

A large, vibrant bouquet of purple flowers, possibly lilacs, is arranged in a clear glass pitcher. The flowers are in full bloom, with many small, delicate blossoms. The green leaves of the plant are visible, adding a fresh, natural feel. The pitcher is partially filled with water, and the stems of the flowers are submerged. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white, which makes the purple flowers stand out prominently.

# Blessings

CELEBRATING THE JOY OF FAITH .....

## THE POWER OF LOVE

FINDING TRUTH  
WHY CAN'T I SEE GOD?  
A CHANGE OF FAITH

SPRING 2014  
[wowblessingstoronto.com](http://wowblessingstoronto.com)





*faith*

**"IT IS JESUS WHO STIRS IN YOU**  
the desire to do something great with your lives,  
the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow  
yourselves to be ground down by mediocrity, the  
courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to  
improving yourselves and society, making the world  
more human and more fraternal."  
(Pope John Paul II)

## *Blessings* | EDITOR'S NOTE

### Live your FAITH

**MAY THE PEACE OF CHRIST BE WITH YOU!** We are so pleased to be able to put forth another issue of Blessings magazine! Our fourth issue is one that we hope touches your heart, opens your eyes to new aspects of your faith, and inspires you to go out and live the word of God!

At times it is difficult to take a step back and be thankful for all that God has given us, because we are so concerned with what seems to be lacking in our lives. We spend so much time and energy thinking about what we have lost, or never had, that we fail to see the wonderful opportunities and situations that God has placed in our path. So, today, count your blessings, be thankful, take the time to see the beauty and gifts in your life—and acknowledge and thank God for what he has done for you.

For many, this magazine truly has been a blessing; we know this because of the steady flow of comments, emails, and feedback that we receive. As happy as this makes us, we cannot continue on in this ministry without some help from our readers! At this time we would like to ask any of you who feel called to share a story, article, or inspiration of your own to please contact us. We cannot continue to produce and create magazines without contributions from people who have been touched by God and want to share their story. If you are a Priest or Sister, religious or lay person, we ask that you put a pen to paper and share your stories, ideas, and articles with us at [wowblessingstoronto.com](http://wowblessingstoronto.com)

It is our prayer to continue to work in a collaborative community. Share your life, share your story, open your hearts, and let others see how God has worked in your life. We look forward to hearing from all of you soon!

Pax Tibi,

*Daniela Di Panfilo*



*"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters,  
he restores my soul."*

*Psalm 23*



# Blessings

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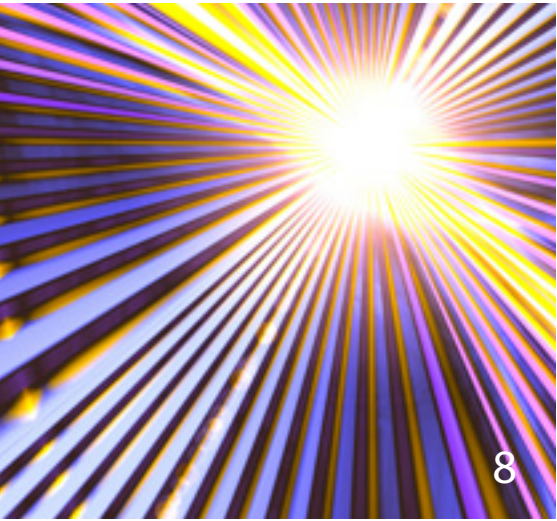
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# The Power of Love:

## A Parent's Influence

I watched her two daughters, just twenty-one and twenty-six, greet people, speak of their mother and remain poised throughout her funeral: in those moments I understood the power and effect of a mother's love on her children. They felt sorrow, but their mom and dad had given them the foundation they would need to navigate their lives – to love and be loved.

God created us in love for love. He created the world and humankind and then entrusted us as co-creators for all future generations. He gave us the privilege of both bringing life into the world and then nurturing our children to know and love God. Every child needs a solid foundation on which to grow, one that includes loving relationships with others, but most importantly with God. Parents have been tasked with laying this foundation.

This obligation cannot be taken lightly - being co-creators gives mere mortals a share in divine work. Women have been given the gift of carrying life within their womb, acting as holy vessels for God's beloved. Mary carried the divine in her womb, but every child is fashioned in the image and likeness of God. In our role as mothers we are united with Mary who is the model par excellence of maternal love, faith and trust. She trusted in God's will, showed us that a deep love for Jesus can help us in our sorrows and revealed that God never abandons us but rewards our faithfulness.

As Catholics we believe that parents are the first and most important educators of their children. By modeling and leading, parents teach about faith and love. They are the most influential in teaching about God and integrating values into their child's life. Parents are evangelizers of their children, witnesses of the Good News to them.

St. Francis of Assisi said, "Evangelizing a person, you see, is saying to them: You also are loved by God through Jesus Christ." We are called to live holy lives because this is how we will evangelize our children. We model by the way we live our lives each and every day. Our children will be watching how we interact in our day to day living, how and when we pray, and how much attention we give to God – what we do will impact them more than what we say. Our daily commitment to a faith that we say is important will give our children a solid foundation on which to build their own faith story.

