



# THE VISITATION

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## Food for the Journey of Discipleship

by Tom Quinlan

Have you ever taken a long, maybe really long, car trip? Most of us probably have. Can you remember what it was like? The sights, the fun, the fatigue, the stops. Long travels, whether in a car or on a bike or walking a trail out in nature can, upon reflection, be a metaphor for the journey of life.

Sometimes our lives are headed uphill, sometimes downhill. Sometimes we're traveling in sunny, pleasant conditions, sometimes we're immersed in clouds, fog, and even the dark of night. But no matter, onward we go because we have a destination that we need to reach.

For the Catholic Christian person, the road of life is traveled in faith. Baptism is so important because it is our starting point and our compass. It orients us for the journey of discipleship, the close following of our Lord, Jesus. Baptism gives us a special grace-filled relationship to Christ, and through him, to all the baptized who become our sisters and brothers in Christ.

Now, if Baptism sends us forth on a path of Christian discipleship, the Eucharist is our food for the journey! Whether we refer to it as the Bread of Life, the Blessed Sacrament, or Body of Christ, the Eucharist is the most intimate gift Christ leaves to us. It actually is, in a way no one can fully grasp, the presence of Christ with us and in us!

The Eucharist is real food and real drink, ordinary foods made from wheat and grapes that we lift up to

God, returned to us as the extraordinary sacrament of Christ for us. It is made possible by Jesus' act of complete surrender to the will of the Father, whereby he offers up his life, his love, and finally his body and blood on the Cross.

The Eucharist embodies the transformative power of the Cross. It represents the Paschal Mystery, from which we know that, in Christ, death no longer has power to destroy: God's grace is greater than sin and darkness. The Eucharist, first shared with his disciples on the night before he died, contains Jesus' everything, given so that we might live more fully here in this world and ultimately be granted a share in life eternal.

And so, as at the Last Supper, Christ wishes today to feed us. He longs to be our refreshment, our food for the difficult, beautiful journey of life to which God calls us. When we partake in the Eucharist we are tapping into the very life of God, made fully available to us now and forever through the death and Resurrection of Christ. It is right that the Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium*, frames the Eucharist (both as sacrament and as the liturgical celebration) as the "source and the summit of Christian life!"

Certainly this is something to keep in mind on those days we might feel resistant to attending Mass. Or when we find ourselves a bit bored and wondering what we are getting out of

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## Who is this man, Jesus?

by Venus Wozniak

Back in January, I was preparing to teach a scripture class for a 7th grade confirmation class. The topic was to be The Person of Jesus. For a good two weeks I tossed the question around in my head and my heart, who is Jesus?

Really, I was experiencing a mini-crisis of faith. I was having a really hard time answering the question. This is a question so tightly woven into the person I am, yet I had no words to describe this person. I came up with a very academic outline for the 7th graders. When talking it over with Justin, he very gently pointed me in another direction, *maybe you should focus on Jesus' relationship with others.*

So that is what I did. The first story of relationship that I focused on was The Woman at the Well (John 4,) then The Raising of Lazarus (John 11,) and the resurrection account of Jesus and the Hibachi (John 21.) These are wonderful stories. They are

stories of deep faith, friendship, and profound emotion.

They are stories – stories that we can enter into and identify with. As I pondered these stories and as I think back on them now I am overwhelmingly aware that how we get to know anyone, most especially Jesus, is through knowing his story.

We each have a story. When we find someone who is willing to enter into our story we open up to that person. This is where the bonds of friendship and true love occur. This is also where deep-seated anger and betrayal can occur.

Jesus has a story. Through the accounts that were mentioned above we can enter into his story. We can also enter into the Samaritan woman's story; Mary, Martha, and Lazarus' stories; Peter and the other

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## Being Eucharist

by Molly Linehan

*In these communities (of the altar), though frequently small and poor, or living in the Diaspora, Christ is present, and in virtue of His presence there is brought together one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.*

*For the partaking of the body and blood of Christ does nothing other than make us be transformed into that which we consume...*

*- Lumen Gentium: The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (1964)*

From his home Cathedral in Louisville, our new President of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, told a story during a homily that was both simple and compelling.

Before he was a bishop, Fr. Kurtz was a priest in the Diocese of Allentown, Pennsylvania. While visiting a fellow pastor's parish, Fr. Kurtz had the opportunity to meet the housekeeper of that church. With pride, the pastor introduced the housekeeper and told his friend that she had just entered the church this previous Easter through the Right of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). Fr. Kurtz responded by asking a question that might stump any one of us, "What is the biggest change in you since you became Catholic?" Without missing a beat the woman smiled replying, "I no longer sweep the dust under the rug."

