

Tui Motu

InterIslands

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the promise of a future we hope for

the promise of things we hope for the pledge of a future unseen

Contents

2-3	editorial <i>John Honoré</i>
4	letters
5	War crimes in Gaza <i>Jim Consedine</i>
6-9	Creating communities of hope & reconciliation in a chaotic world <i>Barbara Reid</i>
10-11	A faith that bridges the gap <i>Nick Doughty</i>
12-13	There he goes – <i>Simon Joseph Toomey</i> (1980-2008) <i>Msgr. Tom Power</i>
14-15	The church is part of me <i>Maura Hanrahan</i>
16-17	The women of Jerusalem <i>Diana L Hayes</i>
18-19	Seasons of blessing <i>Daniel O'Leary</i>
20-21	Celebrating St Declan's <i>Paul Andrews</i>
21	Jesus the party-goer <i>Glynn Cardy</i>
22-23	Take this bread <i>Trish McBride</i>
24-26	My dearest daughter Meg <i>Michael Hill</i>
27	Film review: Doubt <i>Richard Leonard</i>
28-29	Books <i>Elizabeth Nicholson,</i> <i>Dot Wilson, Michael Hill</i>
30	Crosscurrents <i>John Honoré</i>
31	Pre-Easter reconciliation rites <i>Humphrey O'Leary</i>
32	<i>A Mother's Journal</i> <i>Kaaren Mathias</i>

Cover:

Our cover photograph is of the twin daughters of Kaaren and Jeph Mathias. Kaaren is the author of the monthly column *A Mother's Journal*

It would be very easy to start this new year on a note of pure pessimism. Night after night our TV screens have been filled with images of violence inflicted on Palestinian townships. Meanwhile the economic news from all over is nothing but doom and gloom.

Yet all of us who believe in Christ know that our faith is nothing if not a pathway of hope. For that reason we chose for our cover the eager faces of two smiling children, consumed with delight at the here and now. We don't have to be philosophers – or even believers – to know that in a marvellous way children represent future hope. In their very being, they motivate us to strive harder to guarantee them a better world.

Pope Benedict last year gave us an encyclical on Hope (*Spe Salvi*). His springboard is a quotation from the *Letter to the Hebrews*, which we have paraphrased above: *Faith is the 'substance' of things hoped for; the 'proof' of things unseen*. The Pope insists we are here not just talking about future blessedness, but this world... our world... today. "(Faith)", he writes, "gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for". If we as Christians are not people of hope, then we are failing in our primary vocation.

During January, Dominican Sister Barbara Reid led seminars throughout the country, demonstrating how the Gospels themselves offered another Way to people enslaved in a brutal and tyrannical First Century world. In our leading article (pp 6-9), she focuses on the Gospel of *John*, a manifesto of friendship and love. This article is followed by three very varied testimonies of hope (pp 10-15): describing how the call of Jesus Christ can be a beacon even in times

of sickness, death and bereavement – as well as in the daily experience of a flawed Catholicism.

Where does all this leave us in terms of the immediate crises referred to above? Firstly, the wars in the Middle East and elsewhere. Vindictiveness and cries for revenge are not the answer. As Jim Consedine says (p 5), to work for a just peace is the only way to go.

Regarding the economic crash, Queen Elizabeth put in words what most people are thinking: "Why did no one see this coming?" Our society pays huge lip service to captains of industry; managers and business advisers demand megabucks for their wisdom. Yet the economic system has turned to dust and ashes. If we come out of this catastrophe humbler and wiser, it will be a lesson well learnt. Greed and the single-minded pursuit of profit have produced this debacle, and our rulers must ensure there is no repeat. Is John Key, himself a businessman, capable of such farsightedness?

At the start of 2009 Barack Obama takes up residence at the White House with huge expectations placed on his narrow shoulders. John Honoré (p.3) examines carefully the Inaugural Address and marks it highly. Perhaps the best insurance that there really will be *change* for the better is that Obama's first vision each dawning day will be the eager smiles of his two young children. It is their world that he is either saving or ruining. He really has only one choice. Let us help him achieve it. ■

Postscript: As we go to press, we have learned of the death of one of our finest and longest serving contributors, emeritus Professor Albert Moore. Albert was a fine Christian gentleman and a wonderful friend of *Tui Motu*. There will be a full tribute to him in the *March* issue.

M.H.

recreating the american dream

Before millions of his fellow Americans, United States President Barack Obama gave his Inaugural Address in ringing oratorical language. It was immediately compared to those of Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt and set the stage for unprecedented hopes and expectations.

Already Obama has the *mana* of a rock star, his words carry the weight of a prophet, and his actions the hope of the world. But the role demands a lot more than change based on intelligence, rhetoric and charisma. The new President's confident words suggest inspirational leadership. Can he recreate the American Dream?

His address marked a definitive move towards a society not based on the colour of a person's skin. The appeal of Obama's campaign slogan *Change* evoked the history of two hundred years of the subjugation of black Americans and the healing spirit of the civil rights movement.

In his Inaugural Address, Obama, America's first president of African descent, was able to declare that "a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath". Not so long ago, an unimaginable declaration.

The essence of the speech was based on a rejection of "failed dogmas", promising in the future a foreign policy of "greater co-operation and



understanding between nations". He stated that "America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity – and that we are ready to lead once more".

Significantly he also addressed the Muslim world: "We seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect". Already the promise has been made to deliver a major address in the capital of a Muslim nation within the first three months of his term.

The wars of his predecessor that have been responsible for the deaths of millions still threaten the hegemony of the nation and the security of us all. If American democracy is to be admired, let alone propagated, then the emphasis must change from force of arms to diplomacy. Obama confronted the problem admirably: "our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justice of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint. We are the keepers of this

legacy. We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people, and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan".

The economy drew the interesting observation from Obama "that the market can spin out of control and that a nation cannot prosper long when it favours only the prosperous". Like Roosevelt, who declared that Americans had "nothing to fear but fear itself" when he faced the collapse of the banks, Obama must tackle the same problem, described by Paul Krugman in the *New York Times* as "the beginning of a second Great Depression".

Everything is in need of repair: health care, employment contracts, alternative energy sources are among the many concerns. He referred to them as "serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America – they will be met".

In American politics, Inaugural Addresses are written to be read by posterity as much as to listen to. Everyone the world over would like to believe that Obama's Address carries the promise and the power of Abraham Lincoln. Barack Obama's first contribution to history is a splendid piece of inspirational rhetoric, acknowledging but criticising the past and looking to the future. The Inaugural Address of the 44th President echoes confidently Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream*. ■

John Honoré



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Tui Motu-InterIslands is an independent, Catholic, monthly magazine. It invites its readers to question, challenge and contribute to its discussion of spiritual and social issues in the light of gospel values, and in the interests of a more just and peaceful society. Inter-church and inter-faith dialogue is welcomed. The name *Tui Motu* was given by Pa Henare Tate. It literally means "stitching the islands together...", bringing the different races and peoples and faiths together to create one Pacific people of God. Divergence of opinion is expected and will normally be published, although that does not necessarily imply editorial commitment to the viewpoint expressed.

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letters to the editor

Bouquet

Congratulations on a wonderful Christmas issue. Yes, we do get a quality read month after month, but your Christmas is surely special... top quality.

Sr Barbara RSCJ, Auckland

Correction needed

Thank you for the layout and the colour of the *December* cover.

But I was dismayed to find two major errors. First, the icon is known as the Vladimirskaya (or the Virgin of Vladimir), painted by an unknown 12th Century Byzantine artist.

Second, the Bible study group in which I was a participant was named ABIL (Adult Biblical Interdependent Learning), not Abel.

Also, I said that PVA glue affected the gold paint, not the colours, and I glue the entire surface of each piece, using a stronger glue in addition to the surface glue. The way you have worded it gives the impression it is a very tenuous style indeed. Far from it – the earliest of these icons have now lasted perfectly well over 15 years.

Flis Bridle, Katikati

We apologise - ed.



KEEP HOPE ALIVE IN GAZA

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Weeks of violence have devastated Gaza but these young boys at Jabalya camp eat because people around the world care enough to help. Through Christian World Service's Gaza Appeal you can give them hope.

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 **CWS**
ACTION AGAINST POVERTY

Presidential Inauguration

(On the day of President Obama's inauguration we emailed an American friend and subscriber to TM who kindly allowed us to quote his 'stream of consciousness' response)

Since Barack beat out Hillary for the nomination, I have been conflicted. I wanted Hillary – but then most of my blood sweat and tears over the years in the church has been spent on issues of justice for Black America.

Since Dr King's challenge in the 60s I have devoted much energy to the level ground for opportunity and lack of prejudice. My Jesus was, and is, a sanctuary and a place of acceptance... no matter what. I believe that race is a phoney construct of a culture dominated by a certain group – 'white males', if you will.

To free the culture from these tribal, racial and national barriers, I follow Jesus to the sanctuary of wholeness. Watching a new birth in our nation today, I think that some, if not 90 percent, of those barriers have been taken down – not destroyed but dismantled.

There were a couple of symbols many may have missed... Sitting next to Michelle's mother on the reviewing stand for the parade, was Michelle's brother and his wife and children – Craig and Kelly Robinson and her step-children. Craig is the basketball coach at Oregon State university – where PJ and Maria and our grandchildren live. Kelly Robinson happens to have the same skin-colour as me – while Craig has the same skin-colour of our daughter-in-law Maria. You may remember that Maria traces her ancestry to people who were slaves in the olde south.

Perhaps because of that tableau this 20 January, 2009, we will have a society less free of prejudice and much more inclusive. Jesus won't you come by here for Trevor, Tyler, Saytya, Aditya, Kirsten, Liam and Carson – our grandchildren.

The speech Obama gave was not spectacular – but it was challenging. What I remember most are his words from an old song: "Pick yourself up, dust yourself off and start all over again". After the disaster of George W, nationally that was perhaps the best advice.

Bill Harvey, Presbyterian Minister, Los Gatos CA

Apology: In the December issue of *Tui Motu* the CWS advertisement on page 32 lost some vital information due to a technical problem in the printing.

We apologise to readers who were thus prevented from contributing. We hope that they will send their donation instead to the charity advertised on this page. Thank you.

war crimes in Gaza

Jim Consedine

Getting to the truth is always a problem in war. Journalists were barred from Gaza by the Israeli military, so could only report from the Israeli side of the fence. Getting the truth out of Gaza about the economic blockade and gradual strangulation of the Palestinian community has always been difficult.

It was these stifling conditions which eventually forced Hamas to take the stand they did and mobilise against those who were daily throttling the life out of them. Most Palestinians want nothing more than to get on with their lives, to grow their own crops in peace, to run their own schools and hospitals and infrastructure without constant Israeli harassment.

The great myth of the dangers posed by Hamas is what sustained Israeli propaganda during the war. Polls show most Israelis supported the war. Yet between 19 June 2008 and 4 November 2008, during the period of the last ceasefire, Hamas had kept to its agreement and fired no rockets into Israel.

On the other hand, Israel failed to keep its side of the bargain and lift economic blockades. Thus the Palestinians remained economically strangled, trapped within their own borders. This is intolerable to any right thinking person, and ensured that Israel retained almost total control of movement in and out of Gaza, and made Palestinians dependent on Israelis for nearly everything. No wonder they rebelled and started shelling Israel again.

We need to be clear. Zionism and the practice of Judaism are not synonymous concepts. The ideology of Zionism is like any other ideology taken in its extreme form. It is a form of ultra-nationalism, with degrees of expansionism and exclusivity at its core. We need to distinguish it from the faith of Judaism, practised for 4000 years by believing Jews. Judaism is the womb which gave birth to Christianity. Jesus remained a Jew. Zionism and Judaism are not the same. We can reject some Zionist state policies outright and remain pro-Jewish.

And so to war – between two unequal parties. The results we are familiar with. By war's end, 13 Israelis and more than 1300 Palestinians had died. This included more than 450 women and children. Each death leaves a grieving family and friends to mourn. Each death

plants the seeds for renewed anger and bitterness for the years ahead.

Parts of Gaza now look like Warsaw after the Nazis evacuated in 1944, with every home in street after street reduced to rubble. It contains a legacy of depleted uranium bullets scattered about. It has been scoured by white phosphorus chemicals, which are banned by international convention. More than 20,000 buildings have been devastated, all in a relatively confined space. As the BBC reporter said: "it looks like an earthquake has hit, reducing streets and towns to rubble." (20 January)

The United Nations says that 50,000 people have been left homeless. It accuses Israel of possible 'war crimes' because of its attack on a UN school. *Amnesty International* takes a similar position, claiming it has prima facie evidence of war crimes by Israel and calling for a full independent investigation (BBC, 20 January). A later report spoke of eyewitnesses to Israeli soldiers executing two children and wounding a third (BBC, 24 January). The facts speak for themselves – the numbers are abnormally disproportionate.