Pope Francis, at his September 12, 2013 general audience, said that "the Church nourishes us, helps us to grow, teaches us the path to follow and accompanies us in life." He went on to say that, "By reflecting on the human experience of maternity, we understand that the Church is like our own mothers." His words are a template for each mother's role in the life of her children: leaving a legacy of love, faith and Christian values. Children grow and leave their homes and eventually parents die, but when the foundation is strong love and faith go on and hope never dies.

*Teresa Hartnett is the Director of Family Ministry for the Diocese of Hamilton. She has a degree in Kinesiology from McMaster University, a Bachelor of Education from Brock University, a Masters in Religious Education from St. Augustine/University of Toronto, and is certified in a number of family, counselling, marriage, and relationship programs. Her experience with numerous agencies and committees gives her extensive knowledge in dealing with family, communication, and parenting issues. She has been married to Joe for 34 years, has four children, and is a grandmother to Ann Marie.*





# WHY CAN'T I SEE GOD?

WRITTEN BY FR. PIERRE FARRUGIA

**My dear brothers and sisters:  
PEACE BE TO YOU.**

OUR HOME IS NOT IN THIS WORLD, and a destination awaits us which is beyond our greatest imagination. If you think about this journey we make towards Heaven, all of us, without exception, have to face the ups and downs, the roses and the thorns, the joy and the sadness, and so many other polar opposites that keep our lives at an interesting balance. At times the scales will tip more into darkness and helplessness. In desperation we call out to God for a quick and ready remedy and, if it comes to us, well and good, and “glory be to God,” and we move on. If it does not come, well, we somehow think God is on a heavenly break somewhere, reminiscing with his celestial angels. Or, maybe we think that he couldn’t care less, or, perhaps the most horrific of all, that it’s all a fairy tale to begin with, and that he simply doesn’t exist. Secular life is then embraced, and all else is cast aside as improbable or, at best, unknowable, for who has ever seen God?

To make matters worse, it is at these moments that scoffers may approach and ridicule any remnant of faith that may still be alive within us. “Oh yes... God!” they say with a sarcastic smile. “God is so good, but look at the horrible situation you’re in!” Here the smile turns into a grimace, and with tones of anger they try to knock some worldly sense into you. “Where is God when you need him the most? Oh, let me guess—he wants you to wait a little longer,” they say. And then they reiterate semblances of Satan’s temptations to Jesus in the desert: “Why doesn’t he just *show himself*, then you will know for sure that he exists! Then you will know for sure that this waiting game is all part of something real and that it’s all in ‘his plan!’”

How to persevere then, when we cannot see God in even the most dire of circumstances? Perhaps this question ought to be premised by a more basic one, namely: can we *ever* see God? If we seek an answer in scripture, the answer is yes, but it will remind us that we will see him in his essence, for who he is. For, as God himself declared to Moses, “...you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live” (Ex 33:20). If we seek the answer in reason, the answer is the same, for how can we see the One who from nothing brought about the Universe if we cannot even look at the sun, which he has created, for prolonged periods of time without damaging our eyes?

In the Book of Acts, Saul (who was on his way to Damascus to exterminate Christianity, as he thought it and its founder a fake), had a glimpse into God’s essence. He saw a great light, and was blinded instantly (Acts 9:8). He could not see God. It is only when Jesus in his risen form sent Ananias to pray over him that his vision was restored. The God, therefore, who created the suns and the stars whose light we can barely look upon, will naturally be too luminous

for our mortal eyes. Paul learned this firsthand that day on his way to Damascus and then wrote about Jesus, “... who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” (1 Tim 6:16).

And so here is the conundrum: if we cannot see him, how does he communicate with us? Simply put—by assuming the form of visible signs (objects, gestures, words) that we *are* able to look upon!

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If you think about this journey we  
make towards Heaven, all of us,  
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---

In fact, this is the basic definition of the term *sacrament*—when God takes upon himself a visible form through which he imparts his invisible presence and grace. With Moses, for example, it was fire. It was real fire, but in the flames God made himself present to Moses. So, too, in Jesus’ human nature, God veiled himself with true flesh and true blood, and in the Eucharist, with real bread and wine to be present with us, because he loves us.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, let not your heart be troubled if anyone challenges you about not being able to “see God,” especially when you’re down and out. Keep all this in mind, and with love demonstrate why it is so. May God bless you always.



Fr. Pierre Farrugia, OFM, has been a Franciscan priest for eight years. He has studied and received BAs in Philosophy/Psychology/Theology from the University of Malta and the Angelicum in Rome. He then went on to do a Licentiate in Franciscan Spirituality while at the Antonianum University in Rome. He currently resides and ministers to various groups of retreatants of all ages out of St. Francis Centre for Religious Studies in Caledon, Ontario.

