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by Steve Clark

Christ "tasted death" so that no one else would have to die eternally

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Christ's Humility and Victory

Christ "tasted death" so that no one
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The Temptations in the Desert
by [Michael O'Brien](#)



As Adam confronted Satan, so did Christ. At the very beginning of his public ministry, right after being anointed with the Spirit as the messianic King and proclaimed as God's Son, Christ encountered Satan himself. We read about that encounter in the fourth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written,

'Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

'He will give his angels charge of you,' and
'On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "And these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written,

'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

– Matthew 4:1-11

Christ's temptation and testing

To be tempted is to be tested by an inducement to do evil, to sin. For a righteous, godly person, then, a temptation is also an attack on what he values most, living in a way pleasing to God and so attaining the purpose for which he is

made. Christ began his public ministry by undergoing such an attack. The first Adam had to face Satan in combat and in so doing brought the human race down in a great defeat. The New Adam also had to face Satan. Upon the outcome of that encounter hung the promise of a new future for the human race.

“The testing” or “the trial” is recounted at the beginning of the Gospel for a reason. It was a prelude to the rest of Christ's earthly ministry, which in turn was the prelude to his heavenly ministry of redeeming the human race. He did not come for a peaceful ministry of teaching winning truths, speaking gracious words, blessing children, and being commended by all – however much these things formed part of what he did. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Christ came for a kind of war, and the initial campaign was to fight on earth to reach an assured position of heavenly power and authority. That war was first manifested in the event we call the temptation.

Battlefield of the heart

The encounter in Matthew 4 was a fight, but one that did not involve physical force. The temptation was an ethical or moral fight where the battlefield is the will or heart, the inner place where human beings make decisions. In this case, the battlefield was the heart of Christ.

The issue Christ faced was his role as the human Son of God. How would he conduct himself in the position he held? His identity had been manifested to the world by the heavenly voice at his baptism: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Like Adam, the New Adam had to maintain the position that was his by the grace and choice of God.

The issue of his position as the Son of God was clearly stated by the tempter: "if you are the Son of God." Christ was tempted to prove himself. He was first tempted to prove himself as the specially favored one of God by an act of power as great as Moses performed when he provided bread in the wilderness. He was then tempted to prove himself by an act of "faith" in God that would prove God's special protection.

At the end, he was presented all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them and tempted to receive them, not from God but from "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31): "All these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me."

The temptations were subtle in a certain way. Like the temptation faced by Adam and Eve, Satan tempted Christ with something God in fact wanted him to have. By God's intention Christ would do great acts of power, including making bread in the wilderness. He would receive striking protection from God. He would become the ruler of the whole world.

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Steve Clark is President of the [Sword of the Spirit](#). This article is excerpted from the book *Redeemer: Understanding the Meaning of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, copyright © 1992 by Stephen B. Clark, published by Servant Books. It can be purchased at Tabor House Books

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Christ's Humility and Victory continued, by Steve Clark

The path of obedience

But the nub of the temptation for Christ was the same as for Adam and Eve. Would he take the path of obedience? Would he follow the instructions of God, trusting God to bring him where he wanted him to be? Or would he reach out and exalt himself, making use of the power and position God gave him but not in God's way?

Christ won his initial combat with Satan. But it was only the first round. As the Gospel of Luke tells us, "When the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). The account we describe as the temptation of Christ only reveals in a more vivid way the struggle Christ was undergoing all during his public ministry.

Further temptations from Satan are described at those points where Christ decides to turn away from establishing a messianic kingdom of earthly glory and takes instead the path that would lead to the cross (Matthew 16:23, Luke 22:53, John 12:31-32; 14:30).

Victory through humility

The path Christ took could be summed up in his own words: "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11). To translate the saying into more literal English, "Everyone who raises himself will be lowered, and he who lowers himself will be raised."

This principle was applied to Christ's death and resurrection in the Philippians 2 passage that we considered at the beginning of the previous chapter. The New Adam, the Son of God, humbled himself in obedience to the point of death. This self-humbling, this self-lowering, resulted in an exaltation, a rising. Because "he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:8-11).

In Hebrew idiom the word "lowering" or "going down" can refer to defeat, just as "exaltation" or "going up" can refer to victory. Christ's death on the cross was a going down to go up. It was a defeat that resulted in victory, a falling in battle that resulted in rising in triumph. Christ's path followed his own paradoxical instruction: the way to go up is to go down. It had to, in order to overcome the fallenness of this world.

Christ defeated sin, Satan, and death

Here we are going to look at Christ's victory over the enemies of the human race, a victory that was accomplished through lowering himself or humbling himself. The chief enemy of the human race is sin. Christ defeated sin definitively in his own person by keeping the commandments to the end, at the cost of his own life. He did so through the humility of obedience and service. He defeated sin, in other words, by never sinning.

Yet as most if not all of us experience, there is more to sin than simply some action we do or do not do. There seems to be a power behind sin, a power that makes it difficult not to act disobediently and transgress God's commandments. Externally, as Scripture tells us, that power comes from Satan and "this world," this place of exile, this house we live in that makes it hard for us to serve God. Internally, that power is the weakness of the flesh that makes us prey to death. Together these determine much of what happens to the fallen human race and produce the pattern of sin we have already observed.

Christ defeated sin itself, but he also defeated those spiritual forces that hold human beings enslaved to sin. He defeated Satan and death in his own person and so put himself in the position to defeat Satan and death by freeing other human beings from sin. He won this victory by following the paradoxical principle of going down to go up. Christ humbled himself, let himself be put down in defeat, to win the victory over the main enemies of the human race. He let himself lose to Satan in order to win over him. He let himself be put to death in order to defeat death.

This is a chapter about the victory of Christ – on the cross itself. It concerns the way his humility led to spiritual victory because it led to the action of God on his behalf. To gain insight into the paradox of Christ's statement about going down to go up, we must insert "by God" into it. "Everyone who raises himself will be lowered by God, and everyone who lowers himself will be raised by God." To state it more generally, the key to spiritual victory over the fallenness of this world is the action of God, and the way to bring about that action is submission to God and his plan.

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Christ's Humility and Victory continued, by Steve Clark

Christ's war of liberation

It is for this war of liberation that Christ came. His sufferings and death issuing in resurrection were a battle, the turning point of the war for the soul of the human race. As Paul tells us in Colossians 2:15, the cross was the place where Christ "disarmed the principalities and powers." There he triumphed over them.

We do not often view the crucifixion as a victory. One current of popular devotion, in fact, makes the cross seem like a great misfortune which was simply reversed by the resurrection. Nonetheless, the New Testament contains many passages where the crucifixion is seen as a combat with Satan from which Christ emerges victorious. In fact, when the sufferings and death of Christ are seen in that light, we can more easily see them precisely as redemption. On the cross, Christ was delivering human beings from an oppressive enslaving force, one from which they could not free themselves.

During the last day of his life, we find Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, in a situation very similar to the temptation. The Gospel of Matthew describes it this way:

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go yonder and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.

– Matthew 26:36-46

The fact that Christ is in a garden is probably typologically significant. He is the New Adam encountering Satan in a garden just as the First Adam had in paradise. But Gethsemane is a garden of grief in the middle of the fallen world rather than a garden of delight in the world as it was created.

Agony in the garden

Christ is going through what is often described as "the agony in the garden." When we hear the word "agony" we primarily think of pain or suffering. That is an aspect of what Jesus went through, but the word in origin means a struggle or a contest like a wrestling match. The agony in the garden refers to Christ's combat.

Even though Satan is not explicitly mentioned, Jesus is in combat with him there. The three times Jesus returns to prayer are probably connected to the three times he had to undergo temptation by Satan in the desert. If that is so, "the agony" is something of a repeat of the temptation. The scene in the garden may be itself an encounter with Satan. Or it may be a preparation for the real struggle with Satan on the cross when Jesus was given over to the

power of darkness (Luke 22:53) – just as the temptation in the wilderness was a preparation for the struggle with Satan that was his public ministry. Perhaps it was both at the same time.

Satan's initiative in the garden

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Satan has the initiative. He wants to turn back the initial incursion by the Son of God, primarily by working through the Jewish and Roman leaders.

In the wilderness Satan tempted Christ to use the power he had for his own worldly success. He tempted Christ to set up a kingdom over this world, an empire that would embrace "all the kingdoms of the world." Satan no doubt made such an endeavor seem good. If Christ actually controlled all the world, could he not see to it that the human race would live in a better way? This was a test, however, as to whether Christ would turn aside from the path on which his Father had set him.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus faced a different type of temptation to turn aside. If events continued on their present course, he would go to his death the next day. He knew he would face crucifixion, the death reserved for insurrectionists, those claiming to be messiahs and seeking to establish a Jewish kingdom independent of the Romans.

Jesus knew what crucifixion was like. The Romans crucified people on the roads entering cities so that the sight would deter others from committing similar crimes. Crucifixion was a cruel, degrading death, deliberately made to be a torture. Moreover, such a death would involve the humiliation of being an apparently failed messiah. It would be a seeming defeat at the hands of the very ones he had challenged – the worldly authorities, and behind them the ruler of this world, Satan himself. It was no doubt such a death which was before Christ's eyes in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Yet he was still free. Instead of staying at the garden where Judas and the temple police would find him, Jesus could take the Gethsemane road away from, rather than toward, Jerusalem. He could then escape across the Jordan to safety. The temptation he faced in the garden was the temptation not to die, not to lay down his life, and therefore not to obey his Father.

When Christ prayed to his Father, he was troubled by fear and sorrowful at what lay ahead. Yet he also knew why he would have to undergo such a death. He had come to serve, to give his life as a ransom for the many. Christ had come, as he had just told his disciples, to pour out his blood for many so that they could be part of the new covenant and receive forgiveness for their sins. He "must" suffer and die. His Father had given him a command to do so in order that those who believe in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Freedom and testing

Christ was free not to die – only too free. That freedom was probably itself the source of the testing. When we have no choice, there is not as much of a struggle to endure suffering. We usually swallow what we have to take with some measure of resignation. When we could get out of a difficult situation but believe we should undergo it, then we face a test. Jesus faced such a test in Gethsemane.

The victory of Christ was expressed in the prayer, "Not my will, but yours be done." In praying such a prayer, Jesus rejected the course of action any human would have wanted to take, and instead accepted the full purpose of God. That prayer was probably a plea for help to go through what faced him. It was also a willing acceptance of God's will and a desire to see the human race served as a result of what he would do. In the Gospel of John, in a scene that corresponds to the agony in the garden, Jesus expressed the same willingness to do the will of God, "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father glorify your name" (John 12:27-28).

Losing to win

Christ then began what is sometimes called his *passion*. "Passion" in this sense means the suffering he knew he must undergo for the salvation of the human race from its sins. His passion was an ordeal, a true humiliation, but one that he went through with a great deal of self-mastery and personal dignity. Christ knew what he was about because he had made a decision in Gethsemane. He died well, in a way fitting for an unblemished lamb.

The Gospel of John records the last words of Christ on the cross: "It is finished" (John 19:30). By these words he did not simply mean that his sufferings were over and now he would die. He also meant that he had completed the task for which he came. His words registered victory rather than defeat. Christ had succeeded in putting aside "my will," his own human will that recoiled from such an ordeal, and had instead embraced "your will," his Father's will. He had been obedient to death. The Son of God had therefore succeeded in dying in such a way that his sufferings and death could be a payment for the redemption of the human race.