The only real winners in war are the shareholders in the arms manufacturing companies, who profit from the sale of their weapons of destruction and are in no way held accountable for their sin. And the politicians who sit in their snug offices and plan their re-elections. It was no coincidence that this war was waged just prior to a general election in Israel and in the dying days of the Bush Administration. What cynical timing! Bush leaves office, his hands dripping with blood.

Our days of dalliance with empires should be long past. As *Mark's* gospel, currently being read each day in the church makes clear, Jesus inaugurated a new way of being that would be inclusive, non-discriminatory, non-violent and not tied to the dominant political system.

Is it not time for Christians and Catholics in particular to return to the stance of the early church and reject war in its entirety as immoral and opposed to the teaching of Jesus? The time has now come to implement the paradigm shift in Catholic thinking called for by Pope Paul VI at the United Nations in 1966, when he cried in anguish: "War, war - never again!"

creating communities of hope and

American Dominican Barbara Reid is Professor of New Testament at the Catholic Theological Union (CTU), Chicago. She visited New Zealand in January, leading seminars in Dunedin, Auckland and Wellington.

Barbara is no stranger to New Zealand having taught at Holy Cross seminary, Mosgiel for a Semester in 1995, and returning a few years

later to give a series of lectures (reported in TM July 2006).

Her theme this year could not have been more apt: *Creating Communities of Hope in a Chaotic World*. Barbara directs her audience's attention to the Gospels. Jesus came into a world as chaotic and godless as our own and provided people, then and now, with a challenge and a template.

introduction

Barbara Reid called upon her audience to share the Dominican charism of listening and reflecting on the Word of God as a prelude to action. The attitude we bring to the Gospel should be one of radical amazement. "Be amazed", says Abraham Heschel. Cease to be wrapped up in what is trivial and petty. Instead, immerse yourself in the 'whole experience': the whole drama of God shaping our world, culminating in the coming of Jesus Christ. This whole mighty action is simply a progressive unfolding of God's love.

When we study the world and our faith in this way, we begin to understand how God indwells in our every experience. We cease to be enslaved by the 'control' politics of so many contemporary systems, whether it be the -isms of fashion or philosophy, or the tyranny of market economics. We must return constantly to the beauty of the world God has given us and the beauty of its peoples.

We are reminded of God's words to Job: "Where were you when I was creating your world?" God is not scolding Job, but urging him not to lose sight of the transcendent beauty and goodness of God, even when Job himself is suffering and bereft.

God bids us to let go of our fears, our selfishness and our particularism. Fear diminishes us and narrows our world into enclaves of the like-minded. We should never fear to invite others to our table, so we can start listening to them; for they may challenge us and change us.

Barbara concluded her introductory talk by bidding her audience to be agents of resistance. Our contemporary world is full of baleful influences which need to be resisted. She chose two particular examples.

Sexism

Women continue throughout the world to be an underprivileged group: under-resourced and underpaid. We Christians should be advocates for the underprivileged, especially for women.

The Catholic church itself is still overly patriarchal and sexist. For instance, even though 90 percent of priestless parishes in the US are now led by women, women are still forbidden to preach at Eucharist. Sexist language and sexist imagery are still commonplace in the church. How often do we ever hear God described by the pronoun 'she'?

Unforgiveness

Where someone has suffered an offence, often it needs to be that person who must initiate the process of reconciliation.

Matthew 18 describes the parable of the unforgiving servant. How can the servant expect to be forgiven his debt if he himself is unforgiving? Not confronting a person with his/her offence is like taking the poison oneself and expecting the rats to die!

An offence may consume us with grievance and anger. Yet if we ourselves remain unforgiving, we may be giving others poison rather than nourishment. For example, do we forgive the church for its abuse, for its patriarchy, for its refusal to understand the predicament of the homosexual? And do we work to change these things?

We cannot avoid suffering. We cannot avoid the 'dark night'. Mother Teresa was not spared it. Jesus himself came out of the darkness by going through it. If we persevere on the track of Wisdom, we will help create a freer and less selfish society. ■

reconciliation in a chaotic world



Barbara Reid (*centre*), with fellow Dominicans at the Dunedin Seminar. (*l to r*) Srs. Sandra Winton, Cecile – from the Philippines, Barbara, Judith Anne O'Sullivan, Clare Timpany.

a community of friends

The Gospel of John contains a series of encounters whereby Jesus attracts disciples to him, forming them into the very first Christian community

What is it that makes the Gospel of *John* stand out from the other three Gospels? It is sometimes called the “mystical” gospel – in contrast to the action-packed narrative of, say, *Mark*. In the Gospel of *John*, Jesus is presented primarily as a friend: a friend of human beings – rather than one who has simply come among them to save them from their sins. What Jesus has done is come among us to draw all of us into the friendship of God.

The Gospel of *John* is full of stories of encounter – with the Samaritan woman, with the man born blind, with Nicodemus, with the Bethany family, as well as with the disciples who accompany him. All these people are typical of ordinary humanity. In each of these stories we can insert ourselves and hear Jesus speaking to us personally, reaching out to us and loving us.

Friendship was much valued in the ancient world. Aristotle saw it as a relationship freely chosen between equals (although he only spoke of

friendship between males!). What he couldn't conceive of was friendship between men and God, for that would diminish the transcendence of God.

The Jewish tradition, however – followed closely by the Christian way – saw it as most desirable to become God's friend. In the Book of *Wisdom* for instance Solomon prays to God, and the spirit of Wisdom comes upon him. He describes Wisdom as “a breath of the power of God, pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty” (*Wis.* 7, 25). It is this Wisdom who, generation after generation, enters into holy people making them God's friends (*v* 27).

We choose our friends freely (unlike our families, where we have no choice!). We come to trust them and become committed to them. Between friends, differences cease to matter. We depend greatly on our friends, who may well risk their lives for us. It is this quality of friendship that the Gospel of *John* is describing.

The Prologue of *John* (*Jn.* 1, 1-18)

Here the Word of God is depicted as descending into the world to befriend humanity. The Word (*logos*) and God (*theos*) are depicted as united in friendship: this family circle is being opened and extended to include us.

Later in the Gospel Jesus says “I and the Father are one”. The disciples are to be united with one another just as Jesus is with the Father. The love which Jesus brings to us is seen as radiating outwards until it encompasses all people. There are no boundaries. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life (*Jn.* 3, 16).”

This creative goodness of God spreads out into the whole world (*cosmos*). But not everyone accepts this gift of divine friendship. It is noteworthy that John sees God being poured out upon the world in Jesus the Word; at the same time Jesus remains ‘in sinu Patris’ – *in the bosom of the Father* (*Jn.* 1, 18). What is an interesting mix of genders!





John the Baptist (*Jn. 3, 23-36*)

In this passage John the Baptist is depicted as being Jesus's friend. The Baptist describes himself as 'not the bridegroom, but the bridegroom's friend' – in other words, the best man. Both are seen at first as acting in a similar way – preaching the good news of repentance and baptising. John the Baptist does not see Jesus as a rival; indeed he encourages his own disciples to follow Jesus.

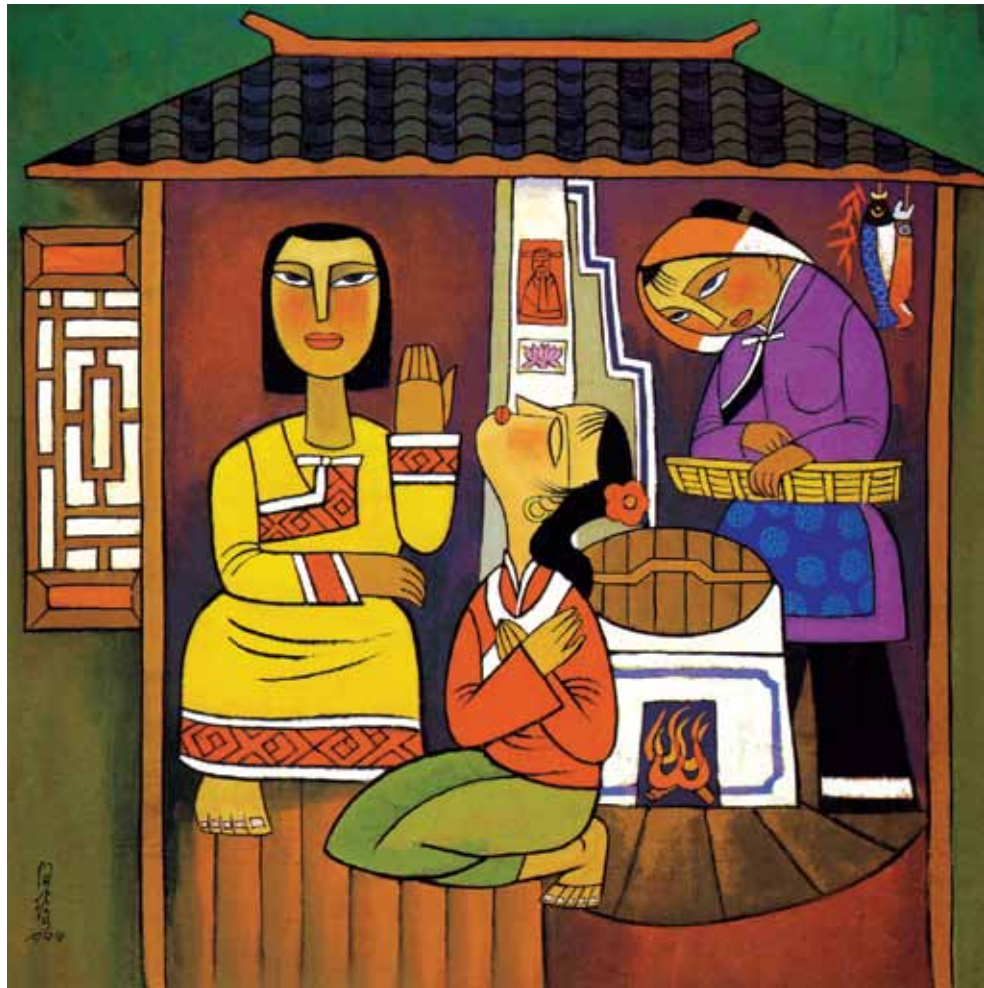
Jesus's eventual ministry in a sense grows out of the ministry of John. Jesus becomes greater; John becomes less (*v.30*). John precedes Jesus to a sacrificial death. Later Jesus is to return back across the Jordan river, back to his roots so to speak. It is as if the memory of John there gives him courage to do what he has to do.

While he is away from Jerusalem by the Jordan river, Jesus hears of the death of his friend Lazarus. He decides to go back to Bethany, to the house of Martha and Mary, in spite of the warnings of the disciples who are under no illusions as to the risk he is taking. (It is noteworthy that in *John*, when Jesus is arrested in the garden, the disciples stand by him and don't run away, as in the other Gospels.)

Martha, Mary and Lazarus (*Jn. 11, 17-43*)

The family at Bethany is depicted as being very special to Jesus. When Jesus arrives after Lazarus' death, Martha rushes out to greet him. She reproaches him for not being there – in a way only friends can; but she indicates that she knows God will work through Jesus. Jesus says: "Your brother will rise again", reminding her of the 'alreadiness' of the Resurrection. It isn't exactly what Martha wanted; nevertheless she expresses total faith in Jesus, using the same words which in the other gospels are put on the lips of Peter: "I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God..."

When her sister Mary arrives, she says much the same thing, while



Martha and Mary at home in Bethany, visited by Jesus. From the *Art Works of He Qi*. He Qi is a prominent contemporary Chinese religious artist.

in *v. 37* we hear the concern of the whole community: "Could he not have prevented this man's death?". This lament reminds us of a criticism sometimes levelled at busy pastors, that they are so caught up with teaching and preaching they have no time for close friends or family. Here, Jesus responds by restoring Lazarus to them.

Jesus washes the disciples' feet (*Jn. 13, 1-20*)

The main part of the gospel of *John* is called the 'Book of Signs'. Jesus performs a series of actions and healings, and there is a clear distinction between those who accept what he is doing and those who reject it. But in the final chapters up to his arrest, Jesus is exclusively with his friends. Chapter 13 starts with the statement: "... Jesus, having loved those who were his own in the world, loved them to the end."

The disciples are reclining around the table together, and Jesus gets up and washes their feet. There is no stated number (no mention in *John* of 'the Twelve' – just the male Apostles): here, everyone is included. Jesus is acting out a parable and giving a model for his disciples to follow: "If I... have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet (*v.14*)."