When I heard this story in the Archbishop's homily, I was at first struck by the simplicity of the woman's answer. It seemed she was saying that she takes her responsibilities seriously and completes a task thoroughly. It could be a poster-story for a "Catholic work ethic". This Catholic housekeeper didn't just pretend to get the job done for image only, she DID get the job done!

And yet, the interaction has stayed with Archbishop Kurtz. And I find his telling of the story stays with me

as well. The housekeeper was not asked what she does differently now that she is part of the faith. She was asked how she has changed. The question she was asked was about her being, not her doing. Her answer might truly be a reflection of how she herself had changed. The dirt under the rugs was gone. She didn't sweep dirt into hiding places anymore. No doubt, this Pennsylvania housekeeper was good at her work. Still, maybe the quality of cleaning is not the central point. As I mull the story over, I'm inclined to think the pivoting emphasis is on integrity. If the presentation appears clean, then it's clean through and through. But if it isn't, if there is dirt, then that is not hidden away. It's revealed and truth is dealt with. Change that comes with faith is about integrity more than it is about perfection.

Well-catechized Catholics know that we are to be transformed by the Eucharist. This transformation is not limited to our individual selves but extends to the transformation of full communities of faith. We don't simply partake in the Body of Christ, we become the Body of Christ. We offer ourselves, giving our bodies as Christ gives his. We become a different people.

Of course, the determination to be changed is only the first step. Thank goodness the change is about integrity and not perfection. We know that the Eucharist calls us to be love to the immigrant, the homeless,

the prostitute and the tax collector. But our first steps are still only in the doing. We seek and do love, and we fall short. We find ourselves frustrated and acting without charity. So we return to the Eucharist longing to be transformed again. None of us have that ideal immaculate church. It's just that we've stopped sweeping under the rug our

need to return to the table to be transformed.



*Molly Linehan is the Director of Campus Ministry at Charleston Catholic High School in Charleston, WV.*

### Jesus

apostles' stories. Here we have the intersection of many stories.

It is in the intersection of stories where the mystery unfolds. Every good story has a bit of mystery - the part of the story that really gets you thinking, the part that nags at you till you have an answer.

The mystery for the woman at the well: how did this man - Jesus - know everything she had done? Even when we think this man - Jesus - does not know us - he does. He knows and sees to our core, our heart and soul and still deeply desires to give us living water. They mystery of the paradox - he could love and satisfy our deepest thirst despite our unworthiness.

Mary and Martha were perplexed and heartbroken that their friend did not come in time to save their brother. The mystery: out of death Jesus brings new life. Jesus requires of Mary and Martha to be willing to be used for the glorification of God. Because they are such good friends, Jesus expects that it will be easy for Martha and Mary to trust in the new life he will bring forth in Lazarus. Never a question is entertained. What new life does Jesus bring out of the deaths in our lives?

Jesus and the Hibachi - at first they did not recognize him. It was in the

abundance of fish in the net that they realized it was him. There was an unspoken reality as they enjoyed the barbequed meal he prepared for them. What is the unspoken reality that we share with Jesus?

Each of these stories has an element of mystery. The mystery, the question - that is where we meet Jesus. It is through these mysteries that Jesus invites us deeper into his story. Sometimes in the depths answers to mysteries come - sometimes quickly, sometimes after much pondering.

At first the mystery of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is unsettling, uncomfortable. But once you allow him in and get to know his story, for he already knows yours, you will uncover how exactly it is that your stories intersect. You will enter into the mystery and he will reveal much to you.

Who is this man, Jesus? How do I know him? I know him through mystery. You can know him in this way too. Enter into the Mystery.



*Venus is the Director of Faith Formation at St. Dennis in Lockport, IL. She can be reached at [venusad@nativity-house.org](mailto:venusad@nativity-house.org)*

## Dedication and Open House

**Nativity House is open!** We have started the CSA and will be welcoming our first guest this fall. To celebrate, we will be holding a **dedication Mass and open house on May 25 at: 17141 W. 143rd St. Lockport, IL.** Mass will be at 3pm.

Please visit!

— Venus and Justin

### About The Visitation

This newspaper, The Visitation, is a publication on topics of social justice, spirituality and theology. It is published four times a year by the Nativity House Project. Submissions are accepted from readers everywhere.

To contact us, email us at:

[newspaper@nativity-house.org](mailto:newspaper@nativity-house.org)

Past issues are online at:

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

### About Nativity House

Nativity House will serve as a shelter for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. The project will also foster a mothering community offering education and support for all mothers. As of 2014, the program operates an on-site community supported farm (CSA) that will provide nourishment for the mothering community and the greater community. Overall we envision a healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work, and stewardship of the earth.

The project is administered by a board of directors and an advisory committee of individuals with a broad range of experience. Nativity House has formed positive relationships with relevant local organizations that will be extremely helpful in carrying out the mission of the house. Nativity House was recognized as a public charity in August, 2011.

