



# THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE

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## Behold Your Mother

By Kayla Jacobs

Several years ago, when I was a college student, I attended a party where heavy drinking was happening. I remember feeling bored and just waiting for my friends to want to move on to the next place. As I was sitting there, trying to pass the time with small talk, a girl I knew, who was very intoxicated, started telling everyone about the abortion she had years before and how hurt she was by it, she began to cry. Everyone seemed shocked and uncomfortable with what she was saying and just kind of stared at her. Although at that time I was not Catholic, nor did I have a concept of the consistent ethic of life, her announcement really hit me in the heart, not because of the abortion but because I saw how badly she was hurting. She was one of the many victims of that abortion. The scene eventually ended when a guy told her to stop talking.



That party took place in my hometown, where the local high school has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the state. I have many close friends who had to make very difficult decisions when we were just young teenagers. Teen pregnancy was so common that our high school had a daycare on campus. I was in high school when the school made the decision to open the daycare. The decision caused quite an uproar among people in the community and surrounding towns, judging our school for having the need for an on-campus daycare. Many people shamed pregnant teenage women (but not the boys who also took part in the pregnancy) by saying, “these young girls shouldn’t be getting pregnant” and arguing that the daycare was an enabler and a problem rather than a solution and support for the moms to stay in school.

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## Transformed by Love: Graces in Disguise

By Annemarie Coman

*“Behold, I make all things new”  
~Revelation 21:5*

Lately I’ve been finding myself getting easily frustrated with the little things that go wrong each day. Maybe you’ve been there. I’m late to an appointment, can’t find my keys and suddenly the glass of water I’m drinking smashes to the ground. Shattered. And so is my sense of peace. By that point I’m ready to have a meltdown. And I’m ready to complain about it to everyone I see for the rest of the day. Little things, so why do I get so angry? How can I learn patience, serenity, acceptance?

In the moment, the Serenity prayer helps, “Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference...”

But there has to be more than just acceptance. Not to mention, most times these things are difficult to accept! So what’s the point of all these little frustrations anyway? If my whole day is full of them, there must be something more meaningful here. So I bring the question to Jesus.

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## God is Love

By Venus Wozniak

God is love. I remember learning this in first grade in my first Catholic School. I memorized it. I accepted it. The next year in 2nd grade, Mrs. Menko asked us to draw a picture of God. I remember wanting to draw a picture of a gigantic light. I got frustrated not knowing how to encompass light with my seven year old drawing skills. I gave up and drew an old man. Because God is an old man. How quickly had I forgotten: God is love (He is also light) – not necessarily an old man.

Many years later when I was pregnant, many people told me that I would not believe how much I would love my baby. I just nodded in agreement and went on my merry

way. I thought to myself, “really? I love plenty of people with all my heart! It can’t be that different.” When she was born and placed in my arms, my eyes welled up with tears at the sight, smell, touch of this perfect little human. I could feel my heart expanding. It was true I couldn’t believe how much I loved her. That was truly a perfect moment of the realization of perfect, undeniable, unconditional love.

The expanding of my heart, the glow on my face, the energy between me and my newborn baby = love = God.

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## Letter from the Directors: Harvest Abundance

By Justin Wozniak

Harvest season is always a great blessing at Nativity House. There is a swirl of activity that settles into deep contentment; the garden winds down, the school year begins, and we transition the tractor from gardenmobile to snow wrangler.

Life at the house is busier than ever. We are hosting two young mothers who are enthusiastically beginning studies in the healthcare field, supported by two committed volunteers and a helpful short-term visitor. We are enjoying the garden produce, canning, and baking. These hearty supplies will last us until the spring, as they have before.

The garden is being prepared for the winter. We are gathering the last of the greens, tomatoes, and beets. We tasted a few small apples from our first producing tree. Our Farm to Table event in August exceeded the success of last year, with many new dishes inspired by these earthy morsels.