In the death of Christ, Satan was defeated. As the Letter to the Hebrews puts it, "We see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels... so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one... He... partook of the same nature [as those he was to save], that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (Hebrews 2:9,14,15).

Not only was Satan defeated but so were all those who share in his rule. Colossians says, "God made [you] alive... having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands, this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it [RSV: him]" (Colossians 2:13,15).

Both passages speak about Christ's death as a defeat of Satan. The first says he "destroyed" Satan, although that translation is misleading because it seems to imply that Satan went out of existence after Christ's death. The word rather probably indicates that Satan lost his ability to inflict death, spiritual, eternal death, on the "many sons" who belonged to Christ (Hebrews 2:10-13). Once Christ died, Satan did not lose all power over the human race, nor all power to inflict death. He did, however, lose his ability to hold in bondage those who belonged to Christ. That power was destroyed by what Christ did. Christ "tasted death" so that no one else would have to die eternally.

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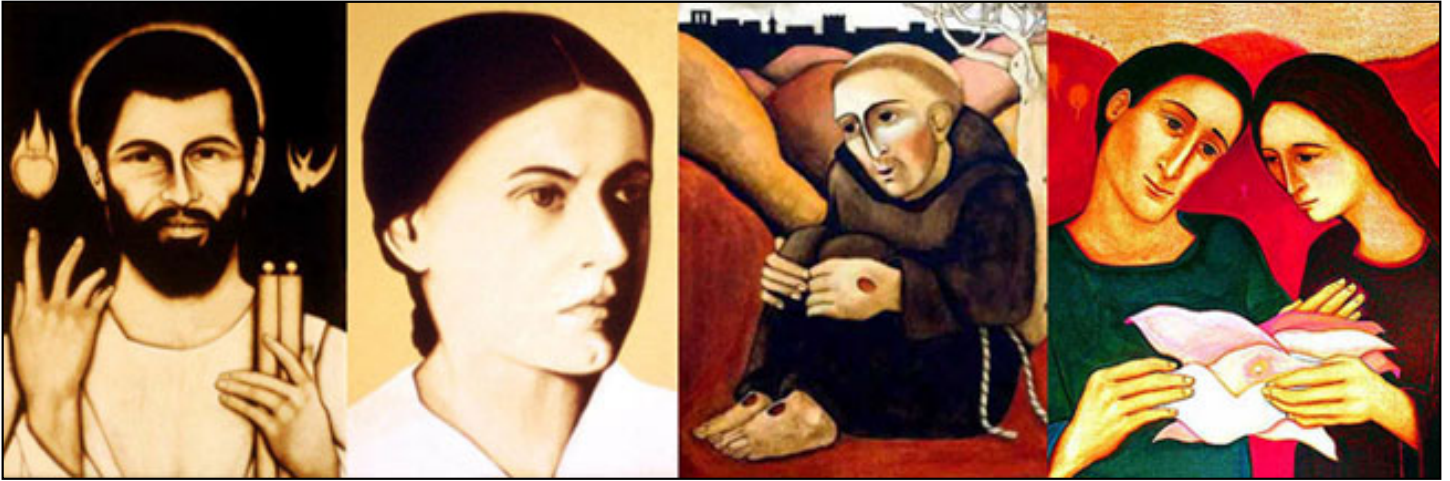
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illustrations by [Michael O'Brien](#)

Why the Church Needs Saints

by W.E. Sangster

William Edwin Sangster, a great Methodist preacher and writer, lived between 1900-1960. During World War II, he served as senior minister at Westminster Central Hall in London, the "cathedral" of Methodism. The basement became an air-raid shelter as soon as the German assault began. As space in the below-ground shelter was scarce, he and his family lived at great risk for five years on the hazardous ground floor. By war's end 450,000 people had found refuge in the church basement. In 1949 Sangster was elected president of the Methodist Conference of Great Britain.

Worthy of admiration

It cannot seriously be questioned that it is a matter of major importance that the admiration of people be directed towards those who are worthy of the admiration. We grow like the people we admire. If the longing for holiness is to be quickened in people they must see, not only its perfection in the Savior, but approximations to it in the saints. Indeed, there are ways in which it could be perilous to see it only in the Savior and never in the saints.

To quicken the quest for holiness in people – which is the end of all religious nurture – four steps are necessary.

First, to convince people that it is God's intention that man should be holy; that nothing less can satisfy his ambitions for his earthly children and that, keeping this fact in mind, a devout man may often murmur to himself, "He wills that I should holy be." Secondly, to nourish in the people faith in the possibility of holiness. The difficult question of ultimate and ineffable perfection can be left aside if only because it involves questions of completeness as well as of purity, and stretches the mind into the vast aeons of eternity. But if the promises of the New Testament are kept in mind, and there are no mental reservations about the power of the Holy Spirit, the life of constant victory over sin by the might of God can be held before the people as a possibility in this life. We can say of all the powers of hell,

They cannot keep a blessing back

By heaven designed for me.

The motive of perfect love

Thirdly, to hold perfection before the people in all its fulness in Jesus. In Him every virtue is balanced with its complementary virtue! The vices of good men are often shadows cast by their virtues. Because they are so morally strong, they lack tenderness. Because they are so generous, a proper prudence is wanting. But in Jesus the balance and harmony are all there. This is perfection – the uttermost that can appear in a sinful world.

They were actions of the perfect if we recognize that our Lord was acting all the time under the motive of perfect love. To startle and recall the recalcitrant in the case of the Pharisees: to defend the Gentiles from the desecration of their Court of the Temple, and to impose discipline on the shabby traders, in the case of that illicit commerce. Love in conflict with sin must hurt to save. His life reveals an utter perfection – i.e. a life moved always by a perfect motive even though it was moving in an imperfect world.

And it is just because he is himself in that world that the plain man finds Jesus' example completely beyond him, and the need for the witness of the saint appears. Gazing on perfection in Jesus, sinful man is both abashed and abased. He hears the hammer strokes through the prayer of his Savior as they nail the suffering Son of God to the wood: "Father! ...Forgive them!...They know not what they do!"...and he knows he is looking on the holy and feels profane. Indeed, he feels the oneness of the human race and that his own fist swings the hammer which transfixes the hand that moved only to bless.

A voice awakens in his soul. "I could never be like that. It is blasphemy to think it. This is God and I am a sinner. I was conceived in sin, and the seed was tainted before I was conceived. I was shaped in iniquity, born into a wicked world, and I have drawn in sin with every breath. The whole mental and moral atmosphere of humanity is heavy with decay. And to this foul earth I belong, and within this body of death I am imprisoned, and I am ashamed even to lift my gaze to the One who is of 'purer eyes than to behold iniquity.'"

By a strange contortion of the human mind the very perfection of Our Lord's example is used to excuse men from following it. His Person is extolled to explain the majesty of his pattern - and then pleaded to excuse human sin. God incarnate could live like that but not sinful man. Need sinful man try? Need sinful man admit the obligation?

Sinful man is glad not to admit the obligation and praises the perfection of his Lord the more heartily now that he has excused himself to himself – and accepted the excuse!

Holiness is derived

So we come to the fourth step and see disclosed the great ministry of the saints. Their holiness is all derived. It is begotten in them of God – begotten in that very human nature which man in self-despair had recognized as hopeless and corrupt.

Look at the saints! Listen to the first martyr and his magnificent echo of Calvary: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!" Pass in review the noble men and women of all ages who have "marked the footsteps that He trod" and come to sanctity.

God did this with tainted seed, shapen in iniquity, and begotten into a polluted world. Can anything be put beyond the power of the Holy Spirit? All the saints came of one diseased stock and some of them had brought forth fruit consonant with the stock from which they came. They had been open sinners, sensual, bestial and proud in it. They made a pagentry of their evil living. Like their precursors in the faith at Corinth, some of them had been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners...but now they were washed and sanctified!

God did it! Now let the heart of man “deceitful above all things” and “desperately sick” deny the challenge of the saint’s example. If God could do this with men and women – and such men and women – might He not do something with me? Even me?

If those who had given hostages to evil, and trebled the carnality of nature by unholy indulgence, could be arrested, converted, washed and sanctified, is anyone beyond the reach of Christ’s redeeming and purifying power?

Augustine said:

To Carthage I came where a cauldron of unholy loves bubbled up all around me. I loved not as yet, yet I loved to love; and, with a hidden want, I abhorred myself that I wanted not. I searched about for something to love, in love with loving, and hating security, and a way not beset with snares...For this reason my soul was far from well, and, full of ulcers, it miserably cast itself forth, craving to be excited by contact with objects of sense...To love and to be loved was sweet to me, and all the more when I succeeded in enjoying the person I loved. I befouled, therefore, the spring of friendship with the filth of concupiscence, and I dimmed its luster with the hell of lustfulness; and yet, foul and dishonorable as I was, I craved though and excess of vanity, to be thought elegant and urbane. I fell precipitately then...

And this was the man whom God made into a saint so mighty that he over-tops the ages, ranks as second figure in the great Evangelical Succession, and spreads the brightness of his sanctity through all the centuries since.

No branch of the church could exist without saints. Indeed, their presence is one proof that it is a true branch of the vine. Only God can make a saint. God, therefore, is in any branch of the church in which they grow. It would be a telling part of the answer of any Christians to those who would unchurch them, simply to say: “Look at our saints.” How the saint is defined, and whether or not precision in definition is possible, is a subject which must engage us later. Our present concern is only to stress the church’s need of saints. Not only is their presence in the church proof of God’s presence also, but a chief means in the education of those who come after.

The unmistakable homesickness of the soul

There is that in the soul of man which must respond to the highest in virtue. It may not respond at once. Human nature can easily be over-faced by examples too remote and austere. Moreover, human nature can easily deny God because the whole race has long been in rebellion against him. Yet there is that in human nature which calls out to the supreme examples of virtue: owns, as it were, the intention of God who made it, and feels the unmistakable homesickness of the soul.

And it is part of the service of the saints to awaken that homesickness of the soul in men and women. It does not exhaust their service to our poor race. Taken in its wholeness, their service is many-faceted. They often bring a revival of religion. It was of revival that Lacordaire was thinking when he said: “O God, give us some saints.” All France went to Ars in the second quarter of the nineteenth century to see the most lowly-born and ill-instructed priest in the country because he was a saint. The church is revived by the power of the Holy Spirit through the saints.

The saints are the most convincing answer to atheism and agnosticism. They do not usually answer them philosophically. In some mystic way they make it impossible for others to live near them and disbelieve. In the mixed character of Voltaire – nobility and cynicism strangely blended – there was much mockery of religion. But a contented atheist he could not be. Asked by a skeptical friend one day if he had ever met anyone like Jesus Christ, he lapsed into silence and then answered with awe-ful seriousness: “I once met Fletcher of Madeley.”

Nothing but an increase of saints will make the church powerful in the world. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life. As he comes to sanctify, so he comes in power. The world could not long ignore a holy church. The church is not despised because it is holy: it is despised because it is not holy enough. There is not enough difference

between the people inside the church and those outside to be impressive. A church in which saints were as common as now they are rare would convict the world, if only by contrast. Sanctity cannot be ignored. Even a little bit is potent. So far from the gates of hell prevailing against it, it hammers on their triple steel.