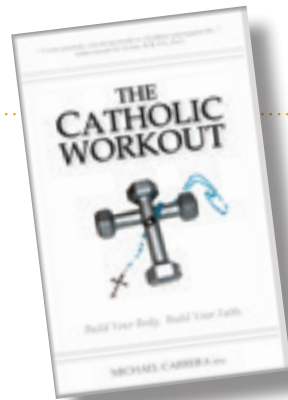


**FITNESS** *and*

# *Faith:* *the* **Catholic Workout**

Written by Michael Carrera

*I created The Catholic Workout over three years ago. I wanted to create a program that combined fitness and faith, a program that strengthened the body but also encouraged a deeper and more profound love for Christ.*



Inspired by the Passion of Christ, The Catholic Workout introduces and guides you through five specific toning exercises while praying the Rosary. Each exercise represents a particular moment in the Passion, which includes the *Scouring and Nailing of the Hands*, *Raising the Cross*, *Nailing of the Feet*, *Removal of Nails and Lowering of the Body*, and the *Resurrection and Ascension*. For example, the *Dumbbell Upward Swing* exercise, shown here, illustrates the *Raising of the Cross*.

It is our God-given right to be healthy, strong, and stable. Our faith depends on it. The goal of *The Catholic Workout* is very simple: *When You Build Your Body, You Build Your Faith*. Physical fitness not only improves your health and makes you feel better about yourself, it also inspires you to better connect with the Lord and with a spiritual community. Whether you want to lose weight, have more energy or, quite frankly, exercise to look and feel better, keep in mind that as you better yourself, you also better your spirit. How?

When you look good, you feel good.

When you feel good, you want to do good.

When you do good, you feel better.

When you feel better, you want to do more of what made you feel good.

**That is... Better yourself!**



**The Dumbbell Upward Swing**

Michael Carrera has a Masters in Exercise Science and is a Certified Exercise Physiologist. Michael has published books, chapters, and articles in the areas of health, fitness, and sports conditioning. He is a Wellness Coach for both individual and corporate clients. His most recent book, *The Catholic Workout: Build Your Body. Build Your Faith*, can be purchased at [www.thecatholicworkout.com](http://www.thecatholicworkout.com). Michael lives in Toronto and is married with four young children.

“do **not** be afraid,  
for I am your **God**; I will  
*strengthen you, I will*  
help you, **I will** uphold you  
*with my victorious*  
**right hand.**”

*Isaiah 41:9-11*





# Be Healed!

Written by Dr. Michael J. Vecchio

Twenty-four years ago, through the blessing of an illness, I was called to a greater appreciation of my identity, my purpose in life, and a better management of myself and the struggles of daily life, both personal and social. Our most loving and merciful Eternal Father through that illness invited me to take my place on Mount Calvary at the foot of the cross on which He permitted His Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to pay for my redemption with His very own life. By Divine grace, I understood the call, responding with the consecration of my life and my work to His holy service. I accepted His call to become His disciple by committing myself to "deny myself, take up my cross daily, and follow Him." Since that commitment, my life has not been without problems and struggles, but I have proceeded to live it with constant love, hope, and peace of mind and heart.

I am a family physician in practice for the last 36 years. Hundreds of thousands of people have come before me with their various miseries seeking compassion, mercy, and healing. I searched for Jesus, wounded or crucified, in each of these neighbours for whom I was asked to be a "good Samaritan." I came out of myself to give myself joyfully and wholeheartedly, answering the Divine call to love and to serve. Christian life is a sacrifice! But the burden of the sacrifice is made lighter by our Union with Jesus, through the intercession and assistance of His holy mother, Mary. She gratefully accepts our daily offerings of love and patient suffering, which she uses to obtain merit for us and grace to save souls.

Without exception, every day I encounter patients who suffer from depression or anxiety. Practically everyone suffers from these problems at some point in their life. Depression may follow traumatic life events, including medical illness, presence of difficult or abusive relationships, consequences of financial problems, housing difficulties, prejudice, and workplace stress. Anxiety may be part of any of the above, or even occur without ev-

ident cause. Regardless, I encounter daily a large number of people who have significant difficulty managing themselves in dealing with these problems, and who require much time and emotional support. I frequently have to resort to the prescription of antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications to help them cope. However, I do know very well that these alone cannot effectively resolve the problems. Beyond the applied compassion of a loving neighbour, they need faithfully to reach out to and embrace the consolation and healing of the living God, who will absolutely manifest His love and compassion in some definite way. In order to heal us spiritually, followed by our mental and physical healing, our Heavenly Father asks us to imitate Jesus and mother Mary in loving, serving, and forgiving: constantly, joyfully, and selflessly. Thus we will be freed to live our lives fully and peacefully, fulfilling His purpose for our eternal happiness.

You will experience much spiritual and mental freedom if you can frequently meditate and pray St. Francis of Assisi's Peace Prayer. God bless you in all your needs!

*"Since that commitment, my life has not been without problems and struggles, but I have proceeded to live it with constant love, hope, and peace of mind and heart."*

## Peace Prayer of *Saint Francis of Assisi*

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.*

*Where there is hatred, let me sow love;*

*where there is injury, pardon;*

*where there is doubt, faith;*

*where there is despair, hope;*

*where there is darkness, light;*

*and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek*

*to be consoled as to console;*

*to be understood as to understand;*

*to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive;*

*it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;*

*and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Amen





# Are You Faithful to...



Written by Maria Raissa Espinoza

Maria Raissa Espinoza is a full-time Catholic youth minister at St. Patrick's Parish in Mississauga. Before landing her dream job, Maria was a fashion industry professional working for a boutique design house, making clothes for Holt Renfrew, Lord & Taylor, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Hudson's Bay. Besides working with teens, she is a wedding planner and free-lance stylist. According to her Twitter account (@cordille), she loves God, family, damask, coffee, and anything pink.