Our goat project has been an fascinating experience. Goats are just weird enough to garner interest from everyone from the guests at the house to all of our visitors. They get along great with the chickens but we are anxious to move them from the flock to their own yard farther back where they will help keep the fence line clear.

All of us at the house extend our warmest gratitude to all who have supported us and the farm projects over the summer, from the students who framed the goat shack door to the expert craftsman who directed the shingling to the CSA weed squad, we would not have had such a season without you. We were also gifted with the company of a variety of volunteer groups and curious visitors, from recent college graduates to those just starting school. All have enriched our community in various ways, whether clearing brush or just being present. Thanks and keep warm this fall!

### *Upcoming Event: Christmas Party!*

We will have our second annual Christmas Party on December 28th. Join us for a fun evening of food, music and celebration of the birth of Christ!

## *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 Nativity House. Submissions are accepted from readers everywhere.

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Past issues are online at:

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

## *About Nativity House*

Nativity House serves as a shelter for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. Nativity House operates an on-site community supported farm (CSA) that provides nourishment for the Nativity House 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.

Nativity House 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 are extremely helpful in carrying out the mission of the house. Nativity House was recognized as a public charity in August, 2011.

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We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

## Love is the Measure

By Dorothy Day

*The Catholic Worker*, June 1946

What we would like to do is change the world—make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And to a certain extent, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, of the poor, of the destitute—the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor in other words, we can to a certain extent change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever widening circle will

reach around the world. We can give away an onion.

We repeat, there is nothing that we can do but love, and dear God—please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as well as our friend.

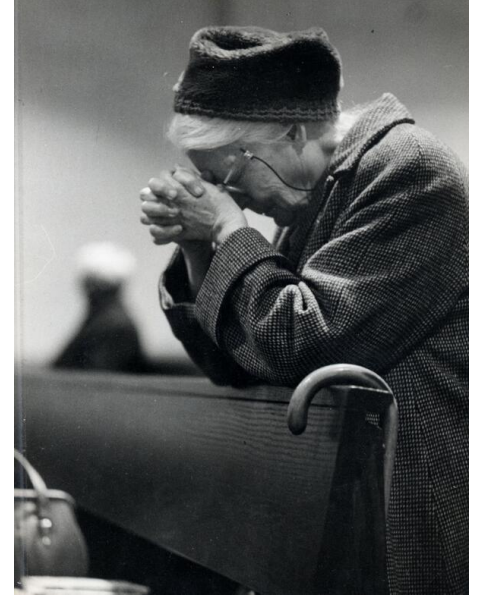
This is the month of the Sacred Heart, the symbol of Christ's love for man. We are supposed to love as Christ loved, to the extent of laying down our lives for our brothers. That was the New commandment. To love to the extent of laying down our lives, dying to ourselves. To accept the least place, to sit back, to ask nothing for ourselves, to serve each other, to

lay down our lives for our brothers, this is the strange upside-down teaching of the Gospel.

We knew a priest once, a most lovable soul, and a perfect fool for Christ. Many of his fellow priests laughed at him and said, "Why, he lines up even the insane and baptizes them. He has no judgment!" He used to visit the Negro hospital in St. Louis, and night and day found him wandering through the wards. One old Negro said to me, "Whenever I opens my eyes, there is Father!" He was forever hovering over his children to dispense the sacraments. It was all he had to give. He couldn't change the rickety old hospital, he couldn't provide them with decent housing, he could not see that they got better jobs. He couldn't even seem to do much about making them give up liquor and women and gambling—but he could love them, and love them all, he did. And he gave them Everything he had. He gave them Christ. Some of his friends used to add, "whether they wanted Him or not!" But assuredly they wanted his love and they saw Christ in him when they saw his love for them.

Many times I have been reminded of this old priest of St. Louis, this old Jesuit, when I have visited prisons and hospitals for the insane. It's hard to visit the chaplains and ask their help very often. They have thousands to take care of, and too often they take the view that "it's no use." "What's the use of going to that ward—or to that jail? They won't listen to you."