The saints are the chief hope of reunion. They link loving hands while mere ecclesiastics eye each other with suspicion and moil for a formula. Deep calleth unto deep. All the saints belong to one communion. That truth is obscured now by church divisions but only in the Church Militant. When the saints meet at the throne in the Church Triumphant they meet with the ardor of love.

The Lord reflected in his servants

Holding up the saints before the people helps them in a dozen different ways. They see the Lord reflected in his servants. They see what God can do with human nature. The saints are not obstructions to Jesus but interpretations of him. Quoting Newman's assertion, "and if Antichrist is like Christ, Christ, I suppose, is like Antichrist," G.K. Chesterton says of St Francis of Assisi, "If St Francis was like Christ, Christ was to that extent like St Francis." The overwhelming majesty of our Lord's example is mediated through his servants and the impulse to deny the obligation to live by that pattern on the grounds of his Deity is thwarted.

"This you can be!" Unaware of it themselves, that is what the saints are saying all the time.

It would never occur to them to say it aloud. It is doubtful if they ever think it. One of the most gracious dispensations of God concerning his saints is their lovely unawareness of sanctity. The nearer they move to him, the more conscious are they of sin. If it were impossible at times not to note their own growth in grace, it were impossible also to forget that it was all by his power. If they could be persuaded to admit their progress and talk of it at all, the language of their heart would be this: "If God could do this in me, he could do it in anyone."

More than that it would be unreasonable to ask of them.

[Excerpted from *The Pure in Heart, A Study on Christian Sanctity*, by W.E. Sangster (1900-1960), The Epworth Press, London, Great Britain, 1954.]

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On Saints and Saintliness

by John Henry Newman

John Henry Newman, 1801-1890, was an influential writer and major figure from the Church of England in the Oxford Movement. In 1845 he became a Catholic priest and was made a Cardinal late in life in 1879.

An ordinary man thinks it enough to do as he is done by; he will think it fair to resent insults, to repay injuries, to show a becoming pride, to insist on his rights, to be jealous of his honor, when in the wrong refuse to confess it, to seek to be rich, to desire to be well with the world, to fear what his neighbors will say. He seldom thinks of the Day of Judgment, seldom thinks of sins past, says few prayers, cares little for the church, has no zeal for God's truth, spends his money on himself.

Such is an ordinary Christian, and such is not one of God's elect. For the latter is more than just, temperate and kind; he has a devoted love of God, high faith, holy hope, over-flowing charity, a noble self-command, a strict conscientiousness, humility never absent, gentleness in speech, simplicity, modesty, and unaffectedness, an unconsciousness of what his endowments are, and what they make of him in God's sight. This is what Christianity has done in the world; such is the result of Christian teaching; viz., to elicit, foster, mature the seeds of heaven which lie hid in the earth, to multiply (if it may be said) images of Christ, which, though they be few, are worth all else that is among men, and are an ample recompense and "a crown of rejoicing" for apostles and evangelists "in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming".

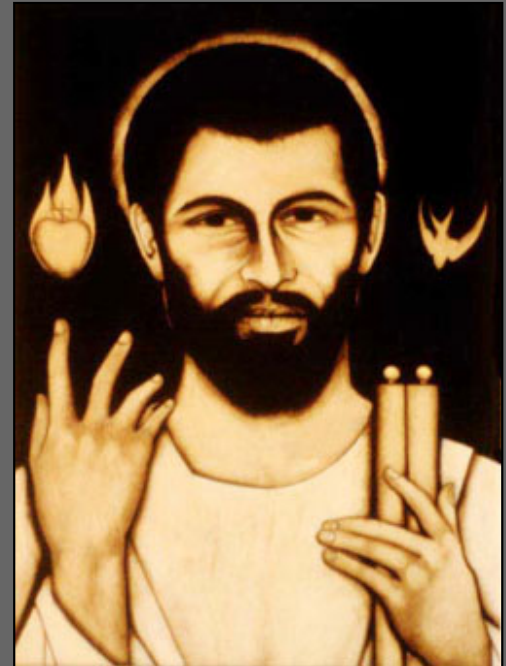
Their excellence is supernatural

All the saints, from the beginning of history to the end, resemble each other in this, that their excellence is supernatural, their deeds heroic, their merits extraordinary and prevailing. They all are choice patterns of the theological virtues; they all are blessed with a rare and special union with their Maker and Lord... But, with all these various tokens of their belonging to one and the same celestial family, they may still be divided, in their external aspect, into two classes.

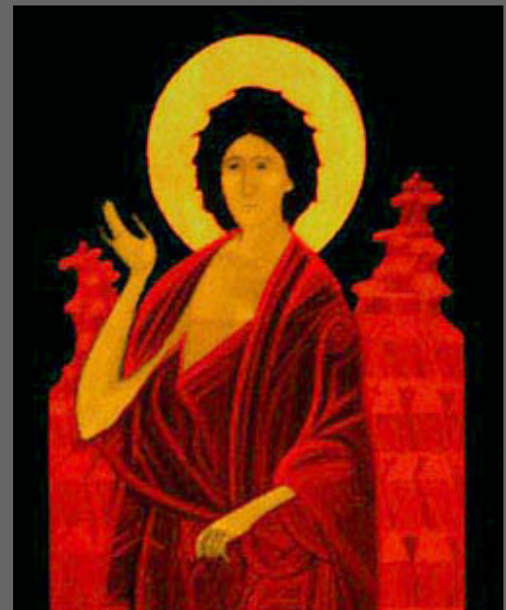
There are those, on the one hand, who are so absorbed in the divine life, that they seem, even while they are in the flesh, to have no part in earth or in human nature; but to think, speak, and act under views, affections, and motives simply supernatural.



Perpetua and Felicitas, martyred in 203 AD



Augustine of Hippo, bishop, writer, died 430



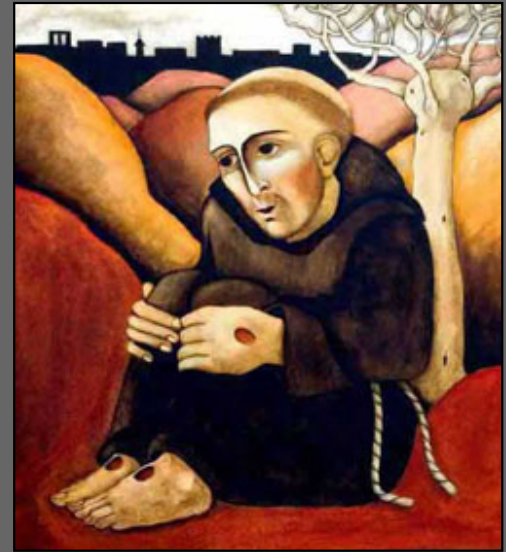
Mary of Egypt, desert ascetic, died in 421

If they love others, it is simply because they love God, and because man is the object either of his compassion, or of his praise. If they rejoice, it is in what is unseen; if they feel interest, it is in what is unearthly; if they speak, it is almost with the voice of angels; if they eat or drink, it is almost of angel's food alone...

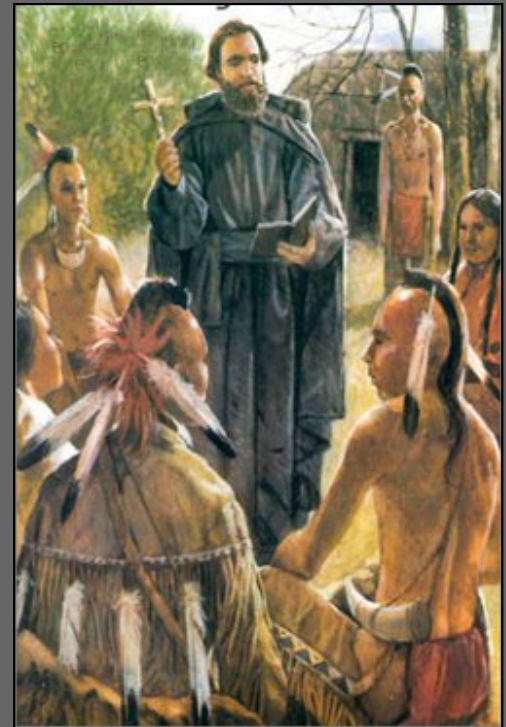
On the other hand, there are those, and of the highest order of sanctity too, as far as our eyes can see, in whom the supernatural combines with nature, instead of superseding it, – invigorating it, elevating it, ennobling it; and who are not the less men, because they are saints. They do not put away their natural endowments, but use them to the glory of the Giver; they do not act beside them, but through them; they do to eclipse them by the brightness of divine grace, but only transfigure them. They are versed in human knowledge; they are busy in human society; they understand the human heart; they can throw themselves into the minds of other men; and all this in consequence of natural gifts and secular education. While they themselves stand secure in the blessedness of purity and peace, they can follow in imagination the ten thousand aberrations of pride, passion, and remorse. The world is to them a book, to which they are drawn for its own sake, which they read fluently, which interests them naturally, – though, by the reason of the grace which dwells within them, they study it and hold converse with it for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Thus they have the thoughts, feelings, frames of mind, attractions, sympathies, antipathies of other men, so far as these are not sinful, only they have these properties of human nature purified, sanctified, and exalted; and they are only made more eloquent, more poetical, more profound, more intellectual, by reason of their being more holy.

A child of wrath regenerated by God's grace

A saint is born like another man; by nature a child of wrath, and needing God's grace to regenerate him. He is baptized like another, he lies helpless and senseless like another, and like another child he comes to years of reason. But soon his parents and their neighbors begin to say, "This is a strange child, he is unlike any other child;" his brothers and playmates feel an awe of him, they do not know why; they both like him and dislike him, perhaps love him much in spite of his strangeness, perhaps respect him more than they love him. But if there were any holy priest there, or others who had long served God in prayer and obedience, these would say, "This truly is a wonderful child; this child bids fair to be a saint." And so he grows up, whether at first he is duly prized by his parents or not; for so it is with all greatness, that, because it is great, it cannot be comprehended by ordinary minds at once; but time, and distance, and contemplation are necessary for its being recognized by beholders, and, therefore, this special heir of glory of whom I am speaking, for a time at least excites no very definite observation, unless indeed (as sometimes happens) any thing of miracle occurs from time to time to mark him out. He has come to the age of reason, and, wonderful to say, he has never fallen away into sin.



Francis of Assisi, preacher, founder of the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans), died in 1226



Isaac Jogues, Jesuit missionary to Huron Indians in North America, martyred in 1646

Other children begin to use the gift of reason by abusing it; they understand what is right, only to go counter to it; it is otherwise with him, – not that he may not sin in many things, when we place him in the awful ray of divine Sanctity, but that he does not sin willfully and grievously, – he is preserved from mortal sin, he is never separated from God by sin, nay, perhaps, he is betrayed only at intervals, or never at all, into any deliberate sin, be it ever so slight, and he is ever avoiding the occasions of sin and resisting temptation. He ever lives in the presence of God, and is thereby preserved from evil, for "the wicked one toucheth him not."

Nor, again, as if in other and ordinary matters he necessarily differed from other boys; he may be ignorant, thoughtless, improvident of the future, rash, impetuous; he is a child, and has the infirmities, failings, fears, and hopes of a child. He may be moved to anger, he may say a harsh word, he may offend his parents, he may be volatile and capricious, he may have no fixed view of things, such as a man has. This is not much to allow; such things are accidents, and are compatible with the presence of a determinate influence of grace, uniting his heart to God.

