



Blessings

CELEBRATING THE JOY OF FAITH.....

CHRIST IS RISEN!
HE IS RISEN INDEED!

THIS TOO SHALL PASS
THE JOY OF GARDENING
MORE THAN OK

SPRING 2013
blessingsmagazine.ca



Love

“LONG BEFORE ANY HUMAN BEING SAW US, we are seen by God’s loving eyes. Long before anyone heard us cry or laugh, we are heard by our God who is all ears for us. Long before any person spoke to us in this world, we are spoken to by the voice of eternal love. Our preciousness, uniqueness, and individuality are not given to us by those who meet us in clock time — our brief chronological existence — but by the One who has chosen us with an everlasting love, a love that existed from all eternity and will last through all eternity.” ~ Fr. Henry Nouwen (*Life of the Beloved*)

Blessings EDITOR’S NOTE

Choose to TRUST

TRUST IS VITAL TO ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE, and to all relationships. It is essential to our capacity to work, grow, live, and love. But how many of us truly trust in God’s plan for us? In the midst of our darker hours, do we believe and trust that God is there walking beside us? Do we have faith in His love for us? At times, it is easy to lose sight of God’s love in our lives. It seems easier to blame our inadequacies and struggles on His absence, yet He is right next to us, no matter how much we may try to push Him away.

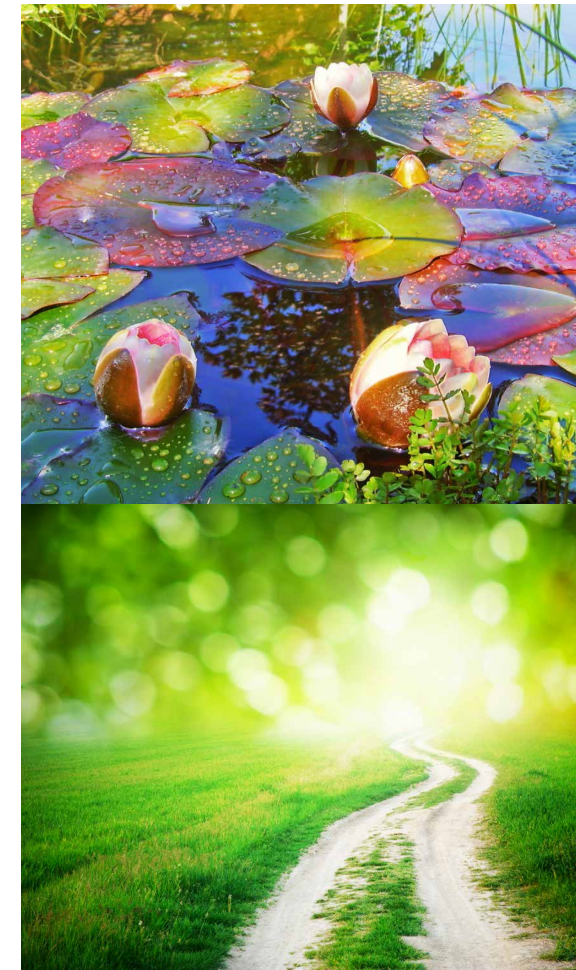
The notion that God truly loves us may be a difficult idea to accept, but nonetheless our faith is based on selfless love. It is humbling to comprehend that Jesus gave His life for us simply because He loved us. “God so loved the world that he gave his son, so that we may have eternal life.” (*John 3:16*)

God is everywhere: He is present in nature, in others, in us all. Once we are open to Him and trust Him, we will find Him, along with the peace we need to calm our hearts.

Spring is a time for new beginnings. Each day new life emerges around us as we witness the return of warmth and light to our lives. We trust that after a harsh winter the dark and cold will disappear and bring the promise of life. We must trust that even in the darkness, Christ is there, breathing new life and light into our hearts. Choose to trust in Him and in His love for you. Trust in His plan for your life. Happy Spring!