If one loves enough one is importunate, one repeats his love as he repeats his Hail Marys on his rosary.



Yes, we go on talking about love. St. Paul writes about it in 1 Corinthians 13. In The Following of Christ there is a chapter in Book III, Chapter Five. And there are Father Zossima's unforgettable words in The Brothers Karamazov—"Love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams." What does the modern world know of love, with its divorces, with its light touching of the surface of love. It has never reached down into the depths, to the misery and pain and glory of love which endures to death and beyond it. We have not yet begun to learn about love. Now is the time to begin, to start afresh, to use this divine weapon.

### Easy Essays:

#### What Saint Francis Desired

by Peter Maurin (1877-1949)



***1. Saint Francis desired that men should give up superfluous possessions.***

***2. Saint Francis desired that men should work with their hands.***

***3. Saint Francis desired that men should offer their services as a gift.***

***4. Saint Francis desired that men should ask other people for help when work failed them.***

***5. Saint Francis desired that men should live as free as birds.***

***6. Saint Francis desired that men should go through life giving thanks to God for His gifts.***

## Loneliness as a New Kind of Poverty, Mother Teresa at the Synod of Bishops

By Mother Teresa, October 1980

*In 1980, Mother Teresa was asked to give an address at the Synod of Bishops in Rome. What follows is her address, as found in Come Be My Light, the collection of Mother Teresa's private writings compiled by Brian Kolodiejchuk, M.C.*

Recently, a man met me on the street. He said: "Are you Mother Teresa?" I said, "yes." He said: "Please send somebody to my house. My wife is half mental and I am half blind. But we are longing to hear the loving sound of a human voice." They were well to do people. They had everything in their home. Yet they were dying of loneliness, dying to hear a loving voice. How do we know some one like that is not next to our house? Do we know who they are, where they are? Let us find them and, when we find them, love them. Then when we love them we will serve them.

Today God loves the world so much that He gives you, He gives me, to love the world, to be His love, His compassion. It is such a beautiful thought for us--and a conviction--that you and I can be that love and compassion.

Do we know who our own poor are? Do we know our neighbor, the poor of our own area? It is so easy for us to talk and talk about the poor of other places. Very often we have the suffering, we have the lonely, we have the people--old, unwanted, feeling miserable--and they are near us and we don't even know them. We have no time even to smile at them.

Tuberculosis and cancer [are] not the great diseases. I think a much greater disease is to be unwanted, unloved. The pain that these people suffer is very difficult to understand, to penetrate. I think this is what our people all over the world are going through, in every family, in every home.

This suffering is being repeated in every man, woman and child. I think Christ is undergoing his Passion again. And it is for you and for me to help them--to be Veronica, to be Simon to them.

*[The poor] don't need our pity and sympathy. They need our understanding love and they need our respect.*

Our poor people are great people, a very lovable people. They don't need our pity and sympathy. They need our understanding love and they need our respect. We need to tell the poor that they are somebody to us, that they, too, have been created, by the same loving hand of God, to love and be loved.



## God is Love

*...continued from page 1*

The love between parents and children, between spouses = God.

This reality requires us to stop. Wait. What? God is Love?

In that blessed moment I imagine God fills the space between me and my newborn daughter. This is a very human understanding of something divine, mysterious, perfect. In many ways this is easy to accept. We love our children, our parents, our spouses. We can understand pretty simply through these illustrations how it is: God is Love.

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Jesus came, lived a life uncommon, suffered, died, conquered death.

We are supposed to love as Christ loved, to the extent of laying down our lives for our brothers. That was the New Commandment. To love to the extent of laying down our lives, dying to ourselves. To accept the least place, to sit back, to ask nothing for ourselves, to serve each other, to lay down our lives for our brothers, this is the strange upside-down teaching of the Gospel. (Dorothy Day, Love is the Measure)

Love is the strange upside-down teaching of the Gospel. This most powerful force - love - draws humans to enter into relationship with others. Relationship is messy business.