## or Is Fashion Faithful to You?

The way in which we decide to dress powerfully communicates how we feel about ourselves and, in turn, how we want others to view and treat us. Our fashion choices are a true expression of ourselves. This is why dressing modestly is so important. By dressing appropriately we are allowing others to not be distracted by our bodies, but to be attracted to our personhood, our goodness, and our desire for holiness. It shows that we respect ourselves, that we recognize our dignity as a daughter of God, and that we love and respect the other person enough to preserve their chastity by not allowing them to have impure thoughts about us.

So can we still be fashion trendsetters and modest at the same time? Of course! Since fashion is an expression of yourself, you can still have a great time putting outfits together that are fun, fabulous, and faithful! Here are three practical fashion questions to ask yourself when you are putting together outfits or trying out a new trend:

1. Are you comfortable? New trends can be scary, like print-jamming and pattern mixing. The key is to be comfortable and confident in every outfit, so if you are not "feeling it," it's probably not for you. Tip: Choose comfortable fabrics that you can wear day to night, like cotton or viscose jerseys, and denim with a spandex content.
2. Are you wearing the right size? Unfortunately, there is no universal sizing standard in the fashion industry. You can be a size 2 in one store and a size 8 in another, so the key is to try it on. Tip: Balance outfits to create easy looks. For example, if you are wearing a soft chiffon blouse, pair it with a structured pant and, vice versa, pair a structured top with a looser bottom.
3. Can you wear this outfit to mass? If the answer is no, then change. If it's not appropriate to wear in the house of God, it is not appropriate to wear out of your house. Tip: Layer, layer, layer! Throw a cardigan or blazer on over that sleeveless top, wear opaque tights with that mini skirt, and wear a tank top under that see-through chiffon blouse.

## FOOD and

## Faith

Written by Melissa Di Donato Attard



### BARLEY AND MUSHROOM SOUP

- ½ cup barley
- 6-8 cups vegetable broth
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- ½ fennel bulb, diced
- 2½ cups crimini mushrooms, sliced
- ½ cup tawny port (optional)
- 1 tbsp chopped parsley
- 1 tbsp chopped thyme
- ½ tbsp chopped sage
- sea salt to taste

Rinse and soak the barley in warm water while preparing the other ingredients.

Heat about 1 to 2 tablespoons of the broth in a soup pot. In the heated broth, sauté the onion, garlic, and fennel for about 5 minutes over medium heat.

Add the mushrooms and sauté for another 3 to 5 minutes.

Drain the barley and add to the soup pot along with the port and cook for about 2 minutes.

Add the remainder of the broth and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium and simmer for approximately 60 minutes or until barley is tender.

Add the herbs and sea salt and enjoy!

*Soups and stews are a wonderful way to have a nutrient-dense meal on a cold winter's day. As a whole grain, barley is an excellent source of fibre and selenium. A diet rich in whole grains like barley can help us to reduce our risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Add barley to any of your favourite soup or stew recipes and enjoy the health benefits of a hearty and warming meal.*

.....  
Melissa Di Donato Attard, H.BSc, BASc, RNCP, received her Honours Science Degree from the University of Waterloo, and a Bachelor of Applied Science in Nutrition and Food from Ryerson University. She also attended the Institute of Holistic Nutrition, where she spent over 600 hours in preparation to become a nutritional consultant. As a Registered Nutritional Consulting Practitioner, Melissa is a member of the International Organization of Nutritional Consultants.





# FINDING *Truth*

Written by Gizela Cardoso

I was raised in a Portuguese family where visiting and consulting mediums was common, especially for those who lived in small villages. Although we were Catholic, many of our beliefs were mixed with superstition. At the age of seven, I was visiting mediums with my family. My parents believed they would receive help from the mediums with their problems, such as unexplained illness, bad luck, and other situations. I was raised thinking mediums are people who have very powerful gifts, including the ability to allow spirits to enter our bodies and speak directly to us. These people, and their gifts, impressed me, but the thought of them seeing spirits really scared me.

During one of our visits to a medium I was told I had the gift of healing, and that in the future I would be helping many people. I was also told that around me were many Guides. In the medium world, Guides are spirits that surround you to protect you. They could be angels, saints, or other souls who have passed away. In my early twenties I began experiencing unusual visions—I started to see spirits. I didn't understand what was happening and became afraid of these visions. I tried to ignore what was going on, but it didn't help, and as time went on these experiences intensified. I began seeing spirits everywhere. In fear, I went to my parents and told them what was happening. Unsure of what to do, my parents took me to see a medium. The medium explained what was happening, and told us not to be afraid and what I could do to use this gift. I was told my gift would help others. This made me happy because I always wanted to help others, especially in the wellness and health area. I pursued studies in natural therapy and became a massage therapist, aromatherapist, and a natural herbalist. I became a business owner at a young age and was reaping the rewards of my success.

At one point in my life, after working for many years, the visions—good and bad—started affecting me in a negative way. Very frightening and unexplained events were occurring. I didn't know what to do or who to speak to in order to receive help. My parents told my aunt and they decided I should go and speak to a woman who was an acquaintance of my aunt's. This woman advised me to go back to mass and confession, to get a spiritual director, and to stop seeing mediums. She also advised that I should continue helping people with problems. Reflecting back, I should have spoken to a priest, but I was still too ignorant and naïve about my faith to know better and I trusted what this person was telling me. What was a spiritual director?