It is a simple action – not servile behaviour, nor a 'professional' service, but a free act between equals. Nevertheless, it is the characteristic action of an apostle, whose task it will be to serve and draw others into the circle of God. It is a quality of friendship to be offered universally (*v.16*). The extent of this service is revealed later on when Jesus says: "No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends (*15,13*)."

After the Resurrection (Jn. 20, 1-23)

After Jesus dies and rises again, the Gospel describes what happens to a community whose 'centre' has gone away. The principal figure in these verses is Mary Magdalen. The question obsessing her is *Where is he?* She says to Peter and the Beloved Disciple: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know *where* they have put him."

Mary acts as the voice of a community bereft. Throughout this Gospel, questions asking *where?* abound. The first disciples ask Jesus: "*Where* do you live?." But Jesus is the one who always knows where he is and where he is going, whereas the disciples are constantly needing to find Jesus and stay with him. Later, Thomas is depicted as *not* knowing where Jesus is: he has become an outsider and needs to be brought back in.

After the two disciples have been into the tomb, Mary also goes in weeping and asking: "... I don't know *where* they have put him". Mary is echoing the yearning of the Beloved seeking her lover in the *Song of Songs* (2,8-3,4). The whole scene is set in a

garden, where Jesus was buried; this is an echo of *Genesis*, and reminds us that Resurrection is truly a new creation.

When Mary sees the risen Christ, she thinks he is the gardener. So, like the Good Shepherd, Jesus addresses her by her name, and at once she recognises him. She clings to him in an ecstasy of greeting.

Jesus says: "Do not cling to me... go and tell my brothers, I am ascending to My Father, to My God and your God". This is a profound truth. After the Resurrection Christ is to be found no longer in the physical body of Jesus but in the body of the believing disciples gathered together in Jesus' name. It is to them where Mary must now return.

The final scene shows the risen Christ appearing to the disciples once more and offering them his farewell gift of peace. This is vital to them – and to us – because peace drives out fear. Fear is a terrible affliction. Fear enslaves us and inhibits us. It prevents us doing good. It destroys community. The commission, therefore – for them and for us – is to hold onto one another, secure in belonging to a community of friends. ■



Jesus washing the disciples' feet: anonymous Ethiopian artist in the Coptic tradition. (From *Christ For All People*, ed. Ron O'Grady)



The women at the tomb of Christ on Easter morning, by He Qi.

Concluding Reflections

Catherine of Siena said: "Preach the truth as if we had a million voices, for it is silence that kills the world." Native Americans say: "If you name a thing, it *becomes*."

The new story tells that patriarchal power structures are bankrupt, that systems whose functioning rest on 'command and control' are dying; that real power is exercised through persuasion, invitation, that results in conversion and empowerment of all, the drawing forth of the gifts of each for the flourishing of the common good.

The new story can no longer tolerate women being treated as second class, second best, or subservient. The new story is unafraid to call God *Sophia*, *Holy Wisdom*, *She Who Is*, and openly professes that women as well as men are equally created in her image.

The new story reverences the old, but recognises that the hour has come. We are enduring the birthpangs as the new creation is being birthed. There is no way around; the new story can be birthed only by going through the death, through the birthpangs, so that the new can be brought forth in prophetic word and act.

a faith that bridges the gap

*Nick Doughty was a man in the prime of life,
happily married with a growing family and a successful business
– when one day he was served with a sentence of death.*

*Here he describes his journey from agnostic despair
to a faith-filled hope*

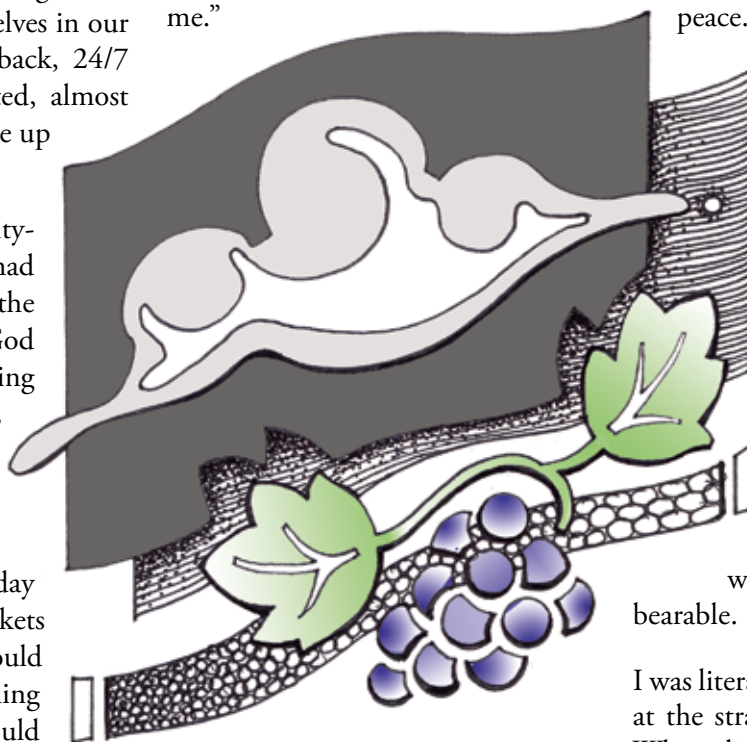
When you're affluent, successful, have a great marriage and two beautiful children, a diagnosis of terminal cancer really ruins your day. I was doing just fine, thank you very much, at least according to the standards we set for ourselves in our pumped-up, don't-look-back, 24/7 world. Until I was invited, almost exactly a year ago, to wake up and smell the coffin.

My life as a liberal, city-dwelling agnostic never had much room in it for the 'big stuff'. To me, the God question was like planning for a pension; somehow, you know it matters, but there never seems to be time to sort it out.

I lived in the everyday delusion that surely blankets most of us – that my life would simply continue, stretching into the future. Death would come, eventually, but not until I'd had a long and happy life, raised my children, fulfilled my ambitions. 'Eventually' is always such a long way off, isn't it?

After my diagnosis and a few weeks of stumbling through tears and rage and fear and confusion, I started to take walks in the city – anything to get away from the turmoil inside. One of these walks took me one Sunday,

I still don't know why, towards St. Paul's Cathedral. I went inside, my mood one of grim challenge. "OK, God," I said, "if you're real, if you mean anything, show me now. If you're there, now is the time. Show me."



No, the scales did not fall from my eyes. No, I did not raise my arms to heaven, proclaiming that I had seen the light. Something much gentler happened. A profound sense of peace flooded through me in that great church. Someone was with me, someone who felt my anguish and torment very deeply.

I went outside into the sunshine,

walked among the tourists. I felt hungry for the first time in several days; I ate and every mouthful tasted good. My senses had come back to life and, flowing beneath it all, was this wordless reassurance, this peace.

I'm a rational person, with a distinctly unhealthy share of cynicism about the way the world works. After a few days, I started to question what had happened. I didn't shrink from the obvious conclusions: unable to cope with what was happening to me, my mind had simply forced itself into another place where things might be more bearable.

I was literally a dying man, clutching at the straws of divine consolation. What did I have to lose by not running to God? All fair questions, all valid, all needed asking. Since that day, though, many things have proven to me the absolute reality of what I experienced.

The first is that the peace and my sense of a living God have not left me. That is not to say I have floated through the past year on a cloud of serenity; these have been terrible times for me and for my whole

family, and I feel very deeply and keenly the loss of my own life and what that means for those I love. There are quite enough bad days, thanks.

But if what happened to me was a trick of the mind, the effects would not have lasted. It would have worked for a time, perhaps, but surely would have crumbled under the kind of relentless pressure that cancer brings to bear on anyone, both in terms of physical treatment and psychological stress. Instead, the sense of peace and God's presence has always been there – sometimes in the background, sometimes swept away for a short while in the turmoil – but always returning, soothing and constant like waves on the shore.

Still, my mind wouldn't let it rest. I had to be sure (sometimes, I think I should have been christened 'Thomas'). I engaged in the old and familiar debates about God, the question of suffering and the rest, looking to pick holes, to find the gaps. I was determined that, if my experience was real, it also had to satisfy the part of me that seeks to understand, to rationalise.

What struck me with great force was this – that Christianity is messy and complicated, that it confronts the human condition unflinchingly and therefore truthfully. It does not present an easy model of existence. It has no simple answers on pain, suffering and loss. It tells us that we are a mess, and while it urges us to work for good here on earth, it tells us that we cannot, ultimately, save ourselves without God's help. It presents us with difficult moral choices. In a profound sense, it reflects reality.

Look at the *Book of Job*, described by a friend of mine as a "terrible piece of PR for God". It tells us that we can't know the reasons for suffering,

that it comes to us all. Look at the outpourings of grief and rage and very human desires in some of the Psalms.

Look at Jesus. A man who begged to have the cup of suffering taken from his lips, if at all possible. A man who, if only for a moment on the cross, felt that his God, his father, had deserted him. There is no attempt here to sweeten the pill, to build some kind of self-contained system that will satisfy our human minds and put it all into neat little boxes of cause and effect. Instead, there is an identification with our pain as we grope our way forwards in the dark – and an assurance that God loves us, despite our ignorance, despite what we are, what we have become.

By contrast, I found that many of today's secular, humanist arguments in the religious debate can look very weak on closer examination. The great scientist Richard Dawkins and others like him trumpet the supremacy of reason, but seem at times blissfully unaware that they have simply embraced, with an evangelical zeal, a faith of their own.

I may have spent a lot of time thinking about these questions, testing the strength of my own beliefs, but if you think I'm now feeling satisfied that I've finally cracked the case and solved the big issues, you'd be wrong. I still find it very hard to accept that I should be taken away from my wife and family, that I will

not see my children grow up. I do not rage against God for that and sometimes I wonder why not. I'm aware there's a paradox, a yawning logical inconsistency here which cannot be explained or justified.

Rational thought and argument, of course, take one only so far. For me, it is faith that bridges the gap. I do not understand, and yet I trust. It is, at times, uncomfortable. But it is enough.

There is one more thing that has sustained me over this past year and convinced me of the truth of the Christian message. If suffering has any meaning for us, it must be in how we choose to respond to it. I am very lucky to have people in my life who have responded in amazing ways. For me, for my family, within the family itself, there has been a great outpouring of love and support.

Relationships have changed and strengthened in unexpected and marvellous ways. New fruit has grown from old vines. Since last summer, I have lived more intensely, more fully than at any other time of my life. Amidst the pain, there has been much love and fun and laughter.

Good things that are not tainted simply because they have their origin in something terrible. Good things that have shown me the power of love and compassion, that have shown me God is indeed with us in this beautiful, broken world. ■

Nick Doughty was a writer for television and film and a journalist. He died in June 2003. Our thanks to his brother, Jonathan, who allowed us to publish this.

there he goes!

Simon Joseph Toomey (1980-2008)

Simon Toomey died in Christchurch last November at the age of 28. His requiem took place at St Mary's, Christchurch on 7 November last year. This homily was preached by the celebrant, his parish priest, Mgr. Tom Power

Today, we are brought here by the common bond of the premature death of someone we knew, but I know that words are really inadequate to temper our grief, so I would like specifically to address my words to three groups of people.

My first words concern Simon Toomey; my second thoughts concern Simon's friends and College classmates who are here in good numbers to the great credit of their friendship and sympathy for the family; and my third thoughts concern all of us, but especially Simon's family.

Like many of you, I have been reading Simon's blog on the internet where he has expressed his thoughts and feelings during the recent months of his illness, and I could not help but be impressed with his maturity of thought as he considered his life and the implications of his illness. This was an insight and an openness to reality – as Simon considered his prospects of survival in the face of an illness – that, in all my years of priestly experience, I have never previously encountered. His maturity of thought and courageous battle have left a deep impression on me, and no doubt on many of you also.

On occasions such as this, or when there are tragic circumstances causing a sudden death of a young person, the questioning thought, brought about by shock, disbelief, horror – and sometimes even in rage – is often

expressed under stress: *Where is God in such cases? Why did he let this death occur? or that tragedy happen?* May I suggest an answer.

The author, Elie Wiesel, wrote in one of his novels, of witnessing the hanging of a young Jewish boy in a concentration camp during World War II. The boy's weight was not enough to trigger the mechanism to make the hanging a quick death, and as the other inmates watched, the boy writhed as he slowly choked to death. One prisoner asked, as they helplessly witnessed this horrific suffering: *Where is God – where is he?*

The answer of another prisoner could well help us reshape our thinking about God. That other prisoner said, "God is there, writhing on that rope." What was found on the boy's body later was an excerpt from today's reading from St Paul, which read: "Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres."