Jesus captivated the hearts of many during his life; specifically, he radically changed the life of a handful of men and women that were in his inner circle. He lived by example. He didn't have a home; he relied on the generous efforts of his friends and followers; he had complete trust in his Father (so much so that he allowed himself to be tortured and put to death.) He challenged his dearest friends. He sent them out two by two; He told them to carry nothing for the journey; He charged them to teach his Gospel of Love unabashedly; He prepared them with a divine confidence to do the hardest work in the midst of persecution.

This lived relationship with Jesus is messy. It required a complete paradigm shift of thinking and lifestyle. A lifestyle of radical love.

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Love idealized. Love actualized.

I heard a story about a husband and wife; we will call them Jim and Anne. Jim and Anne decided after much prayer and discernment to sell their house, most of their furniture, their car. They put the remainder of their possessions in storage, packed two suitcases per person for their family of five and moved to a mission field in Central America. They committed to three years there. Jim and Anne relayed to me how freeing it was to pack it up, give it away and do the work of Jesus. They beamed as they told of the stories of their children growing up learning to love Christ by actively living his life of radical love.

Jim and Anne met and came to love so many beautiful people in their new community. Jim and Anne told stories of poverty, injustices, suffering of the families that became their closest friends. While their faces beam with love and respect for these friends, I could also sense the weight that they shared.

Jim and Anne are back home, stateside now. This family of five have hearts expanded. The love that beamed from their face as they told the stories of their mission experience = God. The love shared between Jim, Anne, their children and the Central American families that became their dearest friends = God.

Recently, I heard a story of Dorothy Day in her later life. People would come to the Catholic Worker House in New York City to visit Dorothy Day and want to bask in her presence - the presence of a living saint. You might imagine that this was a somewhat awkward moment for Dorothy Day. These pilgrims would ask her questions: how did she do it? What could they do? Tell us stories of the beginning. She would get frustrated and say, "come and join us in the work."

Dorothy Day:

We repeat, there is nothing that we can do but love, and dear God—please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as well as our friend... What does the modern world know of love, with its divorces, with its light touching of the surface of love. It has never reached down into the depths, to the misery and pain and glory of love which endures to death and beyond it. We have not yet begun to learn about love. Now is the time to begin, to start afresh, to use

this divine weapon. (Dorothy Day, Love is the Measure)

It's true; the love of the modern world does not even scratch the surface. Contrary to popular thought love comes with suffering. Just look at the Cross of Jesus. Look at how Jesus told us to love him; relationship with Jesus = the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned, the stranger. Love is hard and messy and ugly! It's that strange-upside down teaching of the Gospel. But it is extremely attractive. We are frequently intrigued by this notion and terrified by it all at the same time. We marvel at families like Jim and Anne's. But in the same breath we utter to ourselves, "I am so glad they got the call from Jesus and I didn't - phew."

You did get the call. We all did. The call doesn't go away. It's never too late to answer.

God is love.

Allow God to expand your heart,

To fill the space between you and another person.

the stranger, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned

God wants to do this for you.

Come and join us in the work.

*Venus is the Director of Faith and Formation at Saint Dennis Parish, and the Director of Nativity House.*

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## Transformed by Love

*...continued from page 1*

I begin to realize that I need more than just acceptance to turn these little frustrations into something beautiful, I need the transformative power of Christ's love. For God says to us, "Behold, I make all things new." How can Christ make our little (and big!) frustrations into something new in our eyes? Is it possible that these little frustrations can actually bring us closer to God, that they are actually graces in disguise?

As I meditate on this, I'm reminded of one of the most beautiful treasures of our faith, something I often forget: the idea of redemptive suffering. Here's a refresher: redemptive suffering is the idea that we can offer our suffering in union with Christ's suffering on the Cross for the salvation of souls. Instead of complaining or just getting angry about the problems we experience each day, we can offer them up in union with Christ for the salvation of all. "Redemptive suffering?!" we might say, "that sounds like no fun at all, and anyway my little frustrations don't really qualify as suffering." But here's the thing, God sees our every action, and looks upon even our smallest sacrifices with love, and they are precious to Him. St. Faustina wrote, "Only love has meaning, it raises up our smallest actions into infinity."