Reading the lives and writings of saints

I confess to a delight in reading the lives, and dwelling on the characters and actions, of the saints of the first ages, such as I receive from none besides them; and for this reason, because we know so much more about them than about most of the saints who come after them. People are variously constituted; what influences one does not influence another. There are persons of warm imaginations, who can easily picture to themselves what they never saw. They can at will see angels and saints hovering over them when they are in church; they see their lineaments, their features, their motions, their gestures, their smile or their grief. They can go home and draw what they have seen, from the vivid memory of what, while it lasted, was so transporting. I am not one of such; I am touched by my five senses, by what my eyes behold and my ears hear. I am touched by what I read about, not by what I myself create.

As faith need not lead to practice, so in me mere imagination does not lead to devotion. I gain more from the life of our Lord in the Gospels than from a treatise de Deo. I gain more from three verses of St. John than from the three points of a meditation.

...I want to hear a saint converse; I am not content to look at him as a statue; his words are the index of his hidden life, as far as that life can be known to man, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." This is why I exult in the folios of the Fathers. I am not obliged to read the whole of them, I read what I can and am content...



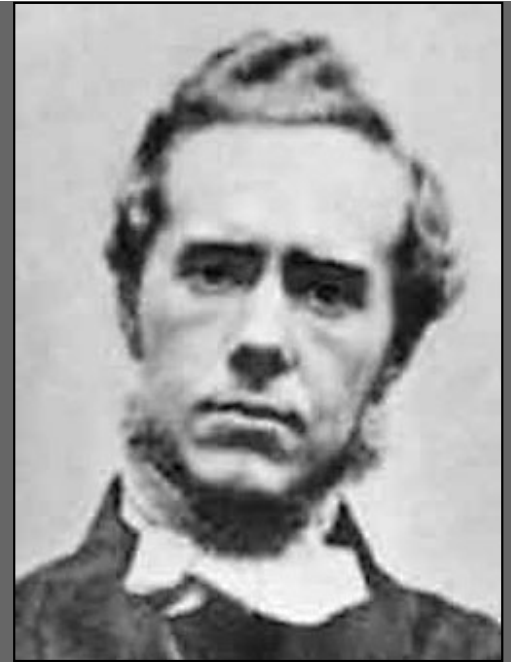
Kateri Tekakwitha, daughter of Mohawk warrior and devout Christian, died in 1679, age 24



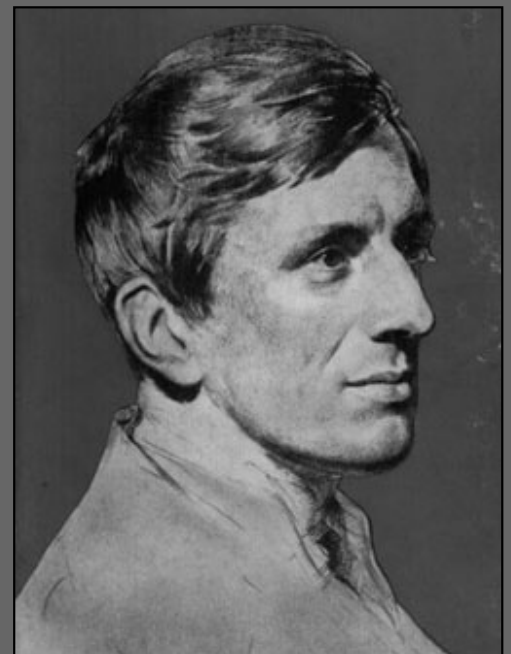
Susanna Wesley, mother of 19 children, including John Wesley & mother of Methodism

A saint's writings are to me his real "Life"; and what is called his "Life" is not the outline of an individual, but either of the auto-saint or of a myth. Perhaps I shall be asked what I mean by "Life." I mean a narrative which impresses the reader with the idea of moral unity, identity, growth, continuity, personality. When a saint converses with me, I am conscious of the presence of one active principle of thought, one individual character, flowing on and into the various matters which he discusses, and the different transactions in which he mixes. It is what no memorials can reach, however skillfully elaborated, however free from effort or study, however conscientiously faithful, however guaranteed by the veracity of the writers.

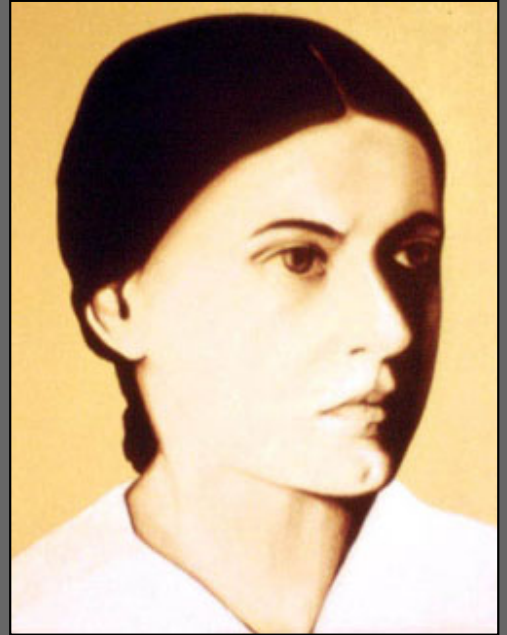
[Excerpted from *A Newman Treasury*, selected and edited by Charles Frederick Harrold, (c) 1943 by Longman, Green and Co., Inc., Arlington House Publisher, New Rochesse, New York.]



Hudson Taylor, Methodist missionary to China for 51 years, died in China in 1905



John Henry Newman, influential writer and major figure in Oxford Movement, died 1890



Edith Stein, German Jewish philosopher,
Carmelite nun, Auschwitz martyr in 1942



Jim Elliot, Baptist missionary to Auca tribe in Ecuador,
martyred in 1956, age 28

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Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai, Egypt

The Ladder of Divine Ascent

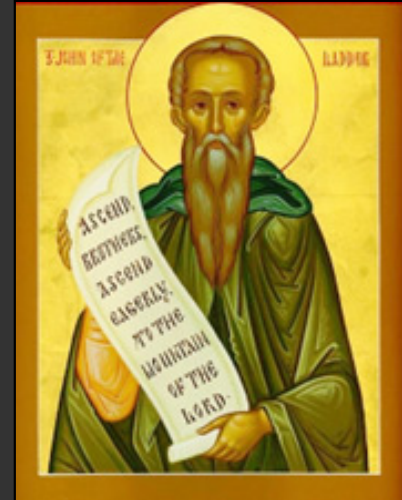
wisdom from John Climacus

The following short excerpts are from *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by John Climacus, abbot of St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, Egypt during the 7th century. John Climacus is revered in many Eastern churches as a great teacher of spiritual wisdom. Orthodox monasteries throughout the centuries have read his Ladder of Divine Ascent during Lent.

Light, fire and flame

Love in its nature makes a human being like God, as far as is possible for a human being. The soul is intoxicated by the effects of it. Its characteristics are a fountain of faith, an abyss of patience, an ocean of humility.

Love is the complete repudiation of any unkind thought about one's neighbor, since, "Love thinks no evil" (1 Corinthians 13:5).



Life of John Climacus

John Climacus, also known as John of Sinai or John of the Ladder, was born around 579, possibly in Syria. He read widely in his early years. At the age of 16 John decided to join the monastic community at the foot of Mount Sinai in Egypt at the spot believed to be where Moses spoke to God face to face.

At the age of 35 John lived as a hermit at a place called Tholas which was about five miles from the main monastery. Many people sought him out as a teacher and spiritual guide. John received so many guests that some monks complained that he had become a chatterbox. John remained silent for a year until his accusers asked that he go back to receiving guests as had been his practice.

It was also customary at the time for small clusters of monks to gather together in a close-knit semi-eremital way of life. John accepted a disciple, named Moses, to live with him. He also traveled to visit sick hermits and monasteries near Alexandria and solitaries in the Egyptian desert. He was recognized for his great love for God and for people, and he was also known for his miracles, and his healing of the

Love, unchangeable tranquility, and our adoption as children of God are different from each other only in name. As light, fire and flame are present in the selfsame operation, so are these three manifestations of the Spirit.

When someone is completely permeated with the love of God, the brightness of his soul is reflected by his whole personality as if in a mirror.

Therefore the one who loves God also loves his brother or sister. Indeed, the second love is the proof of the first.

Poison in your heart: the memory of insults

The memory of insults is the residue of anger. It keeps sins alive, hates justice, ruins virtue, poisons the heart, rots the mind, defeats concentration, paralyzes prayer, puts love at a distance, and is a nail driven into the soul.

If anyone has appeased his anger, he has already suppressed the memory of insults, while as long as the mother is alive the son persists. In order to appease the anger, love is necessary.

Remembrance of Jesus' passion will heal your soul of resentment, by making it ashamed of itself when it remembers the patience of the Lord.

Some people have wearied themselves and suffered for a long time in order to extract forgiveness. By far the best course, however, is to forget the offences, since the Lord says: "Forgive at once and you will be forgiven in generous measure" cf. Luke 6:37-38.

Forgetting offences is a sign of sincere repentance. If you keep the memory of them, you may believe you have repented but you are like someone running in his sleep.

Let no one consider it a minor defect, this darkness that often clouds the eyes even of spiritual people.

Repentance, baptismal renewal, daughter of hope

Nothing equals or excels God's mercies. Therefore, he who despairs is committing suicide. A sign of true repentance is the acknowledgment that we deserve all the afflictions, visible and invisible, that come upon us, and ever greater ones.

Repentance is the renewal of baptism. Repentance is a contract with God for a second life. A penitent is a buyer of humility.

Repentance is the daughter of hope and the renunciation of despair.

Repentance is reconciliation with the Lord by the practice of good

sick.

During this period, political unrest and persecution broke out in the region. Forty-four monks were martyred at the monastery of Sabas during the Persian invasion of Jerusalem in 614. Some monks had fled, forced to wander from place to place as the Persians advanced. Syria fell to Islam in 636, Palestine fell in 638, and Egypt fell by 642. Many monks in these regions fled to the west as the Arab empire took form.



Ladder of Divine Ascent, icon from St. Catherine Monastery, Sinai

The monastery at Sinai survived these invasions. Around 649, after John had spent some 40 years of solitude in the desert, John was persuaded by the monastic community at Sinai to serve as their abbot. John's widespread fame and admiration as a holy man of God was evident when six hundred pilgrims arrived at the monastery on the occasion of his installation as abbot.

The abbot of a nearby monastery at Raithou asked John to write a book of spiritual wisdom for the monks in the desert communities. John called the book *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, from which his name "John of the Ladder" or "John Climacus" (*climacus* is the Greek word for *ladder*) is derived.

deeds contrary to the sins. Repentance is purification of conscience. Repentance is the voluntary endurance of all afflictions.

Hypocrisy and lies, mother and daughter

Fire is produced from stone and steel; lying comes from loquacity and gossip. And the lie destroys love.

No one who has any sense would say that telling lies is not an important sin. The Holy Spirit has severely condemned it. "You destroy those that speak lies," says David to God (Psalm 5: 7).

The mother of lying is hypocrisy, mother and also, often, its substance as well. Hypocrisy in fact works out the lie beforehand and then puts it into practice.

Those who possess the fear of God are the furthest from telling lies, because they have an honest judge, their own conscience.