To connect with us regarding this project, please email Venus at:

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Postal mail should be addressed to:

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We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

## The Lamb of Peace

*In front of the power and armies of Caesar  
in front of their mighty weapons,  
Stands a LAMB,  
the LAMB of GOD.  
What can this LAMB do?  
The LAMB will break down the walls  
of fear,  
of aggressions,  
of violence,  
of sin,  
which imprisons people in themselves  
and incites them to seek their own glory.  
HE will liberate in each person  
a new life of communion with GOD,  
with other people,  
and with what is deepest in the self,  
Sowing seeds of universal peace.  
We are being called to be gentle  
followers of the LAMB,  
NOT people of power.*

*from: Drawn into the Mystery  
of Jesus in the Gospel of  
John  
by Jean Vanier*



### Food

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Mass. Mass is, of course, more about participation than simply receiving. It is more about us than me. The Eucharist, as liturgy, is a communal act of divine worship, where everyone's full presence and active prayer is vital in this greatest prayer of the Church.

After all God has done for us in Christ, why would we ever try to travel through life without help? Jesus knew how difficult it would be for us to follow in his path. That is precisely why he gave us his Body and Blood, mystically present in the Eucharist...so that he could be intimately present to us, nourishing us for the journey of Christ-like discipleship. Let us always stay connected to the love of Christ offered to us in this Bread of Life. Christ shares it with us that we might remain true to the dignity of our

baptismal identity and stay on the course our Baptism set.

Our National Directory for Catechesis reminds us that "we are called to realize that we become what we receive, which has great implications for how we live and act." (p 126) Saying "Amen" when we take the Eucharist should not only be a "Yes, I believe", but also a "Yes, I become." In this life journey of discipleship, may the Eucharist not only be the Body of Christ for us. May it also be our food to help us together to become more fully the voice, the heart, the Body of Christ for our families, for our neighborhood and for our world today!



*Tom is the Director of Religious  
Education for the Diocese of Joliet*

## Sts. Felicity and Perpetua

by Kathy Fech

March 7th is the Feasts of Saints Felicity and Perpetua. Both third century martyrs, Perpetua was a noblewoman and Felicity was her slave. The women were imprisoned for refusing to renounce their faith. Much of their story is available, thanks to a journal kept by Perpetua during her imprisonment. Both women were young mothers at the time of their persecution.

At the time of her arrest, Perpetua's young child she was nursing was taken from her. She describes this as the most arduous trial of her imprisonment. Felicity had to endure her final weeks of pregnancy in a hot, dark prison. It was illegal for a pregnant woman to be killed, lest innocent blood be spilled. Two days before her execution, Felicity gave birth to a daughter who would have to be raised by other Christians in light of Felicity's pending death.

When I reflect on this story in light of what I know of Nativity House, I realize how crucial the prayers of Saints Felicity and Perpetua are to the organization's mission. Felicity and Perpetua are patrons of young mothers separated from their children by war and persecution. In this country, we might think that doesn't apply. However, is there a persecution worse than a young

mother who feels she cannot tell her parents, boyfriend, or husband she is pregnant? Or feels she isn't supported by them once she does tell them? Is there a separation worse than a mother feeling she must have her lifeless child ripped from her body in an abortion because she does not feel she can live with that child?

How many of you have had loved ones get pregnant or impregnate someone under less than ideal circumstances? Perhaps you have experienced this yourself and had to tell others you were expecting a child. How did you react? Or how did others react? Even if you tried to react positively to the faces of the parents, did you whisper behind their back or think, "how could they let this happen?" all while plastering a fake congratulatory smile on your face? I've done it. Far more times than I care to admit.

This plight we create is not unusual for young parents, particularly mothers. They feel persecuted by social stigmas. They feel persecuted by those around them. Or, they suspect they will be persecuted so they run for abortion clinics out of pure fear or feeling they are unable to undergo the persecution. So often, we are the persecutors, whether we mean to be or not. We need to change our

attitudes and provide a safe place, emotionally and spiritually, for all mothers we encounter.

So, Felicity and Perpetua, please pray for us. For every time we sigh at the teen mother in the grocery store. For every time we roll our eyes at the young, unmarried parents taking their child to see Santa. For every time we whisper behind the back of the pregnant, unwed mother at church. For every time a judgmental thought crosses our minds, please pray for us

that we may stop persecuting young mothers. Life is always good. Life is always a blessing. Life is always intentional – a gift from God. Pray that we may celebrate any and all life with the joy of which it is worthy and celebrate those mothers who endure societal persecution for the sake of their child's life. 

*Kathy is a religious educator presently working at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic School in Fort Wayne, IN*



by Lisa Boyer



## THE VISITATION

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