You may be wondering, how can anything we do be precious to God? We are so little, weak and nothing compared to his glory. Well, you're right! But think about it this way. God is our loving Father. In the same way that a father loves the

messy finger painting (of a banana, a goose?) that his two year old gives him, so our Heavenly Father looks with joy and delights in everything that we give to Him in love. So let us give to Jesus all those little things that "ruin" our day- our lost keys, our frustration with a family member, our stress at work, and let us share in His joy and peace, letting each sacrifice be a secret gift between us and Jesus. The gospel of Matthew tells us that what we do in secret, the Lord sees and will reward! How loving and generous is our God!

The witness of the saints, too, reveals to us the beauty of redemptive suffering. Many "victim souls" such as St. Therese of Liseux, St. Faustina and Blessed Alexandrina have freely offered themselves to Christ to suffer for the sake of others. In some way, when I offer my small frustrations in union with the Cross of Christ, I participate in the mystery of Redemption. Wow! This thought turns me from grumbling to marveling at God's love and mercy, that he can use even the small frustrations of our days to make us saints.

St. Therese taught me this lesson: "miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love." When I offer up my little frustrations to Jesus and unite them with the love he poured out for us on the Cross, I can actually grow closer to Him. Not only that, but my little frustrations are transformed into chances to grow spiritually myself. They become like precious jewels that I can give to

Jesus for my own sanctification and that of others. St. Faustina would offer all her little sufferings and humiliations of the day to souls in purgatory. She often felt sympathy for these souls who longed to be with God but needed His mercy to be ready to be united with Him. She shared the grace of her own life freely with others so that many more souls could be with Christ. When I think about it like that, all my little frustrations begin to lose their bitterness and in the light of Christ they become like beautiful gifts.

Another saintly woman was Blessed Alexandrina Maria de Costa. I'd like to share her incredible story because she is still unknown to many. Born in Portugal in 1904, at the age of twenty she was bedridden for life due to injuries she suffered while escaping from an attacker. When she first became bedbound she continually prayed to God for healing. One day though, something changed in her heart, she realized that God might have a greater plan for her sufferings.

She began to unite herself to Christ crucified and offer up her pain for souls. Beginning in 1938, she mystically underwent the Passion of Christ every Friday, and many believe her sufferings helped to shorten World War II. Her life radiated joy, and she was known to all as a holy and loving woman, always full of smiles for the multitudes that came to visit.

Her deep devotion to and union with Christ was evident as for the last thirteen years of her life she miraculously lived on the Holy Eucharist alone, a medically confirmed fact. In 1955, the day before she died, she said, "My God, I have always consecrated my life to you and I offer you its

end now, accepting death with resignation, with all its pains, for your greater glory." Blessed Alexandrina knew well that the sufferings of this life were nothing compared with the glory of Heaven, and she shone the light of this Truth to those who encountered her on earth. She went on to exclaim, "Oh Jesus, life is dear, Heaven is dear! I have suffered so much for souls...I am so happy because I am going to Heaven at last!" Through it all, Alexandrina trusted in Jesus and gave Him every suffering she experienced. She drew close to His Heart and pulled others into His loving embrace through the witness of her life.

What if I really let this idea take hold of my heart? What if instead of complaining internally (or externally!) every time something inconvenient or annoying happened, what if I offered it to Christ and thought, "this one is for the suffering souls in purgatory!" How changed my life would be!

Today I challenge you to take this step with me, to begin to see little frustrations in the light of Christ. To see them not as mere burdens, but as graces, gifts to be given for our own sanctity and that of others, even people we have never met! Jesus tells us "take up your cross and follow me," but we do not carry this burden with sadness or weariness, but hope! For we know what a gift it is to suffer with Christ, and to follow him to the glory of the Resurrection. And everything is easier when we let in the love of Christ, who tells us, "my burden is easy and my yoke is light." God gives us the freedom to do what we will with the gifts of each day. Let us not waste the gifts we are given but let God use them to transform us.