Pax Tibi,

Daniela Di Panfilo



“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

Philippians 4:6

Blessings

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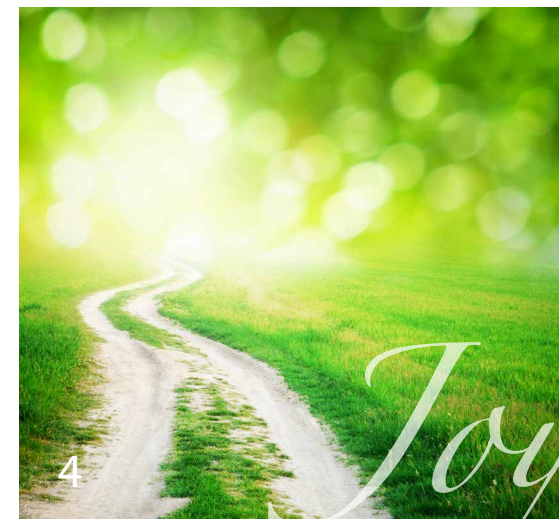
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MORE THAN OK

WRITTEN BY JOAN ATTARD

I was born in Malta, where being Catholic was a way of life.

At a very young age I was in awe that God loved ordinary, awkward me!

I had wonderful parents who taught my six siblings and I the importance of inner strength. We were raised not being afraid to speak our mind and to not worry too much about living up to everyone else's expectations. Mom's motto was: "Do what is pleasing to God; make sure it is your best and God will do the rest."

This lesson was critical in my life's journey.



Two simple prayers to the Sacred Heart of Jesus became constant. One was: "Jesus, watch over me," to which I often added "and do not blink, Lord, because that's enough time for me to get in trouble." The other was:

"Jesus, I'd rather die than marry the wrong man." This was important for me, as joy meant family, and family meant marriage.

At eighteen I was married to Lawrence and moved to Canada. Living a new life was not easy. Living with a man I hardly knew was not easy. I cannot tell you the many times I questioned God. "Lord, I love him, but..." I didn't die, so he must have been the right man for me. In my heart, God's message was clear: "Love him with all your heart, it will be more than OK."

Twenty-three years went by with never a dull moment. We were blessed with three wonderful children—our treasure, our priority. Struggle, tears, and worry were a part of our daily life, and it was not an easy life. Imperfect parents as we were, we knew to hold on to God as the centre of our life, a life filled with hard work and hard choices, but steadily God moved us forward. Lawrence was devoted to me and the children more than I imagined possible. I was confident with him at my side.

In 1998, Lawrence became curious about a priest from Trinidad. So unexpected! God called us to discover Him at a deeper level. The learning, the praying, the fasting, the singing—what a joyous time it was, constantly discovering God Alive. God was melting and molding both of us, unfortunately each with an independent journey.

On February 24th, 2000, God called Lawrence home. It was as if half of my body was amputated—the void, the pain—yet God re-

mained very much alive in my life. His gentle whisper was, "It will be more than OK." The hours at the Blessed Sacrament were my source of strength. God had prepared and developed wonderful friendships that literally held me up and moved me forward to places I never expected to go. Regardless of the trials at hand, I had inner peace. It is very hard to explain. I understood that the relationship with God did not eliminate the pain, but helped me get through each trial. To stand firm and lead my children was exhausting. The loneliness was a huge challenge. Distance made my family's caring ineffective in the daily struggle. I was alone. "Where are you, God?" I'd ask when fatigue set in and made my mind spin in anger or ungratefulness. Little things in life became BIG things, simply because they all fell on my shoulders. Kindness became charity, which robbed me of peace and attacked my self-esteem. I knew God was there, right by my side through every challenge and every tear, but the pain was hard to endure. Prayer became argumentative, a welcomed time and place where I could speak my mind. God's melting and molding continued. He kept moving me and the family forward. There was no lack of anything. As a matter of fact, God's providence was in abundance. But we missed Lawrence's love, a love that made our family unit whole and, if we were not whole, we were broken. It was hard for the kids no matter how well I managed.

Year by year, lessons needed to be learned. Conversations with God continued. God's love kept me humble, yet lifted me up. I survived by remembering my mother's words: "Do what is pleasing to God; make sure it is your best and God will do the rest." I survived through the kindness of a dear friend and her family. I survived through spiritual focus. I survived with my children at my side, sometimes encouraging, sometimes challenging, and sometimes laughing so hard it hurt.