As with all the passions, we ought to recognize various types of lying according to the damage done. One person tells lies from fear of punishment; another when no danger is threatening; another because of conceit; another for enjoyment; another to raise a laugh; and yet another to do harm to his neighbor.

A child does not know what a lie is, so his soul is free of malice. Someone who is elated with wine speaks the truth on all subjects, even without meaning to. In the same way, anyone who is inebriated with the spirit of penitence will never be able to tell lies.

Do not give up, but stand courageously

Let us charge into the good fight with joy and love without being afraid of our enemies. Though unseen themselves, they can look at the face of our soul, and if they see it altered by fear, they take up arms against us all the more fiercely. For the cunning creatures have observed that we are scared. So let us take up arms against them courageously. No one will fight with a resolute fighter.

Do not be surprised that you fall every day; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously. And assuredly, the angel who guards you will honor your patience.

He who really keeps account of his actions considers as lost every day in which he does not mourn, whatever good he may have done in it.

I consider those fallen mourners more blessed than those who have not fallen and are not mourning over themselves; because as a result of their fall, they have risen by a sure resurrection.

John knew that he was living at the end of an age, in a time of great turmoil and uncertainty. He wrote not only for the monks in the desert but also for Christians elsewhere, to strengthen them in the faith as well.

John wrote *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* primarily as an invitation to the journey toward holiness and union with God in the monastic life. It records what John had learned from his forty-year journey in the wilderness, both as a solitary hermit and as a brother in monastic community. John wrote as a pastor to help his fellow monks grow in faith through "a personal encounter with Christ at each step of the ladder."

John died between 654 and 679. Soon afterward, *The Ladder* was translated from the Greek into Syriac. By the tenth century, it had also been translated into Arabic and Georgian. It appeared in Latin by the eleventh century.

John is a very important saint within the Orthodox Church. No other book, except the Bible and liturgical books, has been as carefully studied within the Orthodox tradition. It is read aloud in Orthodox monasteries during Lent.

[For further reading see the book, *John Climacus, From the Egyptian Desert to the Sinaite Mountain*, by John Chryssavgis. Click [here](#) for a PDF version of the book.]

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Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, by El Greco 1541-1614

The Agony in the Garden: Love's Surrender

by Jeanne Kun

After the Last Supper, Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the Mount of Olives to pray, knowing that in a few hours his mission and God's plan of salvation would be fulfilled by his passion and death. Previously Peter, James, and John had been privileged to witness Jesus' glory at his transfiguration (see Matthew 17:1-18; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36), perhaps to strengthen their faith so that they would be prepared to now witness his harrowing anguish in Gethsemane. But like Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, who provided little comfort for Job because they couldn't grasp the "why" of his suffering, Peter and the sons of Zebedee gave Jesus no consolation during his hours of agony. Rather, they fell asleep as they had done before on the mount of the transfiguration, this time overcome and fatigued by their grief (see Luke 9:32; 22:45).

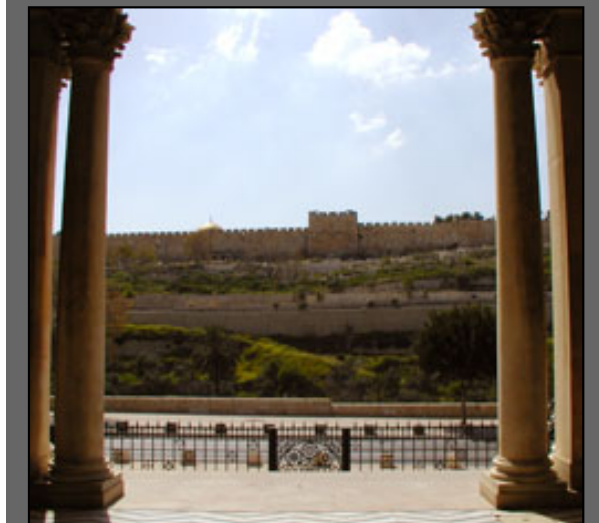
Jesus had urged his companions to stay awake and pray not to come into the time of trial (see Mark 14:38a), yet they failed to be vigilant—and thus they later lacked strength when tested

The Scene

Mark 14:32-42

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. 34 And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." 35 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36 He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." 37 He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? 38 Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 39 And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40 And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. 41 He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

(See also Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46)



and fled. Scripture scholar George Montague notes that when Jesus addressed the drowsy Peter, he used the apostle's name [Simon], evoking his human weakness." Jesus was saddened by his friends' failure but not surprised. Sharing in our humanness, he understood the weakness of the flesh even when the spirit is willing (see 14:38b).

Jesus' experience in Gethsemane was a critical point in his determination to hold fast to his call. In ancient times, the Greek word *agonia* was a technical term used to describe the sweat athletes produced as they did "warm-up" exercises to loosen up and ready their muscles for competing in the Olympic games. Seen in this light, Jesus' agony in the garden was a warm-up for his coming passion and crucifixion.

A costly battle

When, at the outset of this public ministry, Jesus had resisted Satan's attempts to deter him from his mission, the devil had "departed from him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). Now Jesus entered into a battle that would ultimately deliver all humankind from the power of Satan. It would be a costly battle. Jesus would have to bear not only physical tortures and suffering but also "our sins in his body on the cross" (1 Peter 2:24). He would experience in his humanity a sense of abandonment by the Father (see Matthew 72:46). So great was this battle that, Luke the physician tells us, bloody sweat fell from him as he prayed. Yet, he had not been abandoned by his Father. Just as Jesus had been ministered to by angels after his encounter with Satan in the wilderness, an angel came to strengthen him (see Luke 22:43-44; Matthew 4:11; Mark 1:13).

Jesus wrestled with the human dread of his impending torments, yet he submitted to the Father's will without any word of mistrust or rebellion: "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (Mark 14:36). As Benedictine Sister Maria Boulding notes,

Gethsemane was the death-struggle between all that was less than his vocation, yet still had power to attract him, and the purer, freer will in him that could be content with nothing less than abandonment to the utter mysteriousness of the Father's love. He died in this abandonment, believing in the love of the Father who delivered him to death and seemed to be silent. His act of surrender as he said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" was the breakthrough, the leap beyond all limitations; such obedient love could be vindicated only on the other side of death. St. Paul says that Christ was obedient unto death,

View from Gethsemane - looking towards the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, photo by Dick LaCroix

In the Spotlight The Garden of Gethsemane

The garden of Gethsemane lies east of Jerusalem, beyond the Kidron Valley and at the foot of the Mount of Olives. The name "Gethsemane" is derived from the Hebrew, *Gat-shemanin*, meaning "oil press." Most likely, a press for extracting oil from olives was located in what may have been the garden of a private estate. Jesus and his apostles occasionally used the site as a place of retreat (see John 18:2). Nearby is a small cave, traditionally called the Grotto of Betrayal, where the disciples could have been resting when Judas led the band of Roman soldiers to Gethsemane to arrest Jesus.

Scripture scholars speculate that Gethsemane may have been owned by the family of Mark. The young man wearing a linen cloth who fled at Jesus' arrest was possibly the evangelist's subtle reference to himself (see Mark 14:51-52), and his nighttime presence in the garden would be logically accounted for if the property belonged to his family.



7th century Olive trees at Gethsemane

On the traditional site, visited by millions of pilgrims over the centuries, are olive trees that are estimated to date from the seventh century. The Jewish historian Josephus Flavius noted the destruction of the olive trees on the Mount of Olives by the Roman army of Titus during the siege of Jerusalem in AD 68-70. Today the grove of olive trees is enclosed by a stone wall and cared for by the Franciscans.

but this inevitably meant obedient unto life: the unlimited life, love, freedom and joy of his resurrection. (*Prayer: Our Journey Home*)

Jesus won through those fearsome hours in Gethsemane, clinging to his knowledge of the Father's love for him and for all humankind. Readied by his firm acceptance of God's will, he went forward with peaceful dignity to receive Judas' traitorous kiss and meet his captors (see Mark 14:42-46).

Grow!

1. When have you been tempted, like Peter, James, and John, to "fall asleep," turning a blind eye to someone who is in distress or struggling to follow God's will? What attitudes (such as complacency, reluctance to get involved, feelings of inadequacy) might have held you back? What would help you to be more open to offering support in the future?
2. Recall a time when it required great effort for you to accept God's will. Why was acceptance difficult for you? Fear of what God was asking of you? Reluctance to give up your own desires or plans? What was your prayer like then? What did you learn about yourself through this experience?
3. Do you address God as "Abba, Father" (Mark 14:36) as freely—and as honestly—as Jesus did? What have you learned from the way Jesus prayed in Gethsemane?
4. To what specific area of your life do Jesus' words "the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38) apply right now? What impact does knowing that Jesus understands your weakness have on you? Recast Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane in your own words to help you surrender this area to God.
5. What are some dangers to your spiritual wellbeing and relationship with the Lord that you should be vigilant against? How might Jesus' admonition "Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial" (Mark 14:38)" help you?

Jeanne Kun is a noted author and a senior womens' leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

Excerpt from [Jesus' Journey to the Cross: A Love unto Death](#) (The Word Among Us Press, 2008). Copyright © 2008 Jeanne Kun. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

This book can be [ordered online](#) at www.wau.org.



Church of the Nations, photo by Dick LaCroix

Next to the garden is the Church of the Nations, built in the early twentieth century over the ruins of Byzantine and crusader churches. Within it is preserved the traditional "Rock of Agony," recalling Jesus' anguished prayer.

The garden of Gethsemane where Jesus, the "New Adam," prevailed over temptation and embraced God's will, stands in contrast to the garden of Eden where Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan and disobeyed God.

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Be Not Afraid – Eat Together!

Want to avoid high risk behavior among teens?

Here's some practical advice for parents

by Gordy Demarais



It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the – modern world, especially for parents raising children today. Hardly a week goes by without the news warning of yet another threat to a child's wellbeing. Everything is dangerous: the crib, bicycles, the paint on toys, the park. Even worse is parental paranoia for their teens! Modern parents have more to fear than their own parents did: internet porn, AIDs, date rape, rampant campus drinking, drug usage. What's a mother (or dad) to do!!!

Eat Dinner!

Yup! Eat dinner together as a family. Studies by Tufts University, Boston College and the University of Minnesota show there is a very high correlation between family dinner and the avoidance of high-risk behavior among teens. If you want your sons to avoid alcohol or drug abuse – eat dinner together. If you want your daughters to avoid immoral sexual behavior – eat dinner together. If you want your children to do well in school – eat dinner together. This is more important than any warning you can give.

As a parent of teens (three currently, some done, more to come), I find this is easier said than done. It's one thing to have a consistent family dinner when children are young and mom and dad can pretty much dictate the family schedule, it's quite another to fight for it when sports, and music lessons, and jobs and friends, and... begin to fill the imaginations and the schedules of our teenage children. I chose the word "fight" intentionally. Keeping to regular family dinner won't come naturally in a house full of teens.

Make dinner a priority

Mom and dad must decide that family dinner is a priority, and we are going to make it happen. Now, it may be that we need to learn to be a bit creative and flexible in how we get the family dinner to happen. We could simply tell our teen children that family dinner is at this time every night, and we require you to be there, and we won't allow anything to interfere. I suspect for most families, that is a losing proposition. A necessary strategy in relating to our teens is P.Y.B. (Pick Your Battles). The battle for family dinner is one in my view we ought to pick, but if we pick it

in such a way that we are also picking the no job, no sports, etc., battle, this is in my experience an ineffective overall strategy. So, while maintaining the priority of the family dinner, we can be flexible with the time. In our family we sometimes have three different start times for dinner in one week! It takes a bit of communication but it's worth it.