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## Transformed by Love

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We can never forget that the One who loves us the most suffered too, more than we can ever know, to save us and draw us to Himself. And he is with us in every moment; when we cry, He cries with us, when we laugh, He laughs with us, and we are called to do the same with our brothers and sisters. As Christ died on the cross he said, "I thirst," and He was thirsting for our love more than anything else. But how can we love Him? We can see and love Him in each person we encounter today. We can fight frustrations, bitterness and antagonism with love, compassion and forgiveness. We can unite with Him in our little sufferings and so grow to understand his compassionate Heart while our own hearts transform into His likeness more and more each day. Thank you God, for the beautiful mystery of your great love!

Annemarie is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and a Nativity House intern.



## Behold Your Mother

...continued from page 1

I share these stories to bring to light real outcomes when we accept a culture that disrespects women. People getting angry that a school would open a daycare to help their students, who are also mothers, continue their education is just one example of our culture's assumption that women can't do extraordinary things like simultaneously maintain an education and raise a child. A man "piping down" a woman who was grieving because it "killed the vibes of the party" is just one example of a culture that hushes women when what they're saying isn't convenient to them. When it comes to justice for women the common answer, and the wrong one, is that women should change (i.e. woman shouldn't have gotten pregnant, woman should be quiet, woman should have abortion), rather than what should really be changed: the way we treat women.

We see this evident in a number of ways. We see this in the workplace. Women are still paid, on average, 20% less than men for the same work, and that gender pay gap is even larger for women of color. Women also have less of a chance of getting hired, especially true for pregnant women. I recently had a friend who was afraid to tell an interviewer that she is pregnant because she was nervous that they wouldn't hire her (that fear ultimately proven true). The answer to workplace injustices is often something along the lines of: "Well, women should get to a place in her career and climb the ladder before she has kids" or "Women are less reliable in the workplace because they can get

pregnant." Wouldn't a better answer be "we should really treat all of our employees equally, regardless of gender"?

We also see this in the recent decision of Illinois legislators who signed into law S.B. 40, a policy that provides insurance coverage for reproduction healthcare for low-income women, including through Medicaid, that includes abortion. In other words, S.B. 40 will use state tax dollars to help fund abortions. Meanwhile, the same legislators, haven't agreed on a state budget for years, affecting many non-profits forcing homeless shelters to close their doors. It has caused Lutheran Social Services, the largest social services provider in the state, to cut over 30 programs and eliminate over 750 positions, and left the Archdiocese of Chicago's

reasoning is convoluted. The means are immoral. The outcome is disastrous. And women are the pawns.

These issues are greater than bad policy and the inner workings of institutions. The problem is deeply rooted in a culture that doesn't only lack respect for life, but also lacks respect for women. That is why it is important for us, as people of faith, to speak up in the face of injustice and disrespect for women, be it in the workplace, in policy, or in everyday interactions. We are not pro-life unless we are pro-women. Without a doubt this is a fallen world and thank God we have hope in the Resurrection that won for us our redemption. As the Son of God was redeeming our humanity while dying on the Cross He told His disciples to "Behold, your Mother," that is behold Mary, a woman who had an unplanned pregnancy. Perhaps someday we

***It is high time [legislators] stop pretending like they actually care for the poor. The hypocrisy is unmatched. The reasoning is convoluted. The means are immoral. The outcome is disastrous.***

***And women are the pawns.***

Catholic Charities millions of dollars of debt owed to them by the state...just to name a couple of many examples.

The legislators passed S.B. 40 using the argument that poor women deserve the right to choose, yet they don't care to give them the more basic human right of food and shelter, let alone the most basic human right to life. It is high time that they stop pretending like they actually care for the poor. The hypocrisy is unmatched. The

will embrace the redemption won for us by Christ and behold and respect the mothers and women in our midst.