I survived through work, where I was continuously challenged. God's hands-on love was steady. Hard as it may have been, I reached a place on the great mountain called life with my children at my side. This was good and I praised God.

But I guess I was not melted and molded enough. In 2010, after 20 years of service, I was told the company where I worked would be shutting down and 300 people would need to be terminated by March 2011. Literally my financial support was to be dissolved, and I was a key player in making it happen. It was a year of darkness, tears, anger, bitterness, and even hate. No matter how I approached the situation, people were angry and unforgiving. I tried to encourage and console, but the air was thick with unhappiness and discord. This drained energy and peace from me. I prayed, "Lord, enough melting and molding!"

The months to follow in 2011 were even harder. God stripped me of all material confidence, stripped me of my arrogance, stripped me of my self-righteousness. I had a new respect for all who suffered depression. I prayed earnestly for all who were tempted with suicide. I asked for forgiveness for the many times I had judged the weak and the lonely. Everything I tried in order to measure up to the world's expectations just did not work. The valley was deep and dark.

"Mary is the sun and no one will ever be deprived of her warmth."
~ Novena to Mary, Undoer of Knots

The Holy Rosary and Holy Scripture readings became a healing time. I could clearly see I was still resisting God's plan through my pride, my vanity, my self-centred world. I discovered strength through the sacrament of reconciliation.

"With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold,

but let God remake you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed." ~ Rom 12:1-2 (Phi)

I prayed for courage to let go, to surrender the great mountaintop of yesterdays and focus on moving forward. I made a conscious choice to accept whatever God had prepared for me.

With New Year's Day 2012 came hard choices. I was coming to the end of my resources and still had no work. Decisions needed to be made by the end of March. Daily mass, adoration, and constant prayers were my top priority. I remember one day I was praying for a long time, feeling guilty that I was avoiding looking for work. I said to The Lord, "I should really be networking," and in my heart I heard, "You are." I was confused... then in the stillness I understood. He knows all of us by name. That's one amazing network. I was ashamed—hard as I had tried to change, I was still depending on my own efforts and human support instead of letting myself be kneaded and molded by the hand of Divine Providence. "Lord, let Your will be done."

On March 12th I received a call from a person I had met twice. She told me she had met a dear friend at the synagogue who was looking for someone. The first day at my new job was March 19th, the Feast of St. Joseph.

I continue to learn how important it is to remember that it is not what we do but who we are, children of the Most High. This gives me courage to do with less and focus on what is pleasing to God. I am grateful for all the prayers my dear friends and family offered for me. My children endured and survived each storm with me and they are my joy. My grandchildren are a constant reminder of God's tender love for His children and nothing can separate us from Him.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." ~ Matthew 6:33

*"I made a conscious choice
to accept whatever God had
prepared for me."*

THE *Joy* OF GARDENING

Written by Emma Ieradi

*Thank you, God, for making us flowers
in the garden of your creation.*

IN THE SPRING, the hobby gardener daydreams of creating beautiful landscaped grounds filled with mature trees, perfectly manicured shrubs, and splashes of vibrant colours from an assortment of flowers reaching for the sky in beds topped with scented mulch, all accented by a lush carpet of green grass. Then, suddenly, reality checks in, and you remember the long backbreaking hours required to achieve such a scene, and realize that physically you are no longer fit for this task. If this is true for you, don't despair. There is an alternative means to fulfill this dream and still enjoy the pleasure of creating a garden oasis—container gardening.