Getting to the dinner table together (whether it be at 5:15 or 8:00) is half the battle. Now let's talk about the other half. What do we do when we get there?

Here Are a Few Ideas

Say grace well. Better yet, connect family prayer with the meal. Sing a song, pray a psalm, do some petitions, say the Lord's Prayer, then bring out the food and give thanks to the Lord.

A dinner that's worth doing together requires a bit of order. Perhaps it goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway (because teens often have a remarkable ability to forget the 12 previous years of training), we should expect some basic manners at the dinner table. You know, things like sitting down at the same time, saying please and thank you, waiting to eat until everyone is served, keeping to one conversation at a time, passing food rather than tossing it, refraining from eating before grace, not leaving the table during the meal without permission, ending together.

These basic manners go a long way in creating at least an *opportunity* for some healthy family interaction around the dinner table. Expect a certain amount of order. But avoid the temptation to approach the dinner as mainly a time to enforce order and manners. Here again we need some patience and flexibility. If our teens experience us as mainly correcting (I think they might use the term "nagging") them about behavior at the dinner table, they likely will develop a negative attitude towards the family meal.

Conversation

Take the opportunity to allow everyone to share something about their day. We often do this in a fairly deliberate way. I recommend that dad take the lead here. Dad should come to the dinner table understanding that leading the family dinner time is a primary way that he engages his children and leads his family. Invite our children to share but don't "get on their case" when they don't offer much. Some nights they won't, and my experience is that if we press our teens, they become entrenched and stubborn. If we simply respect them and move on, our chances of their participation the next night increases. Conversation can also take the form of discussion of current events. Mom and dad can also use the family dinner to give some simple instruction on faith or virtue or Christian living.

Not every meal needs to be a profound personal encounter with other family members or a deep profound conversation. Sometimes we just laugh. More often just spending the time basically well goes a long way.

Eat dinner together. It's one of the most effective elements in raising great children and a better alternative than being afraid or watching TV.

Hints from God?

Eating dinner together may not be one of the ten commandments, but God gives us some clear hints about the role of dinner: the Last Supper was a dinner. Heaven is a banquet, a dinner. Get the hint? Family dinner is important.

[Gordy DeMarais is the Executive Director for [St. Paul's Outreach](#) (SPO) and a coordinator of the [Community of Christ the Redeemer](#) in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA. Gordy and his wife Teresa have six children.]

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Joan McGreal Has Hung Up Her Boots!

A Tribute to a Missionary of the Poor

by Martin Steinbereithner



It must have been in 2002 when I first bumped into Joan McGreal at an Antioch community prayer meeting in London, UK. She was 63 then. After running a medium-security correctional facility for young people she had had a deeper conversion, which prompted her to sell all her possessions (with the exception of her flat, thanks to advice from Trevor Perry, senior coordinator of Antioch Community). She was then ready for radical things: her parish priest had asked her to go out to Mozambique, and she was just completing preparations to go. I knew nothing of all this; I was simply desperate to add a woman to a mission team to serve in Lisbon in a few weeks' time. Somehow it occurred to me to ask her, and she agreed at the drop of a hat.

On day two or three of our time in Lisbon, she and I had a chance to sit and share in the home of Joao Perloiro, one of the coordinators of A Boa Nova Community in Lisbon. The more I heard of her testimony the more I realized that I was in the presence of an exceptional woman. She quickly won the hearts of the Portuguese brothers and sisters in A Boa Nova, who invited her back to spend some time in their community to study the language before setting out for Maputo in Mozambique.



Mission Team Weekend - Joan is in the front center

Eventually Joan got to Mozambique and served for several months in circumstances which would have been daunting for people half her age. After coming back to London, she became an encourager of radical ventures, be it in the Philippines, Detroit or London. She joined us on a Sword of the Spirit Mission Team Weekend (see photograph) and was immediately adopted as our mom: somehow she combined a radical edge with a warm, kind heart.

For the last few years she worked with the poor in many different places, including London's Wormwood Scrubbs prison. Community was not always an easy place for her, especially when it seemed to lack commitment to the poor. But she remained close friends with many of us in the Sword of the Spirit communities, always sporting her yellow Timberland boots..

After complications following pneumonia Joan passed to her reward on Sunday 25th January. That is the feast of the conversion of St. Paul in some of our liturgical calendars: a fitting "coincidence" for a woman who got knocked off her horse some ten years ago and who since then continued to walk in the footsteps of Christ as closely as she knew how.

May her example inspire many of us to radical discipleship and a love for the poor!

[Dr. Martin A. Steinbereithner is a member of the [Servants of the Word](#), an international ecumenical brotherhood of men living single for the Lord, and the Director for Mission Development for the [Sword of the Spirit](#) in Europe, Middle East & Africa. He currently lives in Belfast, Northern Ireland..]

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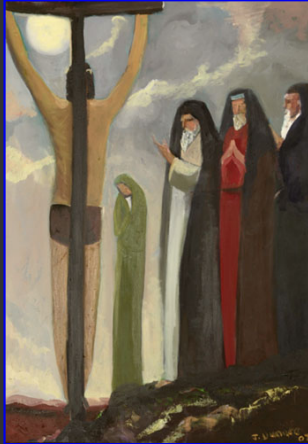
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The Seven Last Words of Jesus

oil paintings and reflections by John Dunne

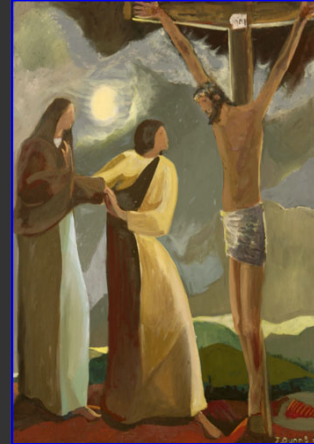
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The Word of Forgiveness



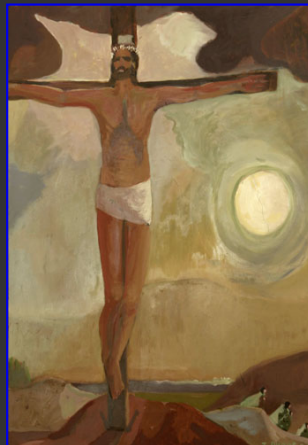
The Word of Salvation



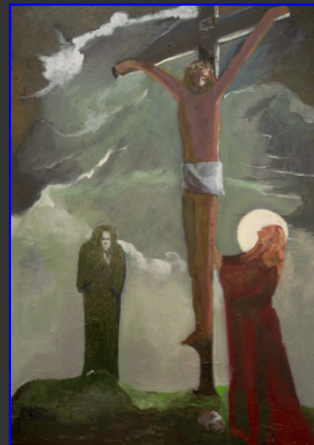
The Word of Affection



The Word of Physical Torment



The Word of Despair



The Word of Committal



The Word of Triumph

John Dunne is a noted Irish painter. He and his wife are members of [Nazareth Community](#) in Dublin, Ireland. Throughout his career as an accomplished artist, John has traveled in many countries. He has absorbed influences from the Far East and the Mediterranean. His interests include theology and its relationship to art. He has a degree in theology.

For many years he has worked on different themes which are based in literature. Three examples are childrens' games as played in Dublin during his childhood, the great legends of the Irish hero Cuchulain, interpreted by the Irish poet Thomas Kinsilla, and a series of ten large paintings based on the poem "Dream of Gerontius" by John Henry Newman.

With all the sacred themes which he paints, John will spend many years researching the material, exploring the theological implications of the particular story and allowing images to come to birth that will point to what lies behind them.

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The Word of Forgiveness

**“Father forgive them for they know not what they do”
– Luke 23:34**

commentary and painting
by John Dunne

This work is about orientation; where we stand and position ourselves in our lives towards its events, both physically and spiritually.

Unlike many past depictions of the crucifixion, we are not encouraged here to empathize with the figure on the cross. For by the use of pathos, the artists in the past will have used every means at their disposal to draw us into the scene and feel the sadness or pity of the event. In my own painting I have placed the figure of Christ with his back to us, whilst the figures of the “elders” dressed in the fashion of the time are emphasized. At this point we are looking in on a scene where the main protagonists are strongly represented as darker figures placed higher than the cross to indicate the moral high ground they understood themselves to hold, and all set against the light of the noonday sun.



The Word of Forgiveness, oil painting by John Dunne

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We may begin to take up our own moral position and start apportioning blame for the terribly deed shown. We could ask ourselves, “Are their sins not as scarlet as the robe worn by one of the figures?” And as for that contemptuous gesture?And the words of venom spat out, “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

Surely they are to blame!

But before we take this line of thought we must remember that the Christian churches have had to seek forgiveness from those accused and we must never forget the dasterly crimes that stemmed from such a stance and viewpoint.

We may not have noticed another figure in this painting! The human figure dressed in green. This person only appeared in the work in its closing stages, as it was not in the original drawing for the painting. I did not understand at the time the importance, except as part of the composition, where it stood on a pivotal point within the work and

seemed to work as a central point around which the rest of the action took place.

Reflecting now on the importance of such a figure, I can understand its significance as a spiritual vortex: a place within which we as the viewer can be drawn into the scene. For in fact this figure is the viewer. If this is the case then the words spoken from the cross are directed at us. Our position, our point of view has now shifted from that of the viewer and now focuses on the ones looked upon and spoken about. From this new point of view we are looking into the face of Christ. We must listen with a new ear to hear what the word of forgiveness means for us and not just those elders or the soldiers or the howling mob crying out for the blood of this innocent victim.

It is important at the start of this series of meditations to be in the right place both spiritually and physically.

This is not a place of repentance, of asking for forgiveness. No, this is the putting ourselves in the same place as those we have historically blamed for the death of Christ: of those who, as fallen people, did not know what they were doing. We will look about for a scapegoat, even blame ourselves, but the point is that before anybody can lay claim to this crime, the death of God no less, the words of forgiveness are spoken from the cross, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Now we begin to understand the importance of our orientation, for when we look into that face of Jesus and understand the compassion as well as the pardon, we may well be encouraged ourselves to forgive! Even those who have not asked for our forgiveness.

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The Word of Salvation

“Behold you will be with me in paradise” – Luke 23:43

commentary and painting
by John Dunne

As we stand before this painting two figures are outlined against the sun as it scorches the hanging bodies. We can identify the body of the thief, as we are told that he was not nailed to the cross, and the body of the Christ turned towards the thief. They had exchanged words, and unlike the words of abuse hurled from others, here was one who recognized the innocence and kingship of Jesus and won for himself a place in paradise.

A companion in death for the God-man, who, despite the great pain and suffering he was enduring, was willing to reach out in love. We are not told anything about this man, other than he was a thief, someone caught up in the machine of Roman justice. For someone like this there was little justice, and he was certainly not a Roman citizen, for citizens were not punished by crucifixion.