Kayla is the Coordinator of Justice and Peace for the Diocese of Joliet's Office for Human Dignity. Follow her on twitter @KaylaSueJacobs and the Justice and Peace ministry @paxjoliet.





# THE VISITATION

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## Bringing Christ into All the World

### St. John Paul II (1920-2005)

by Ellen Coman

On October 22, which corresponds to the date of his inauguration as the 263rd pope, we celebrate the feast day of St. John Paul II. “Go and bring Christ into all the world,” was St. John Paul II’s exhortation to a young Swiss Guard upon leaving his active service. Not unlike Christ’s message to his followers to “go and make disciples of all the nations,” St. John Paul II’s charge applies to all of us Christians. Fortunately, his legacy leaves us a quintessential example to follow.

Born on May 18, 1920 in Wadowice, Poland, Karol Józef Wojtyła experienced many hardships during his life, but was blessed to possess the faith to overcome them. By age 22, the young man had lost both parents and both siblings to death and had begun to experience the sting of Nazi occupation. By faith in God’s providence, Karol allowed these experiences to shape him into the compassionate, courageous, and wholly committed leader he eventually became.

We can attribute credit to St. John Paul II’s incredible track record to the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit. But

let us also reflect on how this special man consciously chose and nurtured being a vehicle of the Holy Spirit. St. John Paul II had a laser-like focus on fulfilling his vocation. He knew his life’s mission and drew immense energy to live it from his prayer practice. Prayer shaped and guided him to see all situations through the lens of God’s plan. Even situations which ordinarily one would consider outrageous, such as the assassination attempt he endured in 1981, to St. John Paul II, were opportunities to thank God. His uncanny attentiveness to individuals was, most surely, fruit grown from his countless hours spent listening to the still, small voice of God.

St. John Paul II wasn’t all work and no play. He knew that in order to maintain his rigorous spiritual leadership he needed regular recreation. He scheduled in time for sports, camping, music, friends along with the daily essentials of prayer, sleep, meals, work, and exercise. He knew that relationships were built and maintained through laughter and shared enjoyment.

St. John Paul II relished being with people from all walks or stages of life from all cultures. He traveled more than 700,000 miles to 130 countries, often prodding, pleading for human rights, speaking out on moral, ethical values, urging all to stay true to the Gospel. He was not short on courage to speak the truth in love, risking personal safety, at times, in places where his message was not entirely welcome. In 1985, St. John Paul II initiated World Youth Days, which continue every 2-3 years even today, to rally over 300,000 international young people and inspire them to be Christ’s light to the world. St. John Paul II, on October 27, 1986, invited leaders from 12 different religions to join him in praying for peace followed by sharing a meal together. Along with Mother Teresa, in 1987 he opened a homeless shelter in the Vatican bringing dignity to residents through spent together. In his 1979 message during Mass at Yankee Stadium St. John Paul II made a special appeal to Americans for charity to the weak, poor, vulnerable, giving not just out of abundance, but out of substance, treating them like guests at your family table. He went out of his way to bless the small children and wounded or ailing he encountered. St. John Paul II knew that to get others to learn from him, he must first learn about and know them.

Through the patient suffering from Parkinson’s disease that St. John Paul II endured in the later years of his life, he showed the world that there can be deep meaning and purpose to suffering. It can be an opportunity to share with Christ in the world’s redemption. Even beyond death he is still bringing Christ to the world since through his intercession numerous people are being miraculously healed and brought to faith. His legacy continues as well through numerous important documents he created and promulgated.

To be a Christ-bringer requires commitment, sacrifice, and humility. But it also brings great fulfillment and happiness. St. John Paul II could have enjoyed a career pursuing his passions of acting and teaching. He could have held on to his personal freedom, privacy, and pursuit of health. We thank God, though, for his sacrifice in laying down his life for others. May we too, in our own ways, “lift high the cross till all the world adore his sacred name.”

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