Every single year for 2,000 years, Christians have celebrated the story of a man who was faithful to God, who kept all the commandments, and who wound up being spat upon, stripped and scourged, crowned with thorns and hung on a cross to die. And this was one of whom God said, "This is my beloved Son."

What gets exposed in the sorts of crises resulting in death is the extent

of our relationship with God. The fact is that Jesus was not the great detached one. If anything, Jesus comes across in Scripture as the great pilgrim, the authentic life who did not escape the human condition, who did not know the master plan, who did not have the completed script, who took life day by day and let life's evil have its full play. Jesus had his last minute doubts, too, when, hanging on the cross for three hours, he cried out, "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" That is the cry of faith.

It is permissible for us to get angry and it is permissible to doubt, as Jesus did on the cross. But in the end you have to ask, "What is your relationship with God?" And if it is a relationship of love, then we have to trust God. God asks for nothing less than that.

God is friend, is beloved, is in relationship with us, and as in any relationship God asks for our trust. Jesus Christ had his own doubts. But Resurrection is proof that God will have the last word. As St Paul wrote, "If God is love, love does not delight in evil, but love rejoices in the truth. Love always protects, love always trusts, love always hopes. And love always perseveres".

As for my second concern: for you young people – Simon's friends and companions, who are here in such numbers and who have supported him so strongly over recent months – Simon's death raises another

question. It is this. *What are you going to do about Simon's death?* I mean after the pain and the shock, and possibly after some anger, possibly against God, after the hurt and the tears, *what are you going to do about Simon's death?* What are you going to do with your life in Simon's memory when your tears have dried?

I want to share with you a story that might suggest an answer. It is the story of Puccini, the great Italian writer of such classic operas as *Madame Butterfly* and *La Boheme*. It seems that when Puccini was fairly young, he contracted cancer. So he decided to spend his last days writing his final opera *Turandot* which is one of his most performed works.

When Puccini's friends and his disciples would say to him, "You are ailing, take it easy and rest," he would always respond, "I am going to do as much as I can on my great masterwork; and it is up to you, my friends, to finish it if I don't."

Well, Puccini did die before the opera was completed. Now his friends had a decision to make. They could forever mourn their friend and return to life as usual, or they could build on his melodies and complete what he started. They chose the latter. And so in 1926, at the famous *La Scala Opera House* in Milan, Italy, Puccini's opera *Turandot* was played for the first time, conducted by the famed conductor, Arturo Toscanini. And when it came to the part of the opera where the master had stopped because he died, Toscanini stopped everything, turned round with eyes welling up with tears and said to the large audience, "This is where the master ends." And he wept. But then, after a few moments,

Toscanini lifted up his head, smiled broadly, and said, "And this is where his friends began." And he finished the opera.

You see the point of the question I asked you a few minutes ago. *What are you going to do about Simon's death?* What are you going to do about his unfinished masterpiece? Will it be that in a month or so, your life will go on as usual? Or can you build on his humour, his ability, his fun, his unrealised dreams? I would suggest that if there is any fitting response to the shock of Simon's death, it is life – your life – a life lived better, a life lived more selflessly, a life that makes a difference, a life that is honest and



decent, a life that makes beautiful music for Simon and for the Lord. Across the chasm of death, you can make Simon live. The music doesn't have to stop here today and doesn't have to be buried with Simon. You have your choice.

My third thoughts – to all of you but especially Simon's family in this sad moment – I leave you with an image of hope, of perspective. Picture yourselves standing on a wharf beside one of those great old-time sailing vessels. It is standing there, sails folded, waiting for the wind. Suddenly a breeze comes up. When the captain senses the breeze as a forerunner of the necessary wind he quickly orders the sails to be hoisted, and sure enough, the wind comes, catches the sails' full

force and carries the ship away from the wharf where you are standing. Inevitably, you, or someone on that wharf is bound to say, "Well, there she goes". And from our point of view, it does indeed go.

Soon, the mighty ship, laden with its crew and goods is on the horizon where water and sky meet and it looks like a speck before it disappears. It is still mighty and grand, still filled with life and goods, but it has left us. We are standing on the wharf quite alone.

But on the other side of the ocean, people are standing in anticipation. As that speck on the horizon becomes larger and larger, they begin to cry something different. They are crying with joy, not abandonment, "Here she comes." And at the landing there is welcome, joy, embracing and celebration.

We miss Simon. He is quickly receding from our sight and this funeral Mass and his burial

at the cemetery are our farewells, our versions of "There he goes." But goes where? From our sight, from our embrace, from our care and love and friendship? How we miss that – how we will miss him. But he is not diminished nor made poorer. We must remember on faith that "Here he comes" is the cry on the eternal shore where Jesus who understands the human heart, even with its sinfulness, is waiting. And there is Simon, now forever larger than life, filled with life, intoxicated with life and laughter and in the arms of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and His Mother, Mary, that same Jesus Christ who makes all things new again, the one who says, "Welcome Simon, Welcome home."

Kindly sent by Simon's mother, Philippa

the church is part of me

Maura Hanrahan

It's always been there, the Catholic Church, through my four decades of life. It nurtures me, annoys me, enlightens me, angers me, saddens me, heals me. It comes and goes, or rather I come to it and leave again, wandering away, occasionally storming away.

This is – I am sure self-help gurus would say – the picture of a dysfunctional relationship. The push-pull, the waves of disparate, conflicting emotions, the apparent instability of what we have together, the church and I. Given the church's track record on women, some feminists (and I belong to that club as well) might liken me to an abused woman who cannot shut the door on her tormentor.

Perhaps.

But it is more complex than that (and you can call that statement rationalisation if you want). For the most part, the pain has been worth the joy. In fact, the pain has even been worth the nuisance factors and boredom that are intrinsic to every relationship.

At the age of ten I entered a convent school run by the Sisters of Mercy (whom we kids cheekily called the *Sisters of No Mercy*). I joined the Legion of Mary and every Wednesday we girls knelt down in a classroom and said the rosary, led by an old sister. She had a man's name, Alphonsus – a remnant of the pre-Vatican era – and a simple faith in Mary, the mother of the Nazarene.

Once in the 150-year-old school chapel I glimpsed Sr. Dolorosa, a nun who came to our shores from Ireland.

Though ancient, she was still tall and stately. I didn't dare approach her. My father had told me that she was the last of the missionary Sisters and, though I didn't quite understand what he meant, I sensed this was something important.

In Grade 9 the nuns hauled us off to confession, as the sacrament of reconciliation was called then. In the confessional box the priest made a highly inappropriate sexual remark to me. I corrected the confession box power imbalance by never going back. Ever since when I've transgressed, I've made peace with God my own way.

After that disturbing incident I still went to Mass and sang in the choir. And I longed for Our Lady to appear to me. I read William Walsh's *Our Lady of Fatima* over and over. Alone in my bedroom I implored Mary to appear to me – me – pick me, I begged her, let me be the next Lucia! She didn't come, of course, and gradually she drifted out of my thoughts.

Around the same time I finally decided that I didn't want to be a nun. I had discovered another species – boys, and I knew they were off limits to anyone who entered the convent. Like a just-released zoo animal I was attracted to university and the exciting promise of the secular world.

But the church never truly left me as I investigated the Eastern religions, Indigenous spirituality, and even went to chant under the moon with Wicca devotees. I saw the value in all these things (well, most of them), but for the most part I was not drawn



to them. They lacked the familiarity of the church of my childhood and adolescence and, deep down, I don't really believe conversion is truly possible.

Eventually, I embarked on a solitary voyage through the literature of the Christian mystics. I felt the love of Julian of Norwich, voluntarily holed away in her damp little cell. I found fellow traveller Thomas Merton and heard him speak to my brokenness: *My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself...* One spring I stood on the porch of Merton's Kentucky hermitage, a Trappist writer friend by my side. Merton speaks to me still.

The pull of the church on Good Friday never left me, not even through the driest years of my relationship with Catholicism. The sobriety, the sorrow, the anticipation, the hopeful waiting for the risen Christ – annually, these combine to draw me in and envelope

me. Even after I learned of the great crimes of some of our priests – indeed, the great crime of our church – I could not leave the church door undarkened on Good Friday.

Somewhere along the lines the knowledge that spiritual practice is not whole without communion with others sank in. So my husband and I occupy a pew most Sundays. The essentially unchanging ritual of the Mass, which I've enjoyed in the United States, Portugal, Mexico, England, Austria, Ireland, Canada and beyond, soothes that ever-present troubled place in my soul, just as music does.

Practising the religion of my birth regularly brings the spirit of Jesus into my thoughts, challenging me as well as validating me, through his love of the bent-over woman, the lepers, and the most flawed of his apostles.

Mary, too, is there when I need her – the mother of us all, the incarnation of the often forgotten feminine aspects of the divine. I no longer implore her to appear, but I feel her presence and I experience it as a vehicle to become closer to God.

As I write this I am reminded of what Cathy in *Wuthering Heights* said about Heathcliff: "He's more myself than I

am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same." That's the thing, I guess; I was baptised into this church, it made an appearance in or had an influence on virtually every important moment in my life. Good and bad and everything that was both good and bad.

So it's part of me, intractably, forever – and while I don't always like myself, I strive to always love myself. To ignore this is to struggle hopelessly against the universe. ■

*Maura Hanrahan
is an anthropologist and
award-winning author.*

The Romero Prayer

***It helps, now and then, to step back
and take the long view.***

***The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.***

***We accomplish in our lifetime
only a tiny fraction of the magnificent
enterprise that is God's work.***

***Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives
includes everything.***

This is what we are about:

***We plant seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations
that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects
beyond our capabilities.***

***We cannot do everything
and there is a sense of liberation in realising that.
This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,
a step along the way,
an opportunity for God's grace
to enter and do the rest.***

***We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference
between the master builder
and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.***

Taken from a homily by Kenneth E. Untener (Bishop of Saginaw, Michigan, 1980-2004) written when he was rector of St. John Provincial Seminary; delivered by John Cardinal Deardon of Detroit, at a Mass for Deceased Priests, October 25, 1979. Later attributed, wrongly, to the late Archbishop Oscar Romero, of San Salvador.

the women of

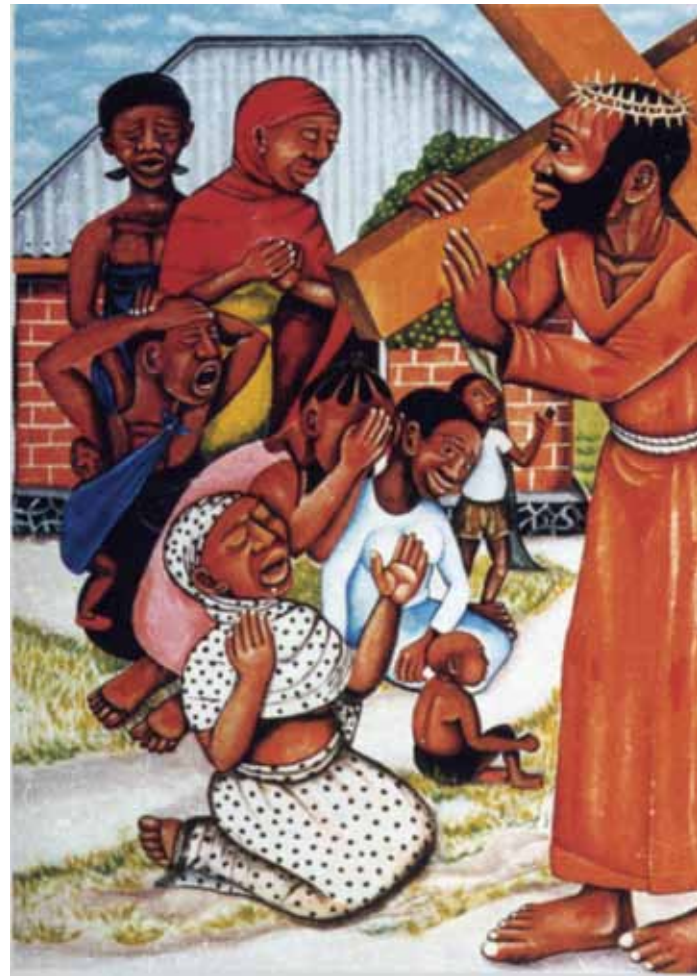
The women of Jerusalem gathered by the side of the path they knew Jesus would take. They greeted him with cries of pain and love. They stood in the path, knelt in the dirt and stormed the heavens with their pain-filled wailing.

Jesus, his brow streaming with blood and salty sweat, his robe soggy with the same awful mix, hears them and recovers his strength to stand. He looks at the women who had followed him, who had believed in him and continued to do so, and he is overcome.