The Word of Salvation, oil painting by John Dunne

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Roman crucifixion was not so much a deterrent or form of punishment as a display of power, and by it those who opposed the might of Rome were rendered powerless. This then is what faces us in this scene – the fact that the very one who claimed to be “Son of God,” the almighty and omnipotent God is rendered powerless by man. It is no wonder then that all had run away from him except one who could not escape to safety – namely the thief hanging beside Jesus. Here indeed was the greatest opportunist the world had seen up to this point, for he seized the moment and became the first citizen of heaven. Grace flowed out from the Christ hanging beside him, and the thief cooperated with that grace.

We can learn an important lesson in hope from this episode in the life of Christ, for even in this the worst of situations, during our pain and the certainty of death, the hand of hope is held out to us. But we must turn to the Lord and seize the moment, avail ourselves of the grace offered. The price he has paid for this to happen is the

highest price possible: death on a cross.

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The Word of Affection

**“Mother behold your son;
son behold your mother”**
– John 19:26,27

commentary and painting
by John Dunne

We cannot but be aware of the rich symbolism contained in this scene, as the mother of Jesus is placed into the care of the “beloved disciple” and John is likewise placed into the care of Mary.

In this work I have John looking up into the face of his friend and master, Jesus, who is in the final throes of dying. John holds the hand of Mary as he receives the last wishes of Jesus. This is the mother who has watched her son mature from the boy to the man. The one who has walked and talked with him even when others thought him mad. This was the mother who was present during the wedding at Cana and who ushered him into his public ministry. Here now, she is fulfilling the prophecy of Simeon “that a sword would pierce her own heart.”



The Word of Affection, oil painting by John Dunne

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Even at this moment of numbing pain, the son does not forget those he is leaving behind. He makes sure that the one who protected and was responsible for his welfare during his formative years will now be under the protection of his trusted friend John. John was later to resettle with Mary to Ephesus (in present day Turkey), away from the persecutions that would follow the death of Jesus. Tradition has it that it was there that John wrote his account of the life of Jesus, no doubt assisted by the memories of Mary. John’s account of the events and their possible meanings differ in many ways from the Synoptic accounts, but in relation to this particular event and of these particular words spoken from the cross the accounts match. John, however, viewed this man hanging on this cross in a different light, for here in his view hung the God-man. This man was no less than the Son of God!

From John’s point of view the crucifixion beggars belief; how was it that God in his love for us was pouring out the life of his own son? Later on John would come to understand this self-emptying of God as love. Love for humanity. Love for you and me and love for his church.

And at this moment we have the first hint of that church.

For Mary would become the mother of the church and the early church would in turn confess her as the mother of God (theotokos, which means God-bearer) and the redeemer. By her prayers and association with the apostles she is truly the first in rank in the church and the arm of the church that provides its heart.

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The Word of Physical Torment

“I thirst” – John 19:26

commentary and painting
by John Dunne

The hot sun has been burning down on the crucified man hanging on the rough cross. Above all the other pain raises that of thirst; a draught of sour wine is the response of man to the King of Kings. This scene represents the total humanity of Jesus and the thirst for God by those who are put far from him. Here we are shown the mounted soldier offering the sponge on the hyssop stem, with the gathering rainclouds behind.

Here the one who created all things including the rain must go without. The sun now hides its face in shame as even nature turns its back on its creator. There are echoes here from Psalm 69:20-21 where the psalmist cries out:

Insults have broken my heart,
So that I am in despair.
I looked for pity, but there was none;
And for comforters, but I found none.
They gave me poison for food,
And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.



The Word of Physical Torment, oil painting by John Dunne

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Now the one who is speaking through the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 41:17) promises to help those who are thirsty saying:

When the poor and the needy seek water,
And there is none,
And their tongue is parched with thirst,
I the Lord will answer them.....

Here hangs the same one who promised the woman at the well that “those who drink from the water that I will give

will never thirst again” (John 4:14).

All of these symbolic sayings are in the past now, as Jesus faced with a prolonged agony, cries out for relief. Saint John tell us in his account that after he tasted the bitter drink he breathed his last and died, but the Synoptic accounts differ, recounting that the agony went on for longer, and the humiliation was to continue. We experience an echo of this sense of utter helplessness when our physical bodies do not function as we would like; when we are at the mercy of others for our welfare. God knows our feelings of humiliation because Jesus experienced this humiliation on the cross.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta put this sign over each of her convent doors, “I thirst, I quench,” words that remind those who work for her that it is the thirst of Christ that is quenched each time a cup of water is given in his name.

It is a reminder to us also, each time we hear these words or look on the image, that we are called to do likewise.

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The Word of Despair

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

– Matthew 27:47; Mark 15:34

commentary and painting
by John Dunne

These words of despair are the most enigmatic of all the words spoken by Jesus throughout his life. Jesus and his Father were bound together in a mysterious bond of love. There are numerous references to Jesus’ witness to the Father in his life; who can forget Christ’s intercessory (high priestly) prayer in John’s Gospel where their relationship is spelled out in such a beautiful way. “I and the father are one, all mine are yours, and yours are mine, as you did send me into the world...” And when Jesus prays for the unity of his church, we hear the same intimacy expressed, “that they may all be one; even as you, father, are in me, and I in you.”



The Word of Despair, oil painting by John Dunne

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And how are we to understand these words in light of such events as the baptism of Jesus when the voice from heaven declares that Jesus was indeed the “beloved son”? Or in Jesus’ transfiguration on Mount Tabor when the voice from the bright cloud says, “This my beloved son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

We are discussing matters that are beyond our ability to comprehend, but if we turn to the prophet Isaiah (53:10) we can see a glimmer of light thrown on this mysterious saying:

“Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him;
He has put him to grief.”

The answer as to why this was so is given in the very next line: “when he made himself as offering for sin.” And in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (5:21) we are told: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.”

Jesus had become the darkness of sin, and this is shown in the painting by the conflict of light and dark. John’s Gospel has told us, “God is light and in him is no darkness at all.” So God the Father must turn away from this darkness of sin that Christ bears for us, and this causes the deep spiritual anguish felt by Jesus.

If we but turn to Psalm 22, from whence came these words:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

This is the very first line of the psalm, so Jesus is here quoting from the psalms. He knew that those versed in scripture would recognize the quotation and remember what came after it - a word of hope for him and for us. For when we continue reading this psalm we see that it is about those who cried out to their God in times of trouble and were saved. In verse 24 we are given the best answer possible

For he has not despised or abhorred
The affliction of the afflicted;
And has not hid his face from him,
But has heard, when he cried to him.

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The Word of Committal

**“Father, into your hands
I commit my spirit”**

– Luke 23: 46

commentary and painting
by John Dunne

The penultimate word of Jesus marks a return to what we would expect from Christ; the mention of his Father as the one who can save him out of death.

We have here a dramatic presentation of these last minutes of the agony of Jesus and the conflict between the elements surrounding the event. For it is spring in Palestine, so the sky is clear. Jesus was crucified at the third hour, that is at 9 am.

Then at the sixth hour, noon, suddenly darkness covers the land, and descends on Golgotha.



The Word of Committal, oil painting by John Dunne

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In this painting, two figures are present beneath the cross, Mary of Magdela, who represents the reformed sinner, and the figure of death. Jesus has his head turned away from this figure and looks down at Mary; for death has no power over him. Death will have a short stay with him, but we know in faith that he would burst asunder the holding place of the death chamber and walk free.

And what of the words themselves? One commentator opens up for us what they could mean.[1](#)

"For Luke, Jesus' last words are not a cry of abandonment but a giving of himself back into the hands that had made him. At an ordinary funeral, this is called "the commendation." The official stands near the body and commends the person who has died to God. There was no one to do that for Jesus, which is why he did it for himself. This may have scandalized those who could hear it, but by doing so he took himself out of their hands. By commending himself to the God whose enemy they said he was, he redefined what was happening to him.

"He gave away what they thought they were taking from him, and the whole scene lost its balance.

"Thus Jesus introduced us to the shocking power of sacrifice. Which can turn something that looks for all the world like loss, into something that feels for all the world like gain?"
The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep; he gives up his life for none can take it away from him."

As we look at this work we could do nothing better that repeats the prayer of Charles de Foucauld:

Father, I abandon myself into your hands;
do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you:
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me,
and in all your creatures -
I wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands I commend my soul;
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
for I love you Lord,
and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands,
without reserve,
and with boundless confidence,
For you are my Father.

¹ The Rev. Dr. Barbara Brown Taylor, Butman Professor of Religion and Philosophy, Piedmont College, Demorest, Georgia

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The Word of Triumph

“It is accomplished”
– John 19:30

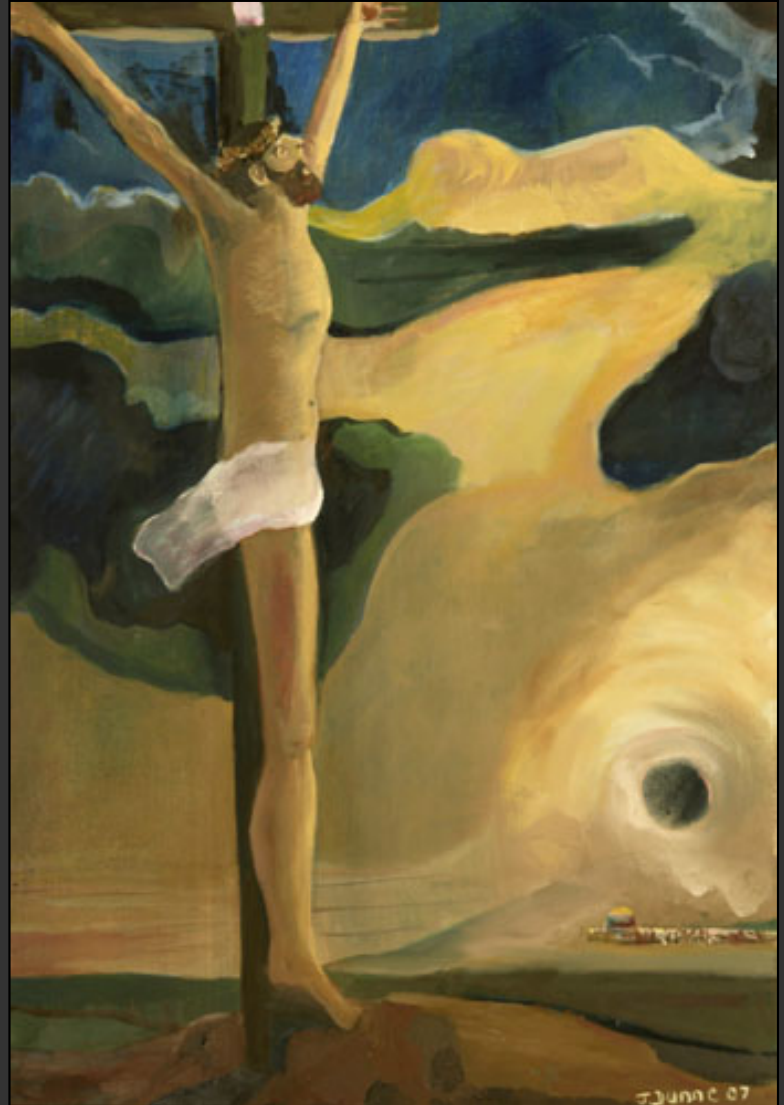
commentary and painting
by John Dunne

The first question that comes to mind on hearing these words is, Just what is accomplished? Is it just the end or completion of his suffering, a release from the terrible pain of his body, hanging as his hands and arms bore his own weight for so long?