As time went on, these frightening experiences continued. This time I went to speak directly to a priest. While telling him my story he asked me, "Gizela, how do you know that the visions you are experiencing are from a good source?" I was taken aback by his remarks. I never would have considered anything different, since the spirits I saw were saints and angels. And they helped people. How could they be from a negative source? The Priest told me how Satan likes to deceive people, and he suggested next time I see a spirit I should utter these words: "Jesus is my Saviour, is he yours?"

The very next day, while helping someone, I had a saintly vision and I quickly said to this spirit, "Jesus is my Saviour, is he yours?" As soon as I uttered those words the spirit transformed into something

so terrifying and ugly it's hard to imagine or recount. Each time I saw a spirit I would ask the same question. I can't describe how disfigured and ugly they became. These images frightened me so much that I never wanted to see them again. They led me on my journey of faith. How could I have been so deceived? And why are so many Catholics deceived? What I believed to be true was not and I was determined to find out the truth. What were the teachings of the Catholic Church? Why did my parents and relatives not know their own faith?

I was thirsting for knowledge. I needed to know what the Church taught, and I wanted to inform myself and warn others as well, so much so that I was inspired to open a Catholic bookstore. I met many practising Catholics who helped guide me back to the Church. Their faith was solid, built on the teachings of the Holy Bible, the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and gospels and doctrine—not on superstition.

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## "Jesus is my Saviour, is He yours?"

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It was this truth that set me free and converted my life. I have come to know the true faith and have been studying the teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola. I recommend caution on visions as faith is believing without seeing. Consult always with a spiritual director or a priest. And question why someone who has a gift would not be using it within the Church.

There is a lot of confusion today about religion. New Age methods are often being raised as possible teachings within the Catholic Church. Take caution. Always fall back on doctrine and the teachings of our Church, which was founded by Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessings.

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Gizela was born in Canada, to Portuguese immigrant parents. She is a single lay Catholic who has devoted her life to Christ and Church.



# Signs of the Cross

Written by Christopher Elliott

Every morning I begin my day with the Sign of the Cross. But my day does not start in a church but in a bathroom. In my job as a Personal Support Worker, I visit the sick and elderly in their homes and provide them with personal care. My work affords me the opportunity to encounter Jesus in some very special and unique ways. One man in particular comes to mind. When I begin to prepare him for his shower, I start by kneeling down to remove his socks. One day as he was watching me do this, he became somewhat amused because my posture gave him the impression that I was going to start praying! He said to me with a smile, "Don't forget, you're in church!" And then he made the Sign of the Cross.

In that instant I saw that what I was doing in that bathroom as a part of my job was a sacred act. Recognizing at that moment that I was in the presence of Jesus living in this man, I also made the Sign of the Cross. That happened over a year ago, and now he and I always begin the day with the Sign of Cross. A "sacrament" is a visible sign through which we receive the grace of God. Most of us don't see the "sacramental" nature of what we do every day, but any work we do has the potential to be sacred if we allow Jesus to use it to help others experience His love.

I have been working with the terminally ill for many years now. I have personally attended over 300 hospice patients, and I have experienced some extraordinary moments in my time with them. Being by their side, I have been privileged to see Jesus reveal Himself in their last days. One person who comes to mind is a woman named Marie. I first met her at the church I was attending in California. She was the church secretary, and a wonderful woman with a great sense of humour. Marie found out that she had cancer, and it was at a very advanced stage. Her doctor recommended some aggressive chemotherapy treatments in the hope that they might trigger a remission. If any of you have ever accompanied someone to chemotherapy, you know that it is a hard day. There is

the waiting, the insertion of the IV, the slow process of infusion, and the general feeling of sickness and desperation by the other people there.

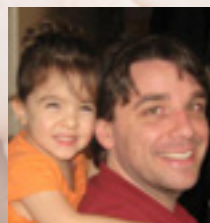
Chemotherapy is always accompanied by side effects that can range from mild to severe. There is the loss of hair, vomiting, weakness, pain, and extreme fatigue. However, Marie developed a side effect that I had never seen before: the front and backs of her hands and feet became red and blistered, and burned like fire. No other part of her body was affected in this way. I immediately knew that Jesus was suffering with her because she carried His wounds.

When Jesus said, "I was sick and you visited me," He was not speaking metaphorically. Jesus really lives, suffers, dies, and rises again in these people. Marie's hands and feet were dramatic testimony to me that God was with her through her pain and suffering, and that one day she would be with Him forever.

Another time when I saw Jesus in Marie was in the waiting room of the chemo clinic. We had been going for weeks, and she had had enough. She was tired, weak, and was losing the will to continue. She looked over at me and said, "I don't think I can go on..." In that instant I saw in my mind Jesus falling under the weight of His cross on the way to Calvary. I said to her what I would have said to Him: "You can do this. You are the strongest person I have ever known. All you have to do is go on for a little longer." And she did. Now she knows the joy of seeing Him face to face.