The soldiers are dumbstruck. They know not how to counter these women, their women – their mothers, sisters and daughters – kneeling in the dust with their crying children at their feet, praising through their tears this man whom they were taking to his death.

Why are they showing him such respect? He is no better than a common slave or thief, to be hung between two other thieves, the worst death possible. Who was this man whom many had condemned and yet so many others had exalted?

The women knew the truth of him. They understood the significance of his life and death. They cried, but they also rejoiced that they were able to see him, to strengthen him on his way. They knew him as he knew them. They knew what Jesus told them, that the future was bleak. “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when



they will say: ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.’” (Lk: 23, 28-9)

Harsh words indeed from one about to die, but in their hearts they knew the truth of his words. Many lived to see them come to pass with the destruction of the Temple and the scattering of their people.

Today we can see the truth of Jesus’s words. Look at our cities, and the devastation and despair present there. Look at our children – old before their time, forced to take on duties and responsibilities beyond their years. They are confronted with

The original source of this piece is *Were You There? Stations* (Maryknoll, New York. Orbis Books 2000). By kind permission of Diana Hayes is Professor of Theology

of Jerusalem



Diana L Hayes

They grow bitter and angry, foul-mouthed and profane. They have too many role models who refuse to act as such, and too few who are capable of helping them to make the right decisions in their lives.

Children too often find themselves abandoned and alone. And women, the mothers, cry. They cry for Jesus; they cry for themselves; they cry for their children and the loss of hope.

Women bear the future in their wombs. They are the bearers of culture, the tellers of stories, the weavers of dreams. They too have fallen victim, like so many men, to the easy way out, the quick climb up the ladder of success, abandoning all they believed in along the way.

Jesus walks on to his destiny knowing that it will end in glory, the salvation for us all. We walk on as well, some quickly and surely, others stumbling and faltering, all seeking the Way, the true path of life.

*Amazing grace
How sweet the sound
That saves a wretch like me.
I once was lost
But now am found,
Was blind but now I see.*

Open your eyes. See the world around us crumbling into chaos. Draw strength from the one who gave his life so that all might live. And live!

choices no one should have, child or adult. Should they become gang members, to find the family that no longer exists at home? Should they try drugs, or should they listen to their parents and other adults who warn them of the dangers, while they themselves are smoking and drinking themselves to death?

It is not easy being a child today. Children look for certainty and guidance from the adults around them, but too often find themselves victims instead. We fill our lives with so many important things that we have no time for the children, with their hopes and dreams.

Jesus of the Cross by Diana L Hayes and art by Charles S Ndege
Publication of Orbis Books. Charles Ndege is a Tanzanian artist.
Georgetown University, South Africa.

seasons of blessing

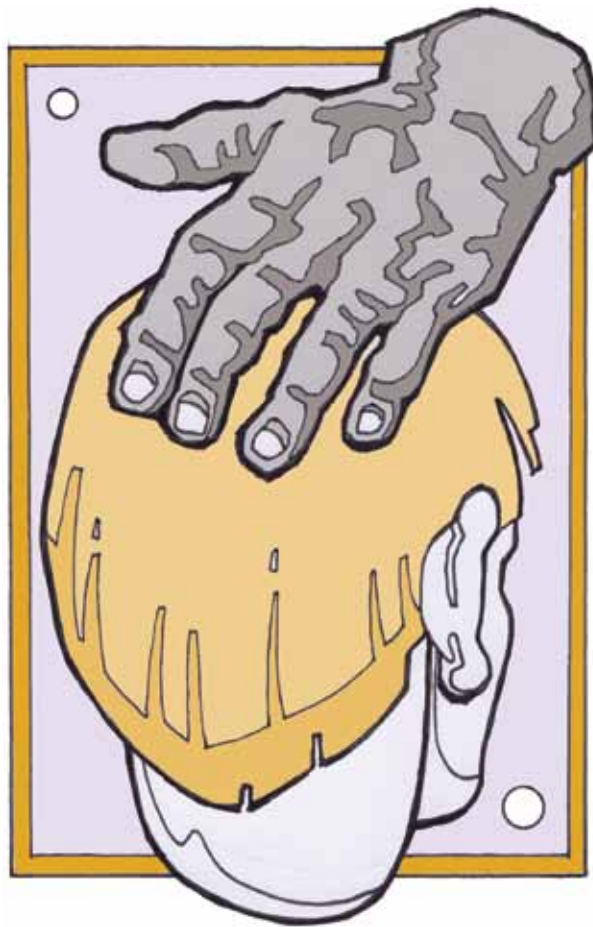
Daniel O'Leary

Every blessing is a reminder of the original blessing – that of life itself. To administer one is to divine a wellspring of sacred presence, already secure below the surface of everything – and in that lies the true meaning of Incarnation

October in North Yorkshire. We were gathered in the parish school for our Autumn Mass of the Sick. The St Vincent de Paul Society stalwarts, who lovingly prepare these popular Eucharists, had begun with their children the custom of blessing each needy parishioner as I moved around anointing them. Before this particular celebration, we had wondered about asking those same parishioners to bless us as well. We were a little anxious. Some in our team thought it might be too big a challenge.

We need not have feared. With an unaffected elegance, the ill, the elderly, leant forward from their seats and wheelchairs, and graciously and smilingly placed their hands on our heads and shoulders, murmuring words of healing and comfort. It was as though they were only waiting to be asked, as though this was something they had always wished to do. Blessing came naturally to them.

Liturgical purists may have some problems with such heartfelt moments of grace and blessing. But that afternoon there was an unforgettable atmosphere of divine presence, when we, the so-called able-bodied, knelt for the healing touch of those we were serving. Both diminished and empowered by their pain, they were the *anawim* in whom



God's own essence burnt most fiercely. Here, in the shadow of their Cross, was the primary source of divine blessing.

Those trembling, gnarled human hands that were reaching out to touch us were alive with grace. They were small sacraments of the compassion of the incarnate God. They were beautiful in their long history of caring and comforting, of failing and falling, of nourishing and nurturing. They had proved their worthiness. That is why they were fashioned for blessing, too, for calling out the image of God from every broken heart, for resurrecting divine courage where only

weakness now lived.

Surely it is a lovely aspect of baptism, for instance, to see it as a thanksgiving blessing for the birth of the baby, already blazing with God's glory, but also vulnerable to losing it in the encounter with the waiting "sin of the world". Instead of seeing the baby's life as only really beginning at the font, how delightful it is to see the sacrament as the recognition of the divine image already fresh and shining in that baby from birth, and now so warmly embraced into the family of Jesus.

Towards the end of the baptismal celebration, I usually invite the oldest grandparent to bless the baby. The spontaneous and natural way they do this, protecting God's dream in the little one, blessing her with their wisdom for the thresholds and transitions awaiting her, always takes my breath away. And through her life, when that baby continues to be blessed by her parents with the sign of the Cross every morning and night, blessed by her friends and her own senses, blessed by the prayers and sacraments of the church, she will be reminded again and again, particularly during the winters of her life, of the Original Blessing that her life is from the beginning. To be born is to be chosen and blessed.

Anticipating similar sentiments in John Paul II's Eucharistic writings, Antonio Rosmini, philosopher and founder of the Institute of Charity, had a profound sense of the Mass as a permanent blessing within the earth. He sees that blessing as the releasing of all the seeds for good and for love implanted by God at the core of everything. Eucharistic celebration blesses and stirs that implanted impulse so that these seeds are confirmed and nourished to blossom to their divine potential. "All things in this world, animate and inanimate", he wrote, "are [revealed as] sanctified by the Body and Blood consecrated by the priest."

As priests, what are we doing when we bless? Are we actually making something holy, adding on something that was missing, spiritually disinfecting a merely natural object? Or are we revealing a hidden richness, divining a wellspring of sacred presence, already secure below the surface of everything? Is this not the true meaning of Incarnation?

Is consecrated ground more sacred than the kitchen floor burnished and blessed by the feet of the families who played and prayed on it? We take off our shoes because all ground is holy ground. We bless the land to reveal that every bush is a burning bush. Is the still water in the church font holier than the dancing water in the stream nearby? We bless water to invoke, enhance and reveal its ageless, unique and beautiful healing power.

In his *Blessing – A Theology of Creation?* Canon Alan Griffiths writes: "The tradition of blessing *for* something rather than *upon* something, as though (holiness) were not already there, has echoes in the theology that underpinned Vatican II and its understanding of grace. Karl Rahner held that the sacramental event brings grace to expression without denying its pre-existence. Grace is always there: the sacraments do not supply it but express it. They reveal its presence ..."

Everyone can bless. It comes with our already-graced humanity. There are people who can be called sacraments of blessing. There are those whose hands, eyes and bodies are always blessing everyone and everything around them.

But not all are like that. Take the example of the graceless tone of current exchanges in internet blogs. In our confused church today there are many strong convictions. But some are expressed with a reckless disregard for people's feelings. They carry no blessing. According to a recent report from the Evangelical Alliance, church leaders find Christian blogs the most hurtful of all. In a Hasidic saying we read, "Rake the muck this way, rake the muck that way, it will still be muck. Wouldn't you be better off spreading blessings on your way to heaven?"

Friends (and enemies) probably have no idea of the eternal effect they have on each other. There is a memory in every blessing that remains hidden in the warp and weft of our souls. Fresh within me still is the Celtic blessing my mother left on my pillow the night before I left home for the first time:

*Be thine the encompassing of the
God of life;
Be thine the encompassing of the
Christ of love;
Be thine the encompassing of the
Spirit of grace;
To befriend thee and to aid thee,
O Donal, beloved of my breast:
To befriend thee and to aid thee,
Thou beloved of my heart.*

*Daniel O'Leary is a priest of Leeds Diocese,
West Yorkshire*

The love of God is revealed in responsibility for others

the Lent appeal 2009

PLEASE GIVE GENEROUSLY SO WE CAN HELP OTHERS HELP THEMSELVES

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Pope Benedict XVI: Spe Salvi, 2007

golden jubilee at st declan's

Paul Andrews

Last month I joined in the celebrations for the Golden Jubilee of St Declan's Special National School in Dublin. As I look back over my working life, I see that I gave more years to St Declan's – 18 in all – than to any other ministry. In many ways they were my best, my happiest years.

It was an unpaid job, as resident manager, psychologist (I paid for my keep from the earnings of my practice), caretaker and part-time teacher. I opened the school in the mornings, locked it up at night and dealt with any emergencies, such as blocked toilets or overnight burglaries.

St Declan's was founded 50 years ago to meet the needs of a particular group of young children. They were of normal intelligence but were under-performing grossly; in fact they were not coping with mainstream primary schools. Often they were written off as stupid or lazy, when in fact they were suffering from conditions which would be recognized more clearly today, such as dyslexia, hyperactivity (ADHD), family upset, epilepsy, Asperger's syndrome and other specific learning disabilities.

A house on Dublin's Northumberland Road came on the market, large enough to accommodate a small school. It was called St Declan's after the patron saint of Ardmore – and also because Declan is an easy name to spell, even for dyslexics. The Department of Education recognised it as a special national school for emotionally disturbed children, and so it remains to this day.

That was a curious rubric: *emotionally disturbed*. When my Jesuit brethren would enquire solicitously how I was surviving in what they imagined as a harrowing task, I could reassure them:

it's not really so hard, because I'm often emotionally disturbed myself, as are the members of my community. The difference is that the children in St Declan's will get over their disturbance.

In 1958 the words of Jesus rang true of Irish schooling: "To those who have, more will be given, and from those who have not, even what they have will be taken away". Girls who were clever, well-motivated and ambitious tended to come from prosperous and harmonious homes. Their parents, wise educational strategists, would select a good school for them and support their learning; and in school they were more likely to be in a relatively small class with good teachers. Children with less brains, motivation and money were more likely to be in lower-stream classes with less inspiring teachers and less motivated companions, though in fact they had more need of small classes and good teachers than the clever ones.

In St Declan's our mission was to reverse that position. The lovely children who came to us had drawn the short straw in many ways: in brains, or money, or family upset, or ambition, or physical or emotional health. Most of them could look back on a history of failure. In the initial assessment I tried to lay out in detail the nature of the problem that was holding them back, and the target and strategy the teachers might use to get that girl or boy over their hump, so that they could rejoin a mainstream class in two years or less.

It was not a matter of turning geese into swans, but of giving children an experience of successful learning at a level they could cope with, and

empowering them with a sense of their own gifts. Obviously the families were part of what we worked with. In one class of First Communicants, only two were from intact families.

The school's role was – and is – to ensure the best care and teaching for those who in other ways were deprived. We were allowed a class-size of about a dozen. This has varied over the years, and is now as low as eight, with special-needs assistants available where children need one-to-one help. When they were given that help, the results were often rapid and spectacular. They would go back to their original school, often reluctant to give up the affectionate attention and skilled teaching of St Declan's, but with a new self-confidence.