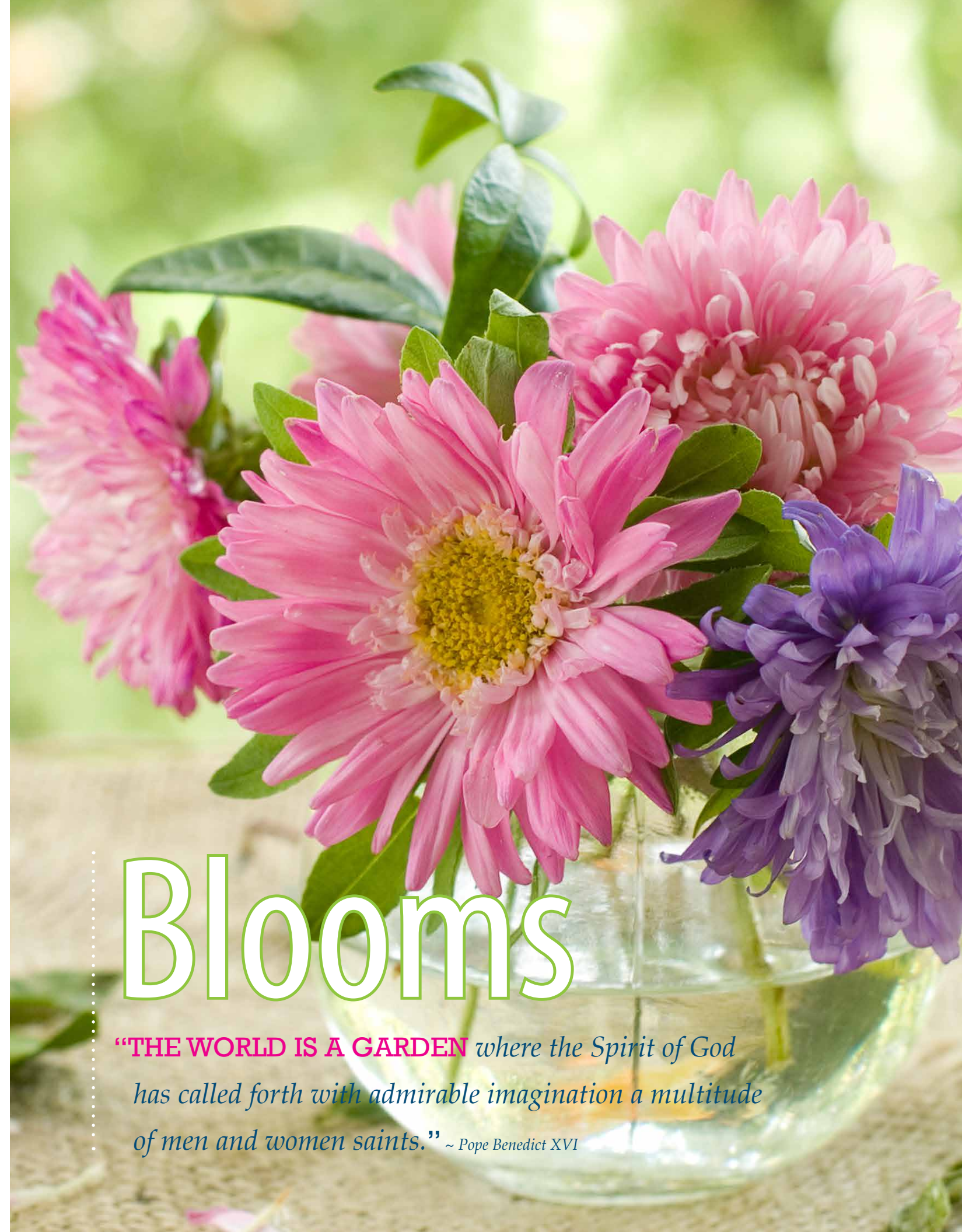
Container gardening, by definition, is the practice of growing plants in pots, window boxes, and hanging baskets rather than in the



ground. Garden landscaping in containers can suit any style from formal to modern, relaxed, or whimsical. It's all up to your personal style and ambition. The only materials required are a pot with drainage holes, good planter soil, and your favourite plants. Almost any plant will survive in a pot—trees, shrubs, flowers, and vegetables—individually or in combination. This is the perfect way for a novice gardener to plunge into this beloved hobby because it takes very little effort. And it allows the seasoned gardener time to experiment with new species of plants and continue to participate in their favourite pastime.