*Christopher Elliott has worked in the healthcare field for almost 10 years as a Nurses' Aide and Personal Support Worker. He is originally from the United States and came to Canada in 2006. Chris is married and has a 4 year old daughter and is in formation for the Secular Franciscans at St. Peter's Church in Woodbridge. He is also a founding member of the St. Mary of the Angels Catholic Worker which focuses on providing support for those who experience loneliness in the community and in institutional settings.*

<http://www.smacatholicworker.com/>



# Pope Francis

*"Jesus teaches us  
another way: Go out.  
Go out and share  
your testimony,  
go out and interact with  
your brothers,  
go out and share,  
go out and ask.  
Become the Word in body  
as well as spirit."*





# Ask Deacon Steve

Deacon Steve was ordained on May 26, 2012 in the Archdiocese of Toronto. He has his Liturgical Ministry at Our Lady of the Annunciation in Richmond Hill. He is married and has a daughter.

**Q.** What would you say to someone having a hard time conceiving children?

**A.** One of the things that I have come to learn is that God never abandons us, even when we think we are alone. In life we are given many blessings by God and, while we may not always recognize them, He does sometimes make it easy for us to know they are from Him.

My wife Claudia and I were married in October 1996. Just like many other couples, we were open to having children and were looking forward to the day when we would have our own children. The first few years of our marriage came and went with no children. We were not worried, figuring that it just wasn't "our time" yet.

When we would normally have started to worry about it, I was diagnosed with a serious health issue. Our focus for the next five years was my health, hospitals, and pain. Eventually it ended with me being restored to health. During this time, I was learning to trust God, and realizing that my prayers were being answered, but not always the way I wanted them to be.

It was now almost 9 years from when we married. I was recuperating, and our focus turned to why we still had no children, as there was no reason why not. For the next 6 years we were filled with confusion, anger, and sadness. We couldn't understand what was going on. We were blessed multiple times in conceiving, but none of our children were ever brought to full term and born. With each miscarriage, we suffered in silence; the deaths of our unborn children were like a deafening silence. I am not sure why, but when a couple suffers a miscarriage it seems to carry a stigma and it's as if society does not want to mourn with the couple. It's as if there is an understanding that since the baby was not born there is no mourning, but this is not the truth. A couple who loses a child always mourn the loss of their child.



It was difficult to not have a child, and it was equally painful watching my wife suffer and not be able to do anything about it. There is an unspoken hurt in seeing and congratulating friends on the birth of their children, when inside you are thinking: God, why are you punishing us? Why can we not see the fruit of your love and our love?

You struggle with the understanding of it all, and constantly think: What are the prayers that I can say, and how do I get my miracle? What have I done to suffer this? And you continue to pray to God knowing that you have this longing in your heart. Yet in all of this pain, questioning, and trial, I knew God was there with us.

In October 2011, I came to the point where I thought it was enough. It did not seem to be our calling to be natural parents, so in late November we went to see an adoption professional. We talked about all of the steps and conditions that we had to go through to adopt a child and, given that it was late November, we said let's just start in the new year.

In the first weekend of that December, it was my deacon formation weekend (the formation are weekends that we go to the seminary for academic programs and, more importantly, to pray together as a community). The topic of this specific weekend was Mary and specifically Mary as the Mother of God. It truly was a very difficult weekend for me, not because of the academics, but because here we were studying the Motherhood of Mary, and all I could think of was having a child. I kept thinking in my heart that Claudia was called to her own motherhood. Given this constant thought, I decided that I would go into the chapel before going to get lunch. I remember my prayers that day and remember asking for Mother Mary's intercession. It was the first time that I did something that was different — I basically gave my desire for a child, and the fact that I knew that Claudia was called to be a mother, to Mary under Mother of God and prayed: "Mary, you are a mother, and you know what it means to be a mother. Claudia has such great capacity to love and deserves to be a mother, and I leave it to you to figure it out." That was it. I literally decided that I would not ever understand any of this and that I could not do anything; the only thing I could do was to give up and leave it in Mother Mary's hands and her intercession.

Not too long afterwards, on Christmas Eve, we received a phone call saying that Claudia was pregnant. We were not expecting that. We were extremely excited and afraid. Given our history, we decided that we would not say anything to anyone for months. We were also waiting for a second confirmation of Claudia's pregnancy.

A few days later we were in the Cathedral with relatives who were visiting from Italy, and we were taking a few moments from

sightseeing to quietly say our own silent prayers. While we were praying, the silence was broken by Claudia's cell phone ringing. It was great news: the second tests confirmed that we were pregnant.

The next few months we were on pins and needles. We prayed every night and blessed our child every night. Every day that went by and our child was with us was a blessing. Months went by and finally we felt it was time to tell others that we were pregnant. I was ordained as a deacon and Claudia was slightly more than 5 months pregnant, and the joy that others shared with us was incredible. Another true gift was to have our baby there on the day I was ordained.

I received my liturgical assignment and where do I get sent to—Our Lady of the Annunciation parish; patronage of the parish is Mary and under the title of when she finds out she is pregnant. On September 14th, we were blessed with our daughter Julia, and to this day I am still speechless and in complete awe of the gift that she is from God.