They were normal children who had hit an abnormal hurdle. We worked hard to maintain that sense of normality while offering them the special help they needed. It was not always easy. One wet January day I walked with the school – some 50 girls and boys – to the RDS where Funderland had opened the funfair to all the special schools of Dublin. The forecourt was full of buses disgorging children whose handicaps were visible – blind, wheelchaired, Down's syndrome and others. As we approached the entrance a big Dubliner shouted at me: "Who are youse?" "Saint Declan's school", I said. He looked hard at the children gathered round me and yelled: "Are yez handicapped or are yez deprived?" (His job was to let the handicapped in first.)

It was an awful moment, as the children looked at me for a verdict on their state. Were they handicapped or deprived? We had worked hard to spare the pupils from the destructive effect of labelling. But no matter how I answered, I knew

jesus the party-goer

Glynn Cardy

One of the things about Jesus both in his teaching and social practice was that he liked parties. Time and again his stories end with a party. Time and again he is found with society's desirables and dregs happily mulling life over around the dining table.

His critics noticed. "The people are suffering and yet you are celebrating?" they sneered. "Mr Jesus, how can you be pious and party?"

They had a point. Jesus lived in Galilee, Palestine. It had been invaded by the Roman Empire and its greed some years before. Taxation was heavy. Most people lived on very little and were pressured to pay more. Resistance was brutally suppressed. There seemed little to celebrate.

In New Zealand there also seems little to celebrate. The post-Christmas lay-offs are starting. As the discretionary dollars dry up, so does tourism. More insidious and destructive however is the daily diet of 'it's going to get worse'.

In the time of Jesus there were other prophets who went around telling people a similar message. 'It's only the start of bad things', they'd say. These prophets advocated belt-tightening, prayer, and hope that a God somewhere off the planet would come and rescue them.

Jesus, seemingly uniquely, had a confidence in the basic goodness of a God who was close at hand and close to the heart. It was an irrational confidence. Yet from that confidence emanated hope. It was a quiet assurance that all would be well even when everything looked so bleak.

There are many people who can look back over the past year and recall heartache, tragedy, and pain. The deaths

of the six students and their teacher in the flash flood at Mangatepopo. The abuse and murders of children like Nia Glassie and Jyniah Te Awa. The little publicised suicides that have been steadily increasing since the downturn in the financial markets.

Having a party to celebrate life when times are tough is not a crass act of denial but a tentative act of faith. It is not *eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die*, but *eat, drink, and be merry for today we are alive*. It is getting together in the faith that no matter how desperate things seem, the spirit of life is stronger still.

I hope we will quietly take stock of the good things in our lives. Many of us have relationships with partners, parents, children, or friends that nourish and sustain us. Many of us live close enough to walk or drive to a beach, or a forest, or a hilltop. Many of us can listen to nice music, watch a sunset, or admire a beautiful piece of art. Many of us are spiritually sustained by what we call 'God'. We need to quietly take stock and be thankful.

Gratitude is a discipline. Irrespective of whether we are in good health or not, been successful or lucky or not, or are rich or poor or somewhere between, gratitude is something we can choose to nurture within. We can then choose to share our sense of gratitude by giving to others.

Are we thankful for the good things in life and expressing that thankfulness by being kind to others? One way to do that is by attending and hosting parties. Like Jesus did. ■

Glynn Cardy is Vicar of St-Matthew-in-the-City and Archdeacon of the Anglican diocese of Auckland

that some of them would internalise that sense of stigma.

'We' means the teachers and school secretary, an extraordinary bunch. It was only in St Declan's that I came to realise the quality of our national teachers. On the basis of their Leaving Certificates, they were among the brightest of their generation; but they had opted for primary teaching rather than medicine or nuclear physics or business. They were not merely bright and well-trained, but also dedicated,

unsurprising, with a sense of vocation and joy in their work. The children knew they were loved. You sensed that as soon as you walked into the school.

So on this Golden Jubilee I look back on those golden years, and feel happy that Saint Declan's is still flourishing. Jesus could look in there and say: "In this place, to those who have not, more is being given. Blessed are the poor." ■

Paul Andrews is a Jesuit priest/ psychotherapist living in Dublin

**Ad to
drop on**

Take this Bread

Trish McBride

Her conversion experience was not just unexpected – it was unwanted, even embarrassing! A 49-year-old woman followed an impulse to enter a San Francisco church one Sunday morning in 1999. All the people there were offered Communion, so she received as well. Then, in her own words, “Jesus happened to me!”

Sara Miles was a committed atheist, a lesbian mother, a journalist, a cook, with a track record of peace work and social activism. She had a significant distaste for organised religion which was shared by her family and friends. Yet she found herself shaken and in tears as she ate this food that was the Body of Christ. Then there were months of confusion and soul-searching through the labyrinths of bread-food-hunger-Jesus-Mystery-incarnation-community-giving and receiving. She was baptised at the church of St Gregory of Nyssa in 2000.

St Gregory’s Episcopal church seems like a building in which such things can happen! The entrance doors lead into a rotunda in the centre of which stands the round altar table. The walls rise to where 99 larger-than-life dancing saints are all following in step with Jesus, Lord of the Dance. A most varied bunch with golden halos: women, men, children and a few animals, multi-national, multi-



faith, from the beginning to now: a naked Eve holds hands with Desmond Tutu, the only depicted one still living. Another panel celebrates Sojourner Truth, Bartholomé de las Casas, Miriam, Origen, Malcom X, Elizabeth I, Iqbal Masih and Teresa of Avila! (Google the unfamiliar names and prepare to be inspired!) High overhead round the cupola are inscribed Gregory’s words: *The one thing truly worthwhile is becoming God’s friend.*

To the right is a more usual church space – a few rows of seats facing each other, the lectern stands where the spaces join, and the presider’s chair is below a

breath-taking mural in the same icon style. Gregory of Nyssa preaches seated at the bottom. At the top Mother Sophia presides over the central image of the marriage between Jesus and the Soul. Gregory (331-396), who wrote from his own experience of married love, explained that in mystical union with Christ, the ‘mother-in-law’ of each of our souls is God. He was one of the last married bishops. He too dances on the wall, arm-in-arm with his wife, Theosebia.

As Sara explored her new life as a Christian with all its complexities, the simplicity of a call became clear: she and others at St Gregory’s were to feed people. Feed the people who were hungry. Feeding people and being fed by others,



however poor, had been a core part of her life in many parts of the world, notably war-torn Central America.

She pondered the experiences of being fed by and from her mother's body, and of feeding her daughter likewise from her own. And the 'intolerable' instruction from Jesus to 'eat his body' became her central connection to all the other experiences. She was hooked on Eucharist and its consequences! So, with support from the congregation she began a food pantry at the church to feed the hungry in their area. The pantry opened its doors the same week as her baptism.

It was a huge learning curve to get this operation running effectively. She had seen publicity from the San Francisco Foodbank, and that set the whole project in motion. This was set up as a redistribution agency 20 years ago for the enormous amounts of food being wasted and destroyed in the US. Through it, farmers can donate surplus crops and get tax breaks. It also gathers seasonal surpluses and donations of food into its massive warehouse, then distributes it to 600 agencies across the area, including St Gregory's. So St Gregory's is part of a much bigger picture.

Sara's first communion was nine years ago. Now 600 hungry people a week come to the central area of the church to receive their food. The altar is covered by a plastic table-cloth. The food comes. The volunteers come. The homeless, the marginalised, the poor ones, the isolated of the area come. They are fed. Many of the volunteers were themselves initially recipients who have found self-respect, community and purpose at St Gregory's. One beamed as she told how energised she feels by doing her volunteer duty. This is all achieved for a financial outlay of \$1 per person. And major funding support from donors has enable St Gregory's to seed another 17 pantries round the area, with passed-on donations and training of volunteers. The work grows!

And on the altar base below the plastic table-cloth in gold lettering: *Did not the Lord share the table of publicans and harlots? So then... do not distinguish between worthy and unworthy. All must be equal in your eyes to love and serve.*

On Sundays, that's how it is. The Liturgy of the Word is held in the chancel, then everyone processes to surround the altar. It is proclaimed: *Jesus welcomes everyone to his table so we offer his Body and Blood to everyone without exception.* Then they do. The final hymn is danced around the altar in step with Jesus and the saints high around their walls. There is continuity here between liturgy and service.

Sara's integration into and commitment to the Christian community has deepened. Jesus is real and no longer embarrassing. Friends and family have adjusted to her new life. There are new friends and a new family as well. She has inspired many with her book *Take this Bread*. It inspired me too. Visiting St Gregory's recently, seeing the Food Pantry in operation and meeting the passionate, earthed woman who responded to the invitation to receive Eucharist and live its consequences, was a soul-deep interlude of the Christ who welcomes all. ■

Trish McBride is a Wellington spiritual director and theologian with a special interest in women's faith journeys.

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Margaret Roper was the eldest daughter of St Thomas More. She was one of the best educated women of her time.

But her greatest claim to fame was Margaret's courageous support of Thomas up to his death.

Truly it can be said his courage was her courage. They loved each other literally 'to the end'

Michael Hill

My dearest daughter Meg...

The date is 6 July 1535. The place – Tower Hill, London, a few paces from the notorious Bloody Tower where down the centuries many disgraced courtiers, princes and political prisoners were left to rot. The condemned man – Thomas More, one time Chancellor of England, humanist and scholar honoured throughout Europe; subsequently a canonised saint.

Most people know of Thomas More's celebrated stand against Henry VIII, his disapproval of the King's dumping of the rightful

Queen Catherine and the elevation of royal mistress Anne Boleyn in her place; then More's refusal to take the Oath of Supremacy whereby Henry arrogated to himself supreme power over Church as well as State.

Thomas had been the king's friend and confidant. Of all those who opposed him, there was no one whose approval Henry sought more than that of Thomas. But More never wavered in his opposition to Henry's arrogant claims.

However, not many people know the story of More's eldest daughter,

Margaret, especially the huge personal influence she had in bolstering her father's courage and preserving his memory. For months More was held in confinement in a damp and verminous dungeon. His health was poor, and he often doubted his own courage to be able to persevere in his resolve and stay loyal to his own conscience: to be *the King's good servant – but God's first*.

Margaret risked her own skin to gain access to Thomas' cell, to bring him creature comforts and spend long hours praying with him, chatting and simply having fun – or at least as near

to 'fun' as is possible in such a dire situation. When her right of visiting was abruptly cut off she continued to comfort him by her wonderful letters.

She was the only one of More's family to stand by him. She was certainly the only one who had any sympathy with his stance. Thomas' wife, Mistress Alice, was disgusted with her husband for putting the comfort and security of the family at risk – especially her own – when a stroke of the pen would have instantly gained his release. William Roper, Margaret's husband, was only interested in his own personal advancement. He even appeared as a juror while his father-in-law was in prison, at the trial of two priests who had refused to swear the Oath.

Margaret and her father had always been close. When she was a child, he insisted that she receive the sort of education usually reserved in those days for specially privileged sons. He paid for the very best tutors, and the youngsters of his extended family enjoyed their own domestic school. Margaret was the star pupil and soon became skilled in Latin and Greek.

The only reported time that there was a disagreement between father and daughter was when she decided herself to write a book. It was a free (and expanded) translation of Erasmus' *Treatise on the Our Father*. More was always very proud of his daughter's scholarship – but he did *not* approve of her becoming an author.

She took no notice of him and found herself a publisher. The book was a success. At the time Margaret was 19 years of age. Significantly, a prayer out of her book was one they prayed together in the Tower.

A letter to Alice Alington

Thomas More was imprisoned in April 1534 and at first was allowed no visits from his family. However, from letters that were smuggled out Margaret intuited that her father needed her presence and support. So

she conceived an audacious but very wily plan. She sent an unsealed letter to him in the Tower – knowing it would be intercepted by the Secretary, Thomas Cromwell – announcing that she was about to follow her husband's example and take the Oath acknowledging the Royal Supremacy. She then went voluntarily to the Royal Commissioners and took the Oath – adding, however, the proviso "as far as the law of God will allow".

Secretary Cromwell was taken in by her subterfuge and readily allowed her access to her father, thinking she might be the best bet to influence her father into taking the Oath. More was none too happy at Margaret's trick of mental reservation. However, there can be little doubt that over the months that followed it was she who added steel to his backbone and enabled him to remain staunch.

During the summer months she would come regularly bringing food, pens and paper and messages. More was able to spend his leisure hours writing one of his better known books *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*. Her influence over that text was considerable.