Container gardening has become very popular. Every quality gardening magazine features a section on this practice. You can admire beautiful pictures of cast iron urns holding boxwood topiaries flanking a doorway, a grouping of pots holding a menagerie of flowers or grasses enhancing an empty corner on a patio, and, of course, a treasure chest of annual and perennial flowers overflowing from window boxes.

Design possibilities are endless and you can create a container garden suitable for any space, large or small. As you tour your favourite garden centre this spring, think about the window over your kitchen sink that can be dressed up with a window box full of flowers to be enjoyed as you do your dishes. Or, consider a collection of herbs planted in pots close to your patio door so that you can pick them readily on those rainy days when you can't go out to the vegetable garden. And remember your front doorway, the entrance to your home. Displaying a collection of your favourite planters will invite passersby to slow down and admire your work, putting a smile on your face.... Ahhhhhh, SPRING!



Blooms

“THE WORLD IS A GARDEN *where the Spirit of God
has called forth with admirable imagination a multitude
of men and women saints.” ~ Pope Benedict XVI*



THIS TOO SHALL PASS - Painted by Mary Filangi

This Too Shall Pass

Written by Mary Filangi of

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*At the cross her station keeping, stood the mournful
Mother weeping, close to Jesus to the last.*

~ Stabat Mater

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IT WAS EARLY NOVEMBER and I was renewing my CPR certificate. It was while doing the Heimlich maneuver that I initially felt pain in my left breast. I had it checked out, and it wasn't long before I received a call confirming it was cancer. At first I thought it was a case of mistaken identity, but I was assured there was no mistake. I was in disbelief, yet I wasn't concerned for myself. At that moment my thoughts turned to my mother. I cried out, "Lord, how am I going to tell my mother? She is still mourning the death of my father." He had died from cancer and now I, too, would make her suffer.

Whenever I think of Jesus meeting His sorrowful mother on His way to Calvary, I relate it to the pain and sorrow I saw in my own mother's eyes. Jesus knew the pain and suffering that Mary would have to endure and yet it would have to be. She would have to suffer alongside Him, just as my mother would suffer with me, and there was nothing I could do to ease her pain.

*At the cross her station keeping, stood the mournful Mother weeping,
close to Jesus to the last. (from Stabat Mater)*

After undergoing surgeries, chemotherapy, and radiation, the outward physical parts that had made me feel like a woman had changed. I no longer felt like a whole woman and it would take time before I accepted my new reality. My acceptance came by placing myself in front of God. There I learned how He accepted me totally and without condition. This allowed my self-image to begin healing and for me to start accepting my new self.

In my final stage of treatment, my doctors told me that I would have to undergo an oophorectomy, the removal of my ovaries. This, however, I wasn't ready to accept, as it would mean that I could never have my own children. Although I had no intention of having children, it also meant a loss of what made me uniquely a woman. I had to do much reflection and praying before I could consent to this procedure.

A few months later, I had the opportunity to travel with my mother to Portugal on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Fatima.

While I was there, I noticed a few people walking on their knees. I inquired about it and decided that I would like to do the walk for all those who had asked me for prayers (walking on one's knees is a gesture of promise or petition). At first it was easy, but at the halfway point I became very tired and my knees were sore. At this point, two women with whom I was travelling came beside me and prayed with me as I continued very slowly.

I repeated the Hail Mary over and over, meditating on each word—*full of Grace...the Lord...blessed...and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus...* This was my constant petition and, as I slowly came into the Chapel of Apparitions, the words "and blessed is the fruit of your WOMB, Jesus" became amplified. I repeated the words over and over, and it was like I was hearing them for the very first time.

I arrived at the front of the chapel where the statue of Our Lady of Fatima is placed. It is the very spot of the apparition of Our Lady to the three little children. I approached in awe, crying because I was overwhelmed by the realization of the generosity of our Heavenly Mother, who offered her womb as a sacrifice to God for us. She willingly accepted the plan God had for her and for her womb. She offered it so that Jesus could be born for my salvation. And now here I was in front of her. I wanted to freely offer my womb in thanksgiving for all she had done for me.

The decision to go ahead with the procedure was now easy. I was overcome with joy and no longer felt like half a woman. I saw myself as a whole woman, and in my wholeness I could freely offer myself in imitation of our Heavenly Mother and in thanksgiving to her.

