation leads inevitably to revolution, as the Jewish followers of a Jewish Lord are unable, after Pentecost, to continue comfortably in religion as usual.

The “lifting of the veil” that revelation implies permits the visionary to see a more cosmic

perspective than before. How can such a vision not lead to an impassioned advocacy for a world more in keeping with the divine plan for universal happiness? As long as the work of justice is incomplete, we will require revolutions large and small to harmonize the values of heaven and earth.

The tree of liberty does need constant attention—watering, nurturing, pruning, protecting from the elements—to achieve its full fruitfulness. Jefferson was prescient in saying that a misinformed

and misguided society can reap a horrific amount of injustice. This forms an argument for the widest and best possible education and values formation for all of its members. It argues as well for the solemnest protection of truth against “impudent and persevering lying”—from government, media sources, celebrities, and especially church leaders. The tree of liberty can only grow straight when firmly rooted in the soil of truth. Time to turn down the chatter and tune in to the revelation. **USC**



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## Does care for creation ignore the poor?

Climate change kills millions from drought, flooding, famine, and disease and exacerbates prenatal and perinatal mortality in poor countries. The United Nations predicts those who are already suffering could experience 100 more days of extreme weather annually.

Despite this humanitarian crisis, concern for God’s creation is often a fringe issue for Catholics rather than a fundamental one encompassing all life, as it should be. Genesis says God created all living things—including humans. God’s covenant with Noah reaffirms this fundamental kinship we share with all of creation.

In his encyclical *Laudato Si’* (On Care for Our Common Home), Pope Francis explains, “Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself.” The pope emphasizes how humanity is integral to creation: “Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves. . . . We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it.”

Since life depends on a healthy environment, protecting human life *necessarily* dictates that we protect nonhuman creation too. Unfortunately, those who contribute least to environmental degradation—the poor and vulnerable, including the unborn—unjustly suffer the most. Thus, care for creation is a moral issue involving human life and dignity, particularly for the poor.

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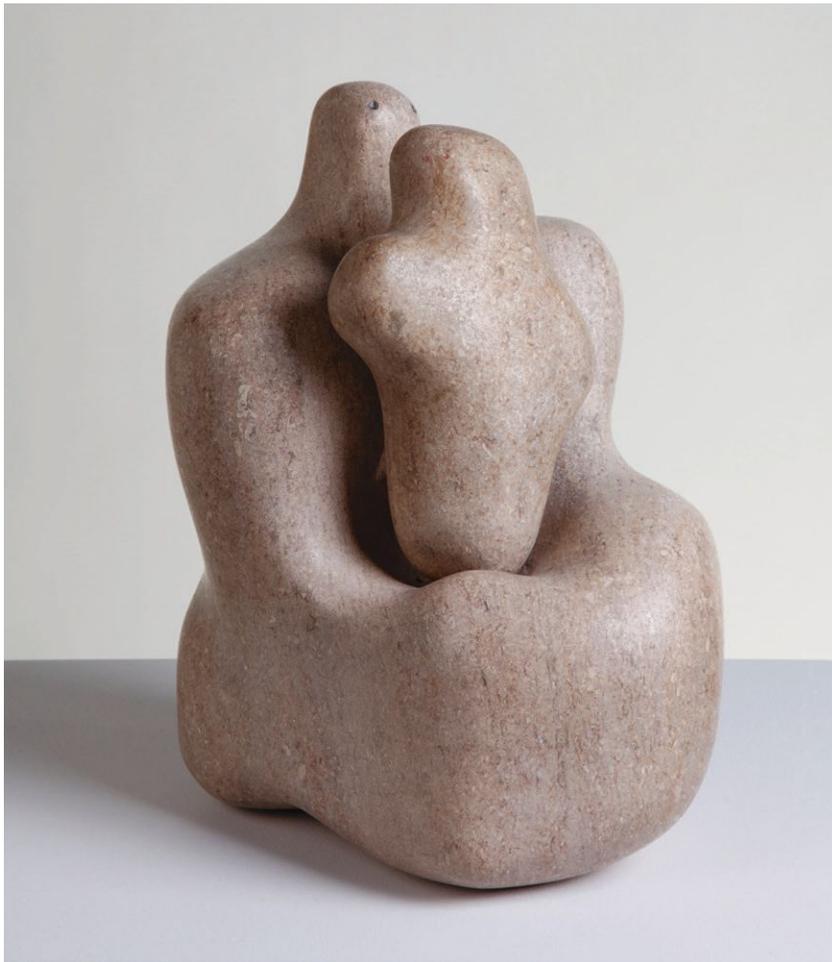
By Michael Wright, author of the booklet  
10 Things Pope Francis Wants You to Know  
About the Environment (*Liguori Publications*).

In “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,” U.S. bishops exhort us to “urgently find ways to care better for God’s creation, especially those most impacted by climate change—the poor.” To respond to this injustice, we must recognize how our own lives impact the rest of creation. We seem obsessed with wanting the latest, the best, or whatever brings us gratification, most of which exceeds what we actually need. “Throwaway culture” and “compulsive consumerism,” as Pope Francis puts it, drive energy and resource consumption that contributes to climate change through carbon emissions, pollution, and deforestation.