Of greatest interest, perhaps, is a 'letter' they composed together, which she memorised and afterwards wrote down and had printed along with many of his unpublished writings after his death. The letter purports to be to her stepsister, Alice Alington. It describes an imaginary conversation between herself and More, where she puts to him all the arguments being put forward (by Alice and many others) in favour of Thomas taking the Oath and he replies rebutting each argument. In the text, significantly, the word 'conscience' occurs over 40 times.

The Tudor English in which it is written is not easy for the modern reader to follow; below is a modernised version of the arguments with some dialogue.

Meg: I hope you will be able to please My Lord the King, who has always been so good to you. If you don't, it will ruin your reputation and perhaps you will risk your soul in so doing. My sister Alice writes that you might also risk losing your friends as well.

More: Goodness me, *Mistress Eve*, is Alice playing the serpent and you are tempting your poor father to swear against his conscience!

Meg, you know that if it were possible there is no one who would take the Oath of Supremacy more readily than I. But having studied the matter carefully for many years, my conscience simply won't allow it.

Meg: I do respect your learning. Yet all the nobles of the realm think differently and hold your decision to be simply a scruple.



More: You know, Meg, I would never pin my soul on another man's back! Even if Bishop John Fisher himself were to take the oath, I would not change my mind. For some will swear this Oath for fear or favour of the King. Some trust in God's forgiveness when they repent. Some, like yourself, say one thing and think another. But



▷▷ my conscience will not allow me to follow any of those.

Meg: Perhaps if you won't swear because you are persuaded by their arguments, would you not do it for fellowship's sake?

More: It may be, Meg, that most of the lords and bishops of this kingdom follow the dictates of the King at this time. But the majority of Christendom – present and in ages past – I believe, agrees with me.

The reasons, however, I have for refusing to swear the Oath I am not prepared to divulge – either to you or to anyone else.

Meg: The only thing then I can say is why should you refuse to swear the Oath when I have sworn it myself?

At this Thomas laughed.

More: Oh Eve, would you offer me the apple because you have eaten it yourself?

The grace and merciful goodness of God strengthens me so that I will lose my goods, my lands and my life itself rather than go against my conscience. God's grace shall strengthen me. My dearest daughter, nothing will happen to me unless God wills it. It will be for the best.

To meet merrily in heaven

It was shortly after this that the Pope made More's fellow prisoner, Bishop John Fisher, a Cardinal. This so outraged King Henry that he determined to execute all those leaders, including More, who would not conform.

Margaret was permitted one final visit. It was the day that the three Carthusian abbots were dragged on hurdles out of the Tower to martyrdom. Thomas and Margaret heard the commotion below the cell window. When they saw who it was, More said: "Don't you see, Meg, how these blessed fathers are going as cheerfully to their deaths as bridegrooms to their marriage?"

During the final weeks of waiting Margaret continually wrote letters of support and comfort. Eventually it was clear to Cromwell and the Council that More was adamant. On 17 June John Fisher was executed. On 1 July More himself was called to trial in Westminster Hall, the scene of many occasions where More had presided as Leader of the House of Commons. He was summarily convicted of treason and sentenced to death.

Margaret waited along the route her father would take on return to the Tower. When she saw him she broke through the soldiers' escort and threw

her arms around his neck, kissing him again and again. His final words to her before the soldiers led him away were: "Margaret, have patience. Do not torment yourself. This is God's will. You alone have long known the secrets of my heart".

In his last note to her he wrote: "I never liked your manner towards me better than when you kissed me last... Farewell, my child, and pray for me and I shall for you, that we may merrily meet in heaven." He was executed by beheading on Tower Hill.

After her father's death, Margaret devoted all her energies to preparing for publication a collected edition of her father's writings including a carefully chosen selection of his letters. She also succeeded in retrieving her father's skull. Cromwell was fearful she might start a cult, so had her arraigned before the Privy Council. However, she acquitted herself so ably that she was allowed to keep the skull and the case was dismissed.

Margaret died young at the age of 39. Her husband, William Roper, who had never supported her or her father's cause during her life, was good enough to arrange that Margaret's remains and Thomas's skull should be finally interred together – in death as in life – at the Chapel of St Dunstan, Canterbury.

The printing of More's collected works was eventually completed successfully by Margaret's cousin, William Rastell. However, there is little doubt that but for her diligence and scholarship the memory and wisdom of Thomas More, martyr and sage, would have disappeared in the flurry of hatred and persecution waged by Henry VIII and his evil agent, Thomas Cromwell. All that we know and celebrate about St Thomas More owes incomparably to the loyalty, courage and diligence of his beloved daughter Meg. ■

The material for this article is largely taken from the book A Daughter's Love, by John Guy – reviewed on page 29

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witchhunt in the parish school

Doubt

Film review: Richard Leonard SJ

In 2005 John Patrick Shanley won a Pulitzer Prize, the Drama Desk Award and a Tony Award for his Broadway play, *Doubt*.

The film is set as the Second Vatican Council is well underway in 1964: the reforming and charismatic priest, Fr Brendan Flynn (Seymour Hoffman), arrives at St Nicholas Parish in the Bronx. The winds of change are blowing.

The local Catholic School is administered by the Daughters of Charity of St Joseph, who were founded by Elizabeth Ann Seton in 1809. This was the USA's first indigenous religious congregation for women. Like the French 'aeroplane nuns' upon which St Elizabeth modelled her Congregation, the DCs, as they are affectionately known, had distinctive headgear – a tight fitting white bonnet with a large black bonnet over it.

Sr Aloysius Beauvier (Meryl Streep) runs the school and the convent with an iron glove. The pupils are terrified of her. So are the nuns. The priests probably are too. But Sr Aloysius is at first cautious and then anxious about the new go-ahead Curate. The Principal wants the church, her school and the world to stay the way it is. She keeps a careful eye on the reforming Fr Flynn.

When the school accepts its first black student, Donald Miller (Joseph Foster), he is given into Sr James's class. Sr James (Amy Adams) is a junior professed sister, anxious to impress Sr Aloysius. She is as kindly and good as her Superior is severe. When she shares with Sr Aloysius that she is worried that Fr Flynn is paying too much personal attention to Donald, Sr Aloysius is galvanized to begin a crusade to both unearth the truth and expunge Flynn from the school and the parish. Without a shred of proof except her moral certainty, Sr Aloysius locks into a battle of wills with Fr Flynn, a battle that threatens to tear apart the local Catholic community with devastating consequences.

Of all the television dramas and films made about the sexual abuse of children by Catholic clergy, this is the best one yet. Even though the direction is a little too static, *Doubt* is a study in how a play can be successfully adapted to the screen (it does not always work). It is also a masterclass in acting. Seymour Hoffman, Streep, Adams and Viola Davis, who plays Donald's mother, have already picked up nominations for the major acting awards in the USA. On their own, the scenes between Streep and Seymour Hoffman are worth the price of admission. The range of emotions these two

can convincingly explore in ten minutes of screen time is mesmerising.

On one level Sr Aloysius is a noble figure, a crusader for the rights of the poor. She will let nothing stand in her way in exposing anyone she suspects of abusing children. That she is so unable to see that her own treatment of the very children she defends is emotionally abusive makes her situation all the more desperate.

Aloysius' problem is not that she cares for kids. It is that she has become a self-appointed vigilante, and that her free floating neurosis in regard to change, order, control and tradition have found expression in a more socially acceptable vendetta against the man who embodies all that she fears and loathes. With righteous indignation, her obsession will only be vanquished when she destroys Fr Flynn. And if she is wrong then that would be one unfortunate casualty in the necessary war against abuse and sin and reform. Take as an example these interchanges between them:

"I can fight you."

"You will lose."

"You haven't the slightest proof of anything!"

"But I have my certainty."

"Where is your compassion?"

"Nowhere you can get at it."

Not that Fr Flynn is off the hook. Shanley is masterful in giving us a man who has a history. He may be the subject of a contemporary Salem witch hunt, but we intuit enough to know that he is not just a victim here. He can be as manipulative and calculating as his opposing force. We come to see why he says in his opening sermon, "Doubt can be a bond as powerful and sustaining as certainty." For while he may want the winds of change, he cannot foresee the hurricane that will soon be threatening his 1964 clericalism, sexism and extremely poor judgment. He is deeply flawed too.

Sr James is caught between the clash of the titans and, understandably, has divided loyalties. She wants to keep her tyrannical Superior happy, but she has real doubts that the likeable Fr Flynn has done anything criminal. But what if she is wrong? How would she live with herself? Through a brilliant use of characterisation, Sr James embodies the position of the audience. She and we end up empathising with everyone.

Around this unholy trinity of characters are woven issues of whether temptation is sin, about culpability and how there are various grades of sinfulness, serious or otherwise.



desert island reading on prayer by sr wendy

Living the Lord's Prayer

Archbishop Rowan Williams and Sister Wendy Beckett

Publisher: Continuum

Price: \$28

Sister Wendy on Prayer

Wendy Beckett

Publisher: Lion

Price: \$33

Review: Elizabeth Nicholson

A book co-authored by Sr Wendy Beckett and Archbishop Rowan Williams, two brilliant minds and unquestioned spiritual authorities, promised much but sadly proved a disappointment.

Living the Lord's Prayer is a small book, based on a BBC series. It consists of separate reflections on each phrase of the prayer, connected by a commentator who appeared to find it necessary to explain each one. The result seemed to me rather disjointed. The reflections do have value (how could they not?), and I find some of the thoughts have stayed with me and deepened my understanding.

But overall I am left with a sense of opportunities missed. How much more interesting it might have been if the two authors had shared their ideas and insights with each other directly, and

had the opportunity to develop them at more depth.

Sister Wendy on Prayer is in a very different category. There have been so many books on prayer published in recent years that one could be forgiven for wondering whether there is really room for another. I would answer with a resounding 'yes', if the author is Sr Wendy Beckett, though she herself is somewhat doubtful. Prayer is profoundly important to her, touching the very core of her life, her relationship with God, and she feels that reading about prayer can become a substitute for praying.

Prayer, she says, is essentially very simple. It is God's business, not ours; we need only the desire and the willingness to be there, "to stand unprotected before God". There are no secret ways, no intellectual skills are required, there is simply oneself and God.

Anyone who has enjoyed Sr Wendy on television talking about art will recognise the same qualities in this book; her glowing enthusiasm, her down-to-earth commonsense and her lack of any sort of exclusiveness (though she writes unashamedly as a Catholic). She would never limit the ability to pray and develop a relationship with God to any denomination or faith.

The book contains reproductions of paintings, used very effectively to illustrate aspects of prayer. I particularly liked the picture of a small sailing boat afloat on a mythical sea under an otherworldly starlit sky.

The sail is taut, but the sailor is invisible. Our prayer is similar. We launch our little boat on the sea of faith, but then stay quiet within it; all the movement comes from God.

It all sounds very simple, and in one way it is. The book begins with encouragement and only gradually reveals the true cost of getting serious about prayer! Part of that cost is, of course, the deepening of our connection with one another and the suffering world.

Anyone who loves Julian of Norwich will delight in Sr Wendy, as will those who have enjoyed her books and programmes on art, but beyond that I would recommend this book to anyone who prays, or is seeking to do so.

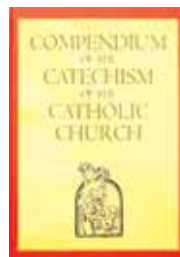
If I had to choose one book on prayer to take with me on a desert island, this might well be the one. I got it initially from the library, but discovered I needed my own copy to re-read and return to, and to lend to others. You have been warned! ■

▷▷ The refreshing note here is that these are not explored didactically, but emerge naturally and unobtrusively from the characters.

The only thing *Doubt* clarifies is that when it comes to true justice regarding child sexual abuse in the church, or any other serious issue, St Augustine in the 5th Century was right when he said that "Hope has two lovely daughters, anger and courage: anger so that what cannot be, may not be; and courage, so that what must be, will be." The problem is in backing up a hunch with certainty and then knowing to whom, when and upon what matters we can give the benefit of the doubt. ■

Permission Richard Leonard SJ, director Australian Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting.

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six stories about disability

Oh Light

ed: Disability, Spirituality and Faith Network

Price: \$22.50 + pp.

Review: Dot Wilson

Oh Light is a collection of personal reflective thoughts of the human journey into a spiritual context, seen through disability lenses. The *Disability, Spirituality and Faith Network Aotearoa/ New Zealand Inc* provided the structure and support that enabled this spiritual and literary work to become a reality.

As disabled people have a perspective that is often not heard, *Oh Light* provides nourishment that sometimes laments, sometimes is insightful, celebratory and transformational, and sometimes sheds new light on the workings of the Spirit. *Oh Light* is written in six parts beginning with the adventure of living with and relating to our bodies – whether we like our bodies or not.

