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*“Mary loves me THIS much?”*

## For mothers, it’s personal between them and Mary

I clearly remember the day I found out I was pregnant. Over the next few weeks; I started to experience a complete transformation of my body, my mind, and my soul. When I realized that there were now two souls living in me and there were two guardian angels walking with me, I was amazed beyond my senses. I thanked God for these gifts and for the privilege of being a Mom.

When my daughter was born, I knew I loved her, but it was only during the first few months of her life that I understood unconditional love. One day, at Mass, I thought that perhaps our Blessed Mother loved me like I loved my daughter. This thought just blew my mind away! Mary loves me THIS much? Cares for me THIS much? Would hold me with THIS much love? Me? Yes. WOW! She IS my Mother.

Since then, my relationship with Mary has changed. It was my encounter with motherhood what made it personal between Mary and me.

As these new learning experiences were taking place in my mind and soul, my life continued with the daily challenges



*“I asked Mary, my Mother, to walk with me as I would now walk with my daughter.”*

and responsibilities that come with maternity. In very plain “mundane” terms, it was hard! Some women tell you it comes naturally to you as a mother, but not me. I had to quickly learn to deal with nursing, lack of sleep, diaper changes, not knowing what to do when my baby cried, some post-delivery health issues, no time for me at all, the increased pressure of the responsibility of a new life in my hands.

I was blessed to have my husband there with me. My parents and extended family were great support as well, and I am grateful that our Lord put them all in my life – but this new life was happening to me and I had to learn to face it and live it. So I asked Mary, my Mother, to please walk with me as I would now walk with my daughter for the rest of my life.

My daughter’s baptism was just a few days after her birth, at the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist (it was not a Basilica then, but certainly felt like one!). The special priests in my life were there, along with my husband, my parents, a few family members from

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# Cardinal Ratzinger did hold abusers accountable

Unlike the Roman papacy, in certain circles *The New York Times* still enjoys the presumption of authority. So when the front page carries a story headlined “Vatican Declined to Defrock U.S. Priest Who Abused Deaf Boys,” people notice.

Written by Laurie Goodstein and published March 25, the thrust is twofold. First, that the Rev. Lawrence Murphy, a priest who abused children at St. John’s School for the Deaf in Milwaukee from the 1950s to the 1970s, went unpunished. Father Murphy, she wrote categorically, “was never tried or disciplined by the church’s own justice system.”

This all feeds the kicker: “the effort to dismiss Father Murphy came to a sudden halt after the priest appealed to Cardinal Ratzinger for leniency.” In other words, Murphy got off scot-free, and the cardinal looked the other way.

Ms. Goodstein cites internal church documents, which the *Times* posted online. The documents were provided by Jeff Anderson and Mike Finnegan. They are described as “lawyers for five men who have brought four lawsuits against the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.”

What she did not tell readers is that Mr. Anderson isn’t just any old lawyer. When it comes to suing the church, he is America’s leading plaintiffs attorney. Back in 2002, he told the Associated Press that he’d won more than \$60 million in settlements from the church, and he once boasted to a Twin Cities weekly that he’s “suing the s-t out of them everywhere.” Nor did the *Times* report another salient fact about Mr. Anderson: He’s now trying to sue the Vatican in U.S. federal court.

None of this makes Mr. Anderson wrong or unworthy of quoting. It does make him a much bigger player than the story disclosed. In fact, it’s hard to

think of anyone with a greater financial interest in promoting the public narrative of a church that takes zero action against abuser priests, with Pope Benedict XVI personally culpable.

Asked about the omissions in an e-mail, Ms. Goodstein replied as follows: “Given the complexity of the Murphy case, and the relative brevity of my story, I don’t think it is realistic for you to expect this story to get into treating other cases that these attorneys have handled.”

Martin Nussbaum, a lawyer who is not involved in the Murphy case but who has defended other dioceses and churches in sexual abuse suits, emailed me four interesting letters sent to Murphy from three Wisconsin bishops. These documents are not among those posted online by the *Times*. They are relevant, however, because they refute the idea that Murphy went unpunished.

In fact, the letters from these bishops – three in 1993 and one in 1995, after fresh allegations of Murphy’s misconduct – variously informed the priest that he was not to celebrate the sacraments in public, not to have any unsupervised contact with minors, and not to work in any parish religious education program.

It’s accurate to say Murphy was never convicted by a church tribunal. It’s also reasonable to argue (as I would) that Murphy should have been disciplined more. It is untrue, however, to suggest he was “never” disciplined.” When asked if she knew of these letters, Ms. Goodstein did not directly answer, saying her focus was on what was “new,” i.e., “the attempts by those same bishops to have Father Murphy laicized.”

As for Rome, it did not get the case until

1996, when the archdiocese of Milwaukee informed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then headed by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. Back then, the CDF handled abuse cases when they involved a breach of confession (Murphy was accused of using the confession to solicit

boys). At that time, too, the only real option for reducing Murphy to the lay state was a church trial. And the bishops in Wisconsin did begin a trial.