By reducing consumption to help mitigate climate change and conserve resources, we help not only the poor but also future generations. Minimizing waste, particularly of food, saves energy and water for production and reduces landfill emissions, while saving more for those with less. Living a life of moderation rather than excess protects life itself: near and far, born and unborn, young and old, rich and poor, now and later.

“What is at stake is our own dignity,” the pope explains in *Laudato Si’*. “Genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others.”

As people of faith called to love one another, we often care for the needy in our communities, shelters, hospitals, and prisons. Likewise, how we treat creation ultimately touches others worldwide, now and in the future. Pope Francis says it best: “Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us.” **USC**



## With gratitude

The rounded shapes of Barbara Hepworth's two-piece sculpture may be described as biomorphic; it also undeniably expresses its title, *Mother and Child*. While more representational depictions of this relationship might stress themes of nurturance and dependence, this simplified iteration elicits diverse responses.

By virtue of scale, the larger form suggests an adult. (Only the title implies gender.) This stable base becomes a seated spectator whose bowl-like lap provides both a literal and metaphorical resting place for the smaller element. Like a nest, this place of

safety becomes a stage from which a child is launched into the world, the proverbial spreading of wings.

Simeon promised Mary that her child would be “the downfall and the rise of many” and “you shall be pierced with a sword” (Luke 2:34–35). As nearly all countries in Europe and the Americas mark Mother’s Day during the month of May, our thoughts turn to our fundamental maternal relationship and, by extension, to all who have mothered us.

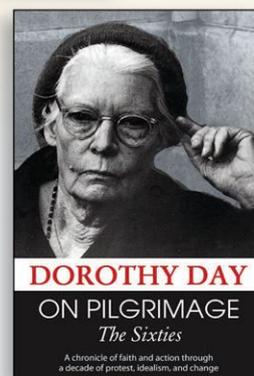
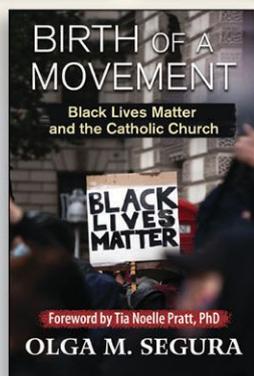
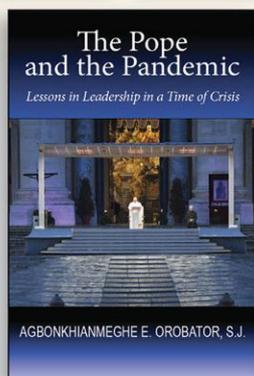
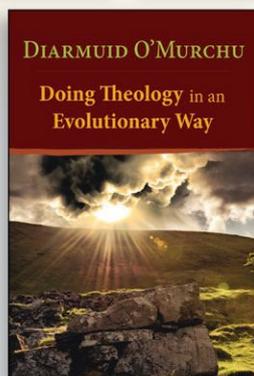
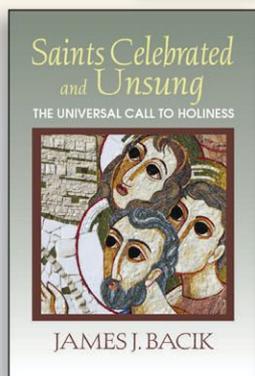
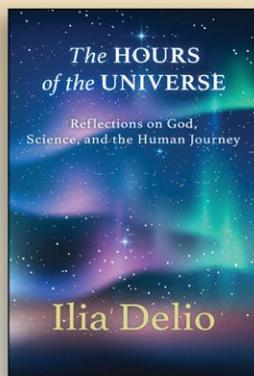
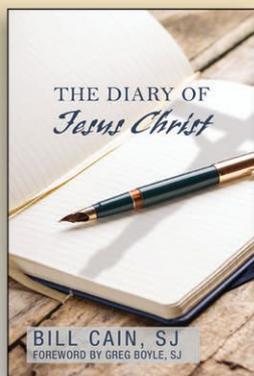
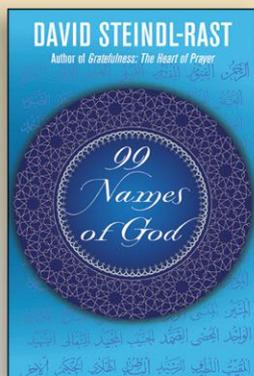
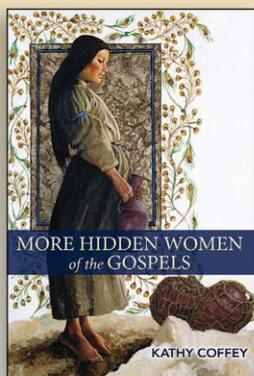
Whether or not we have been the downfall or the rise of many, we’ve probably flung about a few swords. Acknowledging them could deepen our gratitude to those who had to watch us mature by inflicting wounds. **USC**

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*By Jerry Bleem, O.F.M., a priest and artist who teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.*

### Image:

Barbara Hepworth, *Mother and Child*, 1934; pink Ancaster stone; 12.2 x 8.7 x 10.2 inches. Courtesy of the Barbara Hepworth Estate © Sophie Bowness.



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