Do the words mark simply the end to the jeers and sneers, now that the crowd senses his death is near?

Do the words refer to something deeper? – a cry of achievement, a task carried out and a result brought about.

He is alone now after having his final drink, and the painting depicts a work of joy with its variegated yellows denoting exultation.



The Word of Triumph, oil painting by John Dunne

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A cry that shatters the sky, opening up the heavens with its sense of triumph. The price of redemption has been paid and the grip of the evil powers of darkness is loosened. These powers that had waged war, spurring mankind on to commit what the evil powers thought was the final end to all goodness in the universe – the death of the Son of God.

Christ has overcome these forces not by might or meeting force with force, but by submission to the will of God his Father. Man is reconciled with God through this one act of his Son. All beings can now see the depth of evil that had come from the rebellion of Satan, the brightest of the angelic host. No wonder then that all of creation joined in this release from the stranglehold of evil. The good news was this – that there was another way of fighting evil and that was the way of love: a love that was self emptying (Philippians 2:11).

This was the way of Jesus Christ, which revealed this outflowing love at the heart of the Trinity. Non-violent, unselfish, and gentle in nature, it was to become the way of a new people of God. They would in turn suffer for this way, this means of subverting evil. The sun had risen on a new era. Everything was different, now that these words

were accepted by God the Father. From now on there would be help at hand; the Holy Spirit was promised when the Son returned to the Father, and this Spirit would support and confirm everything the Son had said and done. A helper in times of stress and weakness who would encourage and energize the people of God. These words then are not the sign of defeat or humiliation – nor of dejection and throwing in of the towel, as it were – but words of triumph in the face of all that evil could muster. Truly the greatest words ever spoken by the greatest person who walked this earth.

The resurrection would follow, the natural follow-on of this great deed.

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Awakened to Eternity

*a spiritual journey of poems reflecting on the passion,
death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ*

by Jeanne Kun

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[A Spiritual Journey of Poems for Passiontide and Easter](#)

by Jeanne Kun



Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, by El Greco 1541-1614

Gethsemane

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.

—Matthew 26:41

What battles you fought (and won!)
that night beneath the shadows of Gethsemane
as the trio of your close companions
slept on in ignorance and sorrow.
(Job, too, knew scant comfort
from those three friends who came
to sit beside him in his trials.)

There your soul was tormented and twisted
like the gnarled trunks of the olive trees standing watch
(what sacred secrets they witnessed
and still keep in silver-leafed silence)
as Satan seized that opportune time
(long awaited since his failures in the wilderness)
to test and try you once again.

Your sweat fell
(wrung and pressed from you in anguish
like the oil running down the olive press nearby),
mingled with those first drops of your blood
that was before long to run so freely from your veins.

Terror and distress

must have taunted and mocked your resolve
 and made a tight knot in your stomach
 as you anticipated and recoiled
 from the pain and agony soon to come to you.

As you knelt in earnest prayer
 (so full of dread, yet in determined obedience)
 did you first feel
 that your Father's heart
 was as merciless and unyielding
 as the cold rock you leaned against?

And yet you won through those fearful hours
 and the temptations that laid siege to you,
 strengthened by an angel
 (who surely trembled at the horror—and the privilege—
 of being sent on such mission)
 till all that remained was to drink to the dregs
 the cup you willingly took up,
 now sure it was not to be removed from you,
 holding fast to your Father's will
 that all (I, too) might be restored to him.

Readied now, go to receive Judas' traitorous kiss
 and greet your captors.

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> next poem: [I Have Graven You Upon My Palms](#)

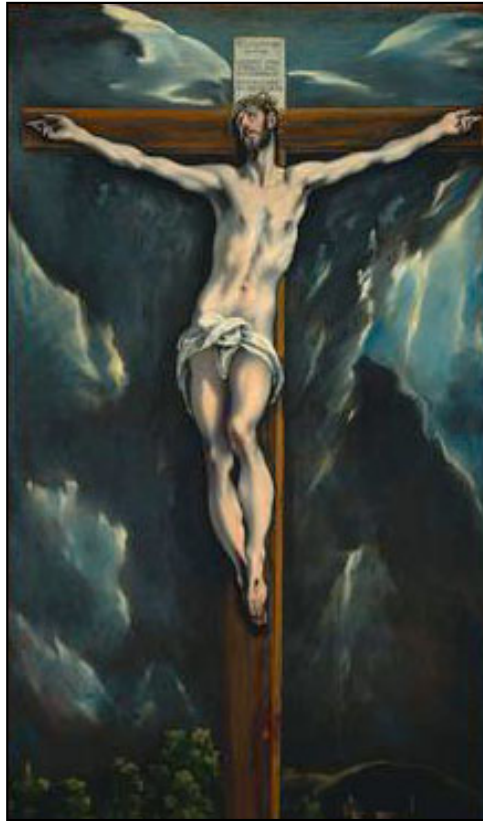
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[A Spiritual Journey of Poems for Passiontide and Easter](#)

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The Crucifixion, by El Greco 1541-1614

I Have Graven You upon My Palms

I have graven you upon my palms.

—Isaiah 49:16

Long ago your hands clung 'round Mary's neck,
 tiny fingers twining her hair about them
 while she hugged you to her breast.
 Later Joseph held your boy-hand secure within his firm grasp
 as you walked the road together on your first pilgrimage to Jerusalem
 and taught those hands to handle lathe
 and plane rough wood beams to smooth usefulness.

Your hands blessed and healed,
 tousled the curly heads of the children who flocked around you,
 and wrote in the dust as the elders looked on,
 hoping to ensnare you, too, in the trap laid for the adulteress.

Raised in thanksgiving,
 your hands
 multiplied the loaves and fishes

and broke bread
to feed your disciples' hunger with much more than crushed wheat.

Then those same hands
that washed soiled feet
(and stained, sin-encrusted souls)
were wrenched and held fast,
forced to the crossbeam as the executioner plied open your fingers
and drove iron through your palms,
inscribing my name upon them.

Tendons mangled and severed,
nerves vibrating in agony,
muscles contorted in tight spasms—
those hands were made useless
except to hold you pinioned to the cross
as your body sagged,
its weight straining and pressing raw against the nails.

Your hands, once so wounded and so bloodied,
still bear the hard-won battle scars—
now a sign of victory and glory
and record of the price you paid for me.

These wounds indelibly written upon your flesh
plead on my behalf before the throne of God
where you stand and never cease to intercede as the Lamb slain for me.

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by Jeanne Kun



Pietà, by El Greco 1541-1614

Pietà

How sore your grief, Mary,
 as you hold the cold and lifeless body of your son
 (once warm with beating heart in your own womb)
 all bloodied now by death,
 and cradle in your arms for one last time
 him whom you so often held upon your breast.

Sharing in his pain and passion,
 you looked on in agony
 as the hands that clung as infant's around your neck
 and those feet that pattered long ago about the cozy home in Nazareth
 were cruelly wrenched and nailed fast.

I wonder:

Had you spoken in quiet hours together
 of the prophecies and their mysteries?
 Had you—with motherly intuition—
 read your son's heart and the shadow that hung over him?
 In your nights of pondering,
 did you gather strength for this inevitable day?

And now, with a mother's knowing heart,
can you perceive that this stiffening form upon your lap
(a piece of torn humanity that tabernacles divinity within)
will soon breathe again
and brim and pulse with life,
all gloriously transfigured?

Looking through the darkness there at Golgotha,
do you already see in your mind's eye
the new dawn promised in three days' time
and tremble to feel again your child's glad embrace?

O wait no longer, Mary,
to entrust him to the grave!
Surrender your son now to Joseph's tomb,
that he might rest awhile from the battle bravely fought
and then descend to death's domain
to claim from Satan there
the victory so hard won for us.

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[A Spiritual Journey of Poems for Passiontide and Easter](#)

by Jeanne Kun



The Entombment, by Raphael 1504-1505

Laid to Rest

The women keep silent vigil,
 watching over the sagging, twisted body
 hanging limply now upon the cross.
 Light and life and breath are gone from his frame.
 Stillness reigns, bringing with it
 relief from the heavy horror of the day's events.

Joseph of Arimathea bravely declares himself,
 claiming in death what he had feared in life.
 He unfastens the broken body from the crossbeam,
 careful not to further wound
 the flesh so bruised and torn by nails.
 What reverence for the tabernacle
 that gave human form to God!

Mary cradles her son in her arms as she so often had
 when he laid his soft infant cheek upon her breast.
 Her hand gently caresses the bloodied, cold brow
 and tenderly closes the sightless eyes
 before she gives him over to the grave.

(Mary, what were your thoughts then?)

Did your son's words of life and resurrection
 echo in your ears?
 Beneath your grief and sorrow,
 did hope that he might rise and live again
 stir deeply in your mother's heart
 and sustain you in quiet expectation?)

Now he rests from salvation's work and pain,
 the sleep of death upon him as he's enshrouded in linen.
 Sweet spices surround and perfume his wounded corpse.

Darkness falls as the stone is rolled in place.
 Yet a deeper darkness invades and fills the rock-hewn sepulchre,
 reaching into its narrow confines
 and encircling the body it now holds as in a womb.

Soon morning light will dawn upon the stone-cold tomb,
 warming its icy hardness.
 But greater light shines from within,
 glowing and pulsing with new life and waiting to find release.
 No guard set there to vigilantly keep watch
 (and hold death within its chamber)
 will stay his power to burst forth.

*For he has torn, that he may heal us;
 he has stricken, and he will bind us up.
 After two days he will revive us;
 on the third day he will raise us up,
 that we may live before him. . . .
 His going forth is as sure as the dawn.
 —Hosea 6:1-3*

O Sun of Righteousness,
 night's shadows must fade before the glory of your rising
 Triumph now over death's dark domain,
 and spread the radiance of your newly-won dominion over us!

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"Noli Me Tangere" (*Do Not Touch Me*) by Titian, 1511-12

Awakened to Eternity

I

The day of rest past—
 rest prescribed by law,
 rest that refreshed her body
 and eased the fatigue of the harrowing day spent at Golgotha,
 yet brought no relief to her grief—
 Mary [Magdalene] made her way early
 to the garden where the priceless treasure of her master's body lay,
 that tabernacle so cruelly ransacked and emptied of the glow of life.

Night's veil was not yet lifted from the earth,
 but already a faint glimmer spilled over the horizon's edge,
 pushing back the shadows
 and spreading its soft light through the garden as Mary entered there.
 Yet even as the dawn began to break,
 desolate darkness and black fear blinded her eyes,
 for she'd come in one last act of kindness

to anoint her Beloved with sweet spices—
and found the tomb and grave cloths empty
and his body gone!

“O Gardener, tell me where you’ve laid my Lord,
that I might see him once again!”

Then Mary heard her name
as only he could speak it
and knew him in the sound of it.
Joy rushed in upon her,
and in the morning sun,
her heart was filled
(like the garden ’round about her)
with new life and vitality.

II

I too seek my Lord with love’s longing.

Now go to him, my soul.
You’ll find him (as Mary did so long ago)
waiting for you in the garden as in a lovers’ trysting place.

In that fair place
where seed has fallen to its death
(buried in its own earthen grave beside his tomb)
and now springs forth in fruitfulness and fragrance,
he wipes away all tears
and speaks my name in voice my ears have ever strained to hear,
restorer of my life
and herald of my wakening into eternity.

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