The serendipity of everything does not escape me. The weekend on Mary's motherhood, the finding out about being pregnant on Christmas Eve, receiving confirmation in a Cathedral, the fact that I was sent to a parish named after Mother Mary finding about her own pregnancy — it is too much for me to personally believe it was a coincidence. I know that God answered our prayer, and for me all of these events are confirmation that it was Him who was behind it all. Our daughter Julia is an incredibly happy child. She reflects the joy and happiness that all children bring and is also the person that God is using to remind me that He is Love and to always trust Him.

So I shared this story to remind everyone that God is with you at all times. For anyone struggling with wanting to have a child — first, God is not punishing you; second, trust Him; and third, truly know that whatever happens He is with you through your struggle. And lastly, no matter what happens in life, God loves you beyond all measure.

*"During this time, I was learning to trust God and realizing that my prayers were being answered, but, not always the way I want them to be."*



# A CHANGE OF FAITH

## *“The story of My Conversion”* Written by Vada Martinez



I always wondered about the meaning of my dreams. On several occasions I experienced the same dream, which consisted of messy, white, rapidly moving clouds with “JESUS” spelled out in large multi-coloured letters. I remember it clearly, like it was just the other day.

***My name is Vada Martinez and this is the story of my conversion.***

I am 51 years old. I was born in a small town in Guyana, South America, in a culture predominated by the Hindu religion. Other religions, including Christianity, are practised, however, in all the schools Christianity plays a major role in education.

As I was growing up, I was a devoted Hindu, which was encouraged by my parents. Even though Hinduism is a different religion, the moral teachings are no different from what I teach my children today. I remember my dad telling me on many occasions, “Don’t ever be afraid of human beings because they are not God, but be afraid of God because He is the Almighty One.”

I left Guyana in 1985, at the age of 23. I lived with a Jewish family for three years while attending Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology. During those years I did not socialize much. I met my best friend and husband-to-be in 1988 at the first party I attended, just as if God had planned it. He was

born a Catholic but was not practising his faith at that time.

In June of 1991, we got engaged, and were married on August 31, 1991, at Our Lady of Guadeloupe Church. It was an interfaith marriage. One of my vows was that I promised to raise our child/children in the Catholic Faith. I

never thought of becoming a Catholic, and my husband had never once asked me to become one, or if I would like to convert. It was fine with him having a Hindu wife. In February of 1993 God blessed us with our first-born child. She was baptized when she was a year old and, at age 7, she received her First Communion.

We were a Christian family, but were not entirely practising at that time. As our daughter got older we attended Mass regularly, with my husband being the only one receiving communion. This was during the years prior to me becoming a Catholic.

As an only child for approximately 6 years, it was inevitable that our daughter would ask for a sibling, so the pressure was on. We were blessed with a pregnancy, our son Joseph Angel Martinez, for 18 weeks in 2000. Unfortunately on May 31, 2000, I had a miscarriage. This tragedy shocked the entire family, especially me. It was a very difficult decision for me to actually give up my child. I was refusing to deliver my baby, but I was developing an infection and had a high fever; he was dying

in my womb. Even though I was not a Catholic at the time, I asked to see a priest before anything else. The priest came and did the Anointing of the Sick, and he told my husband that when I delivered the baby we could baptize him, which we did.

I came home after 1 ½ weeks in the hospital. I received many arrangements and baskets from caring people but, despite the abundant support, I still felt empty. I tried many different types of medication for anxiety and depression, but nothing seemed to work. Then one day something very powerful suddenly happened: the force of wanting to be closer to Jesus. My thoughts lingered on those dreams with Jesus’ name spelled out in the clouds, and I knew what I had to do.

Wanting to know what I needed to do to become a Catholic, I called St. David’s Church. I was told that the RCIA classes had already begun. I was very brokenhearted; I felt empty. Approximately 30 minutes went by, then the phone rang and I was told that it was okay to come in and register for the classes. Words could not express the enthusiasm I felt.

I started my classes with passion and full of energy, and I really enjoyed the sessions. I drove my teachers to the extreme with curiosity and questions wanting and thirsting for more knowledge. At this point I felt better and told my family doctor that I wanted to be off my medications, which he did not agree with. He wanted me to continue until I was totally healed. I told him that I did not need medication, that my Lord Jesus Christ would cure me, and he smiled. I gave my life to my Lord, and I did not need any medication for anxiety and depression anymore. I was feeling real healing. Even though I was not a full-fledged Catholic, I accepted Jesus and could feel and see the difference in my life from the time that I said “yes.”

I was pregnant with my second daughter at the age of 39. My obstetrician told me that there was a 99% chance that my child would be born with Down syndrome. Not understanding much of the Catholic faith, I thought to myself, “Oh, my gosh, I

don’t think that I can handle a sick child!” My husband then said to me, “My love, whatever God gives us, we will accept.” With my husband’s words it did not take a minute for my mind to be changed, to understand the importance of Catholic values, and I put everything in the Lord’s hands.