Prints of "This Too Shall Pass" can be purchased through [blessingsmagazine@hotmail.com](mailto: blessingsmagazine@hotmail.com). All proceeds will go to Breast Cancer Research.

*"I was overwhelmed by the realization of the generosity
of our Heavenly Mother.."*

CHRIST IS *Risen!*

HE IS RISEN INDEED!

WRITTEN BY REV. VITO MARZILIANO



IN EVERY LITURGY, WHICH IS A MEMORIAL OF GOD'S LOVE,

the Church continues to celebrate the Paschal Mystery, proclaiming to the world that CHRIST IS RISEN. In the churches of the early centuries, the ambo, the place from which the Scriptures were proclaimed, was often built using an empty sarcophagus. Its placement in the liturgical space was by itself a proclamation. Even when not in use, the empty sarcophagus was making that fundamental statement of faith: "He is NOT here! He is Risen!"

The Easter Gospels present to us the various narratives of the encounter with the Risen Lord. The early disciples, after experiencing with turmoil and fear the reality of the Passion of Christ, and subsequent to noticing the empty tomb, encounter the Risen Lord in the Garden, in the Upper Room, on the road to Emmaus, and at the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Each encounter is different. Each experience is unique and personal. Christ comes into their life granting them love, mercy, and forgiveness. He shows them his hands and his feet. He invites them to touch him. He shares a meal with them, and commissions them to go forth and be his witnesses, promising that he would remain with them until the end of days.

The experience of the Risen Lord continues in our lives, in our daily experiences, in our sorrows, and in our joys. Just as the Gospel narratives present a variation of details, so do our experiences. We encounter Christ in our celebrations, when we "gather in his name", when we hear his Word, in the "breaking of the Bread", and when we are sent forth, in the words of St. Augustine, to "become what we have eaten". Christ is among us. In the Eastern Liturgies, as the sign of peace, the greeting exchanged is the following: "Christ is among us."

Throughout the Gospels, there are significant details, often repeated, which offer comfort to those who fear, who suffer, and who hope: The angel's message to Mary and Joseph at the time of the Incarnation, the angel's announcement to the shepherds, or to the women at the tomb: "Do not be afraid!" Above all, the words of Jesus: "Do not let your hearts be troubled!" I once read that a Scripture scholar counted the number of times that the expression "Be not afraid!", or similar words, are used in the Bible. According to that calculation, this expression numbered 365 times... a reminder to all for each day of the year.

At every encounter with Jesus of Nazareth and with the Risen Lord, those who are in his presence are offered the gift of forgiveness. When words are spoken and love is shared, forgiveness occurs. Tax collectors and public sinners who come into the presence of the Lord, who hear his words, who share a meal with him, are healed and forgiven. To them, the grace to "go and sin no more" is offered, and their life changes. In the celebration of every Sacrament, the encounter with Christ occurs. Our sins are forgiven and our faith is strengthened. As our journey continues we take Christ with us and become witnesses of his love to the world.

Easter is not only a season. We are "an Easter people". Our joyous cry is "Alleluia!" May the peace of the Risen Lord touch and change our lives as it changed the life of Magdalene and the other women, of Peter and the Apostles, of men, women, and children who throughout the ages continue to proclaim with words and deeds: "Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed!"

Rev. Vito Marziliano is pastor of both St. Clare Catholic Church and St. Nicholas of Bari Catholic Church in Toronto.



"The experience of the Risen Lord continues in our lives, in our daily experiences, in our sorrows, and in our joys."

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. Do you think the Second Coming of Jesus will happen soon?

A. Over the centuries, many people have tried to foretell when the second coming will be. Some of them have devised intricate methods that try to use the Bible as some sort of secret message and decode it. They have changed letters to numbers, or taken one word or sentence from one of the books and added it to another book.

The fact is, Scripture tells us that it is futile to try to figure out the exact time. Here are two passages that help to show this. The first is from Mark 13:32–33: “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.” The next is from Acts 1:7: “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.” From Acts 1:11 we know that Jesus will return, but the focus should not be on when. Instead, we should focus on the hope and consolation the knowledge brings us. We are called to love God with our whole heart and not worry about calculating exact time frames. Even in the book of Revelation, it’s the ending that counts—literally.