Ms. Goodstein’s original article said simply that Cardinal Ratzinger’s deputy halted Murphy’s trial after the priest sent the cardinal a letter saying he was dying and asking for clemency. A follow-up *Times* article [on April 1] clarified

that Rome came down the way it did because Murphy had shown “apparent good conduct” for the last 24 years, and “it would be difficult to try him” because “so much time [had] passed between the crimes and the trial.”

Plus, his bishops had already stripped Murphy of his priestly faculties, the equivalent of taking a doctor’s medical license. Does all this really suggest people callously looking the other way?

A few years later, when the CDF assumed authority over all abuse cases, Cardinal Ratzinger implemented changes that allowed for direct administrative action instead of trials that often took years. Roughly 60% of priests accused of sexual abuse were handled this way. The man who is now pope reopened cases that had been closed; did more than anyone to process cases and hold abusers accountable; and became



*“Cardinal Ratzinger’s experience led him to promote reforms that gave the Church more effective tools to handle priestly abuse.”*

the first pope to meet with victims.

Isn't the more reasonable interpretation of all these events that Cardinal Ratzinger's experience with cases like Murphy's helped lead him to promote reforms that gave the church more effective tools for handling priestly abuse? That's not to say that the press should be shy, even about Pope Benedict XVI's decisions as archbishop and cardinal.

The Murphy case raises hard questions:

why it took the archbishops of Milwaukee nearly two decades to suspend Murphy from his ministry; why innocent people whose lives had been shattered by men they are supposed to view as icons of Christ found so little justice; how bishops should deal with an accused clergyman when criminal investigations are inconclusive; how to balance the demands of justice with the Catholic imperative that sins can be forgiven.

Oh, yes, maybe some context, and a bit of journalistic skepticism about the narrative of

a plaintiffs attorney making millions off these cases.

That's still a story worth pursuing.

– William McGurn

**“The Pope and the *New York Times*,” first published in *The Wall Street Journal* on April 6, 2010. Reprinted with permission of *The Wall Street Journal*. © 2010 Dow Jones & Company. All rights reserved.**



ON APRIL 17, POPE BENEDICT PRAYED BEFORE A STATUE OF ST. PAUL IN THE SAINT'S CAVE IN RABAT, MALTA, AS HE MARKED THE 1,950TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE APOSTLE'S SHIPWRECK ON THE ISLAND. "STANDING IN YOUR MIDST AS THE SUCCESSOR OF THE APOSTLE PETER, I INVITE YOU TO HEAR GOD'S WORD AFRESH, AS YOUR ANCESTORS DID, AND LET IT CHALLENGE YOUR WAYS OF THINKING AND THE WAY YOU LIVE YOUR LIVES," THE POPE SAID. (AP PHOTO/OSSERVATORE ROMANO, POOL)

Pope Benedict XVI held an emotional meeting with victims of clerical abuse on April 18 during his pastoral visit to Malta. Participants reported that the Pontiff had tears in his eyes and many of the victims wept openly, during the private session. A spokesman for the victims' group said that after speaking and praying with the Pope he could "feel like a convinced Catholic again."

The Vatican said that the Pope "was

deeply moved by their stories and expressed his shame and sorrow over what victims and their families have suffered. He prayed with them and assured them that the Church is doing, and will continue to do, all in its power to investigate allegations, to bring to justice those responsible for abuse and to implement effective measures designed to safeguard young people in the future."

The Vatican had indicated that the Pope was likely to meet with abuse victims during his trip, but the meeting would not be open to the press. As he did in meeting quietly with

abuse victims during his visit to the U.S. in 2008, the Pope chose to hold the conversation away from the glare of publicity, emphasizing the session was for the benefit of the victims and of the Church, *not* for the media.

At his general audience in St. Peter's Square on April 21, the Pope said, "I shared in their suffering and, with emotion, I prayed with them, assuring action on behalf of the Church."

– [www.CatholicCulture.org](http://www.CatholicCulture.org)

## Forming friendships that might lead to marriage

An infant will reach up and pull at her mother's lips, pull back, and with a slapping motion, drool a depthless smile of love and friendship. Mom smiles back, and the child is safe and happy. Two brothers leave for schools far from the other, their handshake firm and long; the glance between them is deeper than flesh. A new widow reaches down and kisses the lips of her sleeping friend; her smile is one of understanding and peace. "We'll always be just one," she whispers, "just us." Friendships always begin and, left to trust, burst into years of joy and awareness of the other.

Publilius Syrus (1st century B.C.), a Syrian-born slave freed in Rome because of his oratory and theater skills, wrote, "The friendship that can come to an end, never really began; friendship either finds or makes equals."

The noun "essence" is fundamental to the property of friendship because essence is the indispensable or intrinsic property that absolutely identifies something. Thus it can be said that true friendship is the essence of a relationship between people who refer to themselves as "true friends." It is this relationship referred to by Publilius; though he wrote this two millennia ago, it could not have differed were it written two millennia before his time. In John's Gospel (15:13), Jesus said, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friend." Would it be too strong to say that a spouse would give his/her life for the other – or, one's life for one's child? No!

How are friendships formed? Why do some find it difficult to make friends and, when they do, find them difficult to keep?

Parenting and nurturing environments are keys to