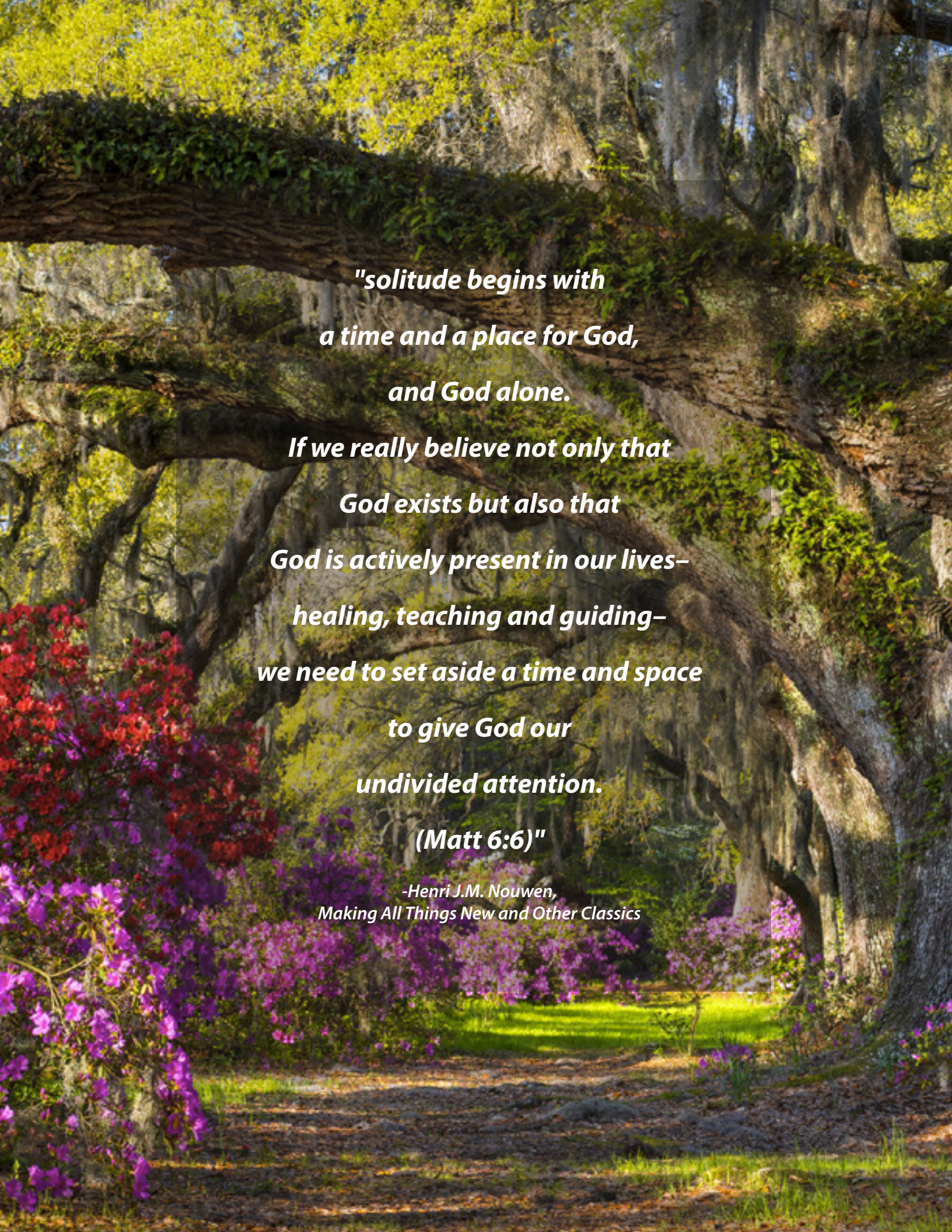
Through it all, my pregnancy was very complicated. My obstetrician called us in to see her right away. We were told that test results showed that the baby was in serious danger, but there was not much they could do. I would have to lie in bed throughout my pregnancy and yet there was still no guarantee that the baby would be safe. A few weeks went by and I went for another test. My obstetrician was stunned by the results. She said in all her years of practice she had never seen a problem such as mine resolve itself. I looked her straight in the eye and told her, “I know why.” She asked me why, and I told her it was my Lord Jesus Christ. She smiled without saying anything. My faith was so strong at that point in time that nothing and no one could convince me otherwise. I knew that He would beat any odds.

In April 2001 (Easter Vigil), I received all my Sacraments together with my unborn child in me. I became a new, full-fledged Roman Catholic. It was and has been a holy experience from that date onwards, a totally new birth for me and my family as practising Catholics. I could feel my faith deepen each day, with Jesus working wonders in our lives. We have been very privileged to serve our Lord as a family and as individuals. The return is phenomenal and beyond any gratification you can imagine. You know God is in your life when you stop and think, “WWJD?” I accepted Jesus in my life 13 years ago. It was the most important decision I have ever made. Since that time I’ve had a growing sense of purpose, peace, and fulfillment that is based on my personal relationship with my Lord Jesus Christ.

Vada Martinez is a wife, mother and works as an executive assistant. She spends many hours volunteering at St. David’s Parish in Maple, Ontario.

*“I could feel my faith deepen each day,  
with **JESUS** working wonders in our lives.”*





*"solitude begins with  
a time and a place for God,  
and God alone.  
If we really believe not only that  
God exists but also that  
God is actively present in our lives—  
healing, teaching and guiding—  
we need to set aside a time and space  
to give God our  
undivided attention.*

*(Matt 6:6)"*

*-Henri J.M. Nouwen,  
Making All Things New and Other Classics*