Q. If you were approached by someone who was suffering, what would you say?

A. I would want them to know first that no matter what, God is with them through their pain and suffering. Sometimes people who are sick or suffering seem to think that it is because God wants them to be sick, or that they did something wrong. Rather, God is using their suffering to help them become holy.

It is true that suffering is a consequence of Original Sin, but it is also true that God allows suffering to bring about good in us. Jesus took suffering onto Himself, and it was on the Cross that He transformed suffering. He transformed it into an act of ultimate love. And it is through Jesus that we can have meaning in our suffering. This does not mean that our suffering goes away, but it means that we can unite our suffering to Jesus on the Cross.

Even though it is an act of faith to give our suffering to Jesus, I would also tell the person that God has not abandoned them, but is with them through it. It is not easy to accept, but God is there with them during their moments of pain and it is He who wants them to be holy. God is not punishing them but He redeems them, loves them, and wants them to unite with Him.

Q. The Catholic Church has a new Pope. What does it mean for us?

A. As I am writing this, it has been about a week that we are celebrating our new pope, Pope Francis. In this short time, he has already shocked the world with his simplicity and humility. We have been hearing stories that show us his heart—his washing the feet of AIDS victims and working with the poor.

What has impressed me already is his call for us to return to living our faith, a return to loving our neighbour and to always remember the poor. For me, he is showing us that Christ is part of everyday life. Even in his inauguration homily, he has called all of us—Catholic and non-Catholic alike—to protect the poor, and I quote: “Today too, amid so much darkness, we need to see the light of hope and to be men and women who bring hope to others.”

As a deacon, my vocation is to serve those who are marginalized and bring God’s love and presence to those who need Him, and Pope Francis has already shown himself to be a great model. Pope Francis is reminding everyone that this call is not just for deacons, priests, and nuns, but it is a calling for all of us.

To live our faith and be truthful to our love for God, we must protect the dignity of each person and look at what we can do in our everyday life to bring God’s love and hope to all those we meet.

Please join me in praying for him, in listening to him, and to joining him as we all accept his invitation to “walk with Christ”.



Photo: Adrian Santos / Catolicos_ES

Intercession of SAINTS

“How sweet is the way of Love!
True, one may fall, one may not
be always faithful, but Love,
knowing how to draw profit
from all, very quickly consumes
whatsoever may displease Jesus,
leaving naught but humble
and profound peace in the
innermost soul.” ~ *Story of A Soul, Chapter VIII*

St. Therese of Lisieux also known as St. Theresa of the Child Jesus of the Little Flower



Saint Therese of Lisieux

also known as St. Theresa of the Child Jesus of the Little Flower



O Little Flower of Carmel,
Almighty God endowed you,
consumed by love for him,
with wondrous spiritual strength
to follow the way of perfection
during the days of your short life.

Sickness touched you early
but you remained firm in faith
and prayer was your life.

O pray for me that I may benefit
by your intercession
and be granted the favor

I ask in this novena...
St. Therese of the Child Jesus,
pray for us.
.....

A Novena is a prayed for
nine consecutive days

DID YOU KNOW...

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (C.C.C.)

²⁶⁸³The witnesses who have preceded us into the kingdom, ⁴¹especially those whom the Church recognizes as saints, share in the living tradition of prayer by the example of their lives, the transmission of their writings, and their prayer today. They contemplate God, praise him and constantly care for those whom they have left on earth. When they entered into the joy of their Master, they were “put in charge of many things.” ⁴²Their intercession is their most exalted service to God’s plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world.



The Choir

The music, the hymns,
the lyrical tunes
and the emotional high
that comes in singing
these sacred songs,
in unison with others
makes me happy.

The friendship that grew
from our shared hobby,
brightens my life.
My love for the music
makes my heart sing,
a silent song of gratitude
for all my blessings.
Heals my invisible hurts
and fills my soul with hope.

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Vittoria Sisca D'Amario