Namaste – I greet the God in you is a story of yearning and disappointment, of searching and acceptance – followed by a healing. It's a story about looking

for a cure in one place and finding it in another. Archimedes said: "Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world".

The Third part of the book is about the extent to which every person makes an active contribution to the world. The drive to create and produce is stronger than the limitations of other people's judgments. Love is the most powerful chemical in the universe. It dissolves everything which is not of itself.

Part Four talks of the stories we whisper in other's ears about what we perceive to be an affliction, impairment or a misfortune. These are all stories. A disability in one context becomes an ability in another. A disadvantage in one historical moment may be an advantage in times to come. Mahatma Gandhi said: "Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will".

In Part Five we read of age-old stories of grace – that word which has fallen out of common use. It is like a manuscript



lost long ago and now being discovered once again fragment by fragment. I only have to open my arms to receive it.

Part Six tells the most important story of all – the story of unity in an age of brokenness. What joins us is stronger than what drives us apart. Love is always stronger than fear. Brokenness is simply another name for wholeness.

*Dragged down but never out
The mystical light
Manages to shine throughout the patches
of dark
To never give up
But to reach towards life –
The moment of reconnection
Just takes a second*

Rhonda Swenson

However you see yourself, there is something in this reflective book that will speak to your spirit as it has to mine. ■

Oh Light is available from some bookshops, but can also be ordered directly from the network by emailing pamcook@paradise.net.nz
website: www.dsfnetwork.org

a daughter's role in her father's heroism

A Daughter's Love: Thomas and Margaret More

John Guy

Harper Collins 2008

Price: \$65 pbk.

Review: Michael Hill

Sir Thomas More, humanist, lawyer and politician, family man and saint is one of the most celebrated figures in British history. His daughter Margaret is scarcely known, reduced in Robert Bolt's famous feature film *A Man for All Seasons* to little more than a cipher – a dutiful daughter, attentive and loyal, but no more. Yet More himself said to her: "You alone have known the secrets of my heart".

In this new joint biography, John Guy suggests that when More was locked up in a damp cell in the Tower of London for

opposing the magisterial will of Henry VIII, he might easily have succumbed to the privations and disgrace had Margaret not stood by him and injected iron into his resolve.

Thomas is rightly celebrated as a martyr for conscience. His beloved Margaret surely deserves a share of this acclaim, certainly from the evidence offered here.

John Guy introduces us to the bustling and brilliant world of the early European Renaissance, especially as it impacted on the family of this successful London lawyer. Most of the early part of the book is about Thomas. Margaret enters simply as the daughter who, most unusual for those days, was given the best possible classical education available.

However, when the clouds gather and More comes into direct conflict with the king, Margaret takes an increasingly prominent role, visiting him almost daily in his ghastly dungeon – at considerable personal risk.

She is the source of all we know about those harrowing final months, and after his death she gathered More's papers to be preserved for posterity.

She comes through these fascinating pages as passionately supportive and courageously loyal to her beloved father. There are few stories in all history of the relationship of a father and daughter to match this, and John Guy tells it well.

This is a fine biography, scholarly, informative but also very readable. To be recommended. ■

ring out the old! ring in the new!

What are we leaving behind in 2008 and will 2009 be the better for it? Obviously, George W. Bush's eight calamitous years are at an end. His departure was fittingly memorialised by having a pair of shoes thrown at him in Iraq. He has been a fiasco, responsible for the death of thousands in The Middle East, the debasement of the American Constitution, the shame of Guantanamo Bay and the specious 'war on terror' that has left the world in a state of apprehension. Add to that, the collapse of American capitalism and its reputation abroad – and one could say good riddance to 2008.

Surely we are leaving behind the greed and criminality of money manipulators like Madoff in the US and the managers of the bankrupted finance companies in New Zealand and the world over. The excessive salaries and bonuses given to these people confirm the fallacy of the 'trickle down' theory from the rich to the poor.

In 2008, the rich became richer, more avaricious and the poor more impoverished. Consider the surreal dream world of Dubai, pandering to the wealthy, built by imported underpaid workers – the whole chimera built on sand. One could argue that the middle classes seem to be disappearing as a result of the disparity between socio-economic groups.

With the collapse of the motor industry, could we regard 2008 as the last year that gas-guzzling cars such as SUVs were regarded as status symbols? 2009 could see a wider acceptance of public transport and cleaner fuels. Environmentally sustainable measures to protect the planet must become *de rigueur* in 2009. There is hope that this will come about, now that we have a use for old shoes – politicians beware!

The rape of Gaza

At 11 am on 27 December 2008, the aerial bombardment of Gaza

Crosscurrents

John Honoré

began and continued through the night into the next day. Writing these words in the third week of 2009, the razing of the Gaza Strip and the massacre of its inhabitants continue under the guise of self-defence. For this writer, a graphic reminder of this overwhelming distortion of power is a photo, taken in Gaza a few years ago, of an Israeli soldier firing at so-called civilian 'terrorists' and holding a terrified young Palestinian boy in front of him, as a shield. The boy resembled my grandson.

After the humiliating withdrawal from Lebanon in 2006 (but leaving millions of cluster bombs in civilian areas) the Israeli army needs a face-saving victory against Hamas. This month, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak and the Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni are contesting the election by trumpeting their intention of annihilating Hamas whatever the human cost. Have they been reading their Hebrew Bible's: *Thou shalt smite them and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: (Deut. 7:2)*? Over a thousand Palestinians have been killed, 90 percent civilians, among whom are 500 women and children, as against a handful of Israelis, mainly combat soldiers. If this massacre is what will win the election for politicians, then the state of Israel is fatally flawed.

In response to ineffective Qassam rockets being launched by Hamas, the sheer inhumanity of tonnes of explosives being rained on civilians beggars the imagination. Hamas was democratically elected because of Fatah's inability to break the imposed blockade of Gaza and its inability to win any concessions from

Israel. Hamas is resisting an illegal occupation with home-made rockets and boys' slingshots. Hamas fighters are not foreigners, they are the sons of every Palestinian family. Paradoxically, this latest carnage guarantees their survival. The razing of Gaza will enter the collective memory of the Middle East and breed more fighters to undermine the security of Israel.

Surely Israel's much vaunted right to exist cannot be at the expense of others. If this right is to be recognised, Israel must abide by international law and the demands of humanitarian organisations. On the contrary, Israel has ignored the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention on humanitarian law, all UN General Assembly and Security Council censures, and among others, Amnesty International, Oxfam, Human Rights Watch and Red Cross, together with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel itself.

The late Harold Pinter, who was a Jew, wrote, "We cannot celebrate the birthday of a state founded on terrorism, massacres and the dispossession of another people from their land." Making matters worse is the support by the United States, whose foreign policy is hugely influenced by the American Zionist organisation AIPAC.

But that might be changing. The Wall Street Journal opined on 10 January: *Israel should be held accountable for its crimes, and the US should stop abetting it with unconditional military and diplomatic support.*

Israel will never be secure by force of arms supplied by a sycophantic world power. It is building a legacy of hate in the Middle East whose peoples will continue to fight against injustice. We must hope that the ineffectual but symbolic rockets do not metamorphose into the equivalent of Israel's weaponry, supplied by Arab States enraged by Israel's massacre of the Palestinians. This war must be resolved by political, unbiased negotiations based on mutual recognition and compromise. ■

pre-easter reconciliation rites

Pre-Easter Reconciliation services will get under way shortly. Let us see if they can be better attended than were many of the Rite 2 Reconciliation rites held before the recent Christmas. In the five different parishes in which I was then involved as a confessor, attendance overall was light. Only in one parish was there sufficient number of penitents to keep the confessors occupied for even half an hour.

In the liturgical reforms that took place after Vatican II, a good start in the renewal of the sacrament of Penance was made with the spelling out of three distinct modes of celebration. Of these, Rite 3 was to be conducted without any individual confession of sin. Experience soon showed that such a penance service involving general absolution readily leads penitents on to subsequent individual confession in Rite 1 or Rite 2.

But then the Holy See got cold feet. It almost completely ruled out general absolution. The reason given for this was that even if already forgiven in a general absolution, mortal sins must subsequently be submitted to the judgement of a confessor. Many penitents might fail to observe this requirement. The theology behind such a ruling can perhaps be justified. But the pastoral judgment cannot. It is in error.

Just how many of those who come to a rite involving general absolution have in fact committed mortal sins? Have they been robbing large sums from the firm they work for? Have they been two-timing on their spouse? Have they beaten up their children and inflicted on them notable injury. If indeed, as I believe is the case with the vast majority of penitents, they have on their consciences only venial sins,

general absolution is all that is required for legitimate reception of the sacrament.

Why make a rule based on the faulty judgment that most of those at Rite 3 have mortal sins and would subsequently have to confess individually anyway? I restrain myself from making the cynical assertion that Roman officials might be applying to the laity their own experience. When such clerics go to the sacrament, do they always have mortal sins to confess and are they thinking that such must be true also of the laity? Anyway, it is understandable that some priests ignore the restrictions placed on the use of general absolution.

For my part, let me make a positive suggestion regarding Rite 2 celebrations. The pattern of Rite 2 has its limitations. Joint opening – fine. Individual confession – fine. But those who among the first to confess have a considerable wait before they can take part in the short concluding prayers of the rite. Some solve this problem by simply leaving without taking part in the final stage of the rite. That's not a desirable solution.

A modification of the ceremony works well. Those who have made their confession are directed to gather together in one place. Once 12 or 15 are there, a parish member leads them in a simple closing service. Then they are free to go. Such a session of closing prayers is repeated for successive groups of penitents.

Ideally this series of closing services is conducted in such a location as a side chapel. But a section of the main body of the church will do. The remainder of the congregation can see what is going on and will wait patiently for their own turn to confess and then be sent on their way.

Not in the rubrics' book? No. But a sensible adaptation of the Rite to the realities of the situation. ■

Humphrey O'Leary

Humphrey O'Leary is a canon lawyer and Rector of the Redemptorist community in Auckland

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A Mothers Journal . . .

My New Year resolutions are somehow diffuse and shapeless. Last year it was to Focus on the feminine aspects of God, the year before was to Listen Better, another year it was Recycle More... no telling even now if I was successful at any. They're not SMART (Specific, Milestoned, Achievable, Realistic and Time limited) goals to be sure. But I like the idea of a theme for the year.

This year's theme came to me this morning: "Be More Playful". My children are lined up as my tutors – they've been working on lightening me up for a few years now. They started this year's instruction on our New Year family tramp. Day Two we had covered half the pre-determined distance. Hmmm. Day Three I was wanting us to hurry up to achieve the day's goal... but smaller people decided to stop and sample every single stream

and trickle on route to the next hut and rate the flavour of each vintage. Sounds fine but it seemed to involve queues by the rocks, turn-taking sorting out, multiple gulps and protracted discussion at each of the numerous waterways. Twelve streams in an hour to be precise. Twelve! But who's counting? I did sample a few rivulets as I waited. A unique draught each time – one was mossy, another stony, others were greenish, watery, leafy, tangy...

Then there was the slow business of crossing swing bridges one at a time as per the Department of Conservation signs. One daughter decides to cross them all backwards, no hands. Slower to be sure but dallying with danger rather

than just crossing bridges is what nine-year-old girls do! I only managed a few steps before I turned forwards again. Surprisingly fun!

When we set off up the hill from the top hut, I hoped we'd get near the top. After ten minutes my determined pace degenerated into an amble to hunt for Mt Cook lily goblets. They were essential accoutrements for our alpine mid-

summer party – elves and fairy guests were invited. Three children made a party mixture of alpine daisy petals to throw as confetti, we had a scroggin treasure hunt and dressed in fern bikinis (on top of polypro) and danced in the tugging spikes of cold breeze and tussock... and even the baby joined in with the raucous singing. Imagine if I'd just stomped hotly up the hill in record time and missed out on this Fairy ball! That view



and hill objective will wait for another time.

I find it surprisingly difficult to be playful. My head is filled with Lists of jobs, Tasks to complete, places to go. Telling jokes and going the long way about things don't come naturally. But it could be good for me.

And there's always that inspiring example of the bloke who turned water to wine at the end of a party and walked on water for a laugh. He liked children. Said we need to come to God as a child...

Anyone for a water fight?

Kaaren Mathias

One way you can do something really worthwhile this Lent

Walking for a good cause has a long and illustrious history. Think of Dame Whina Cooper, or the Hikoi of Hope in 1998. And what better cause could there be today than the very future of the planet itself?

During the 40 days of Lent the *Walk for the Planet* will go from Stewart Island leaving on Ash Wednesday, to Wellington arriving there on Easter Sunday.

For more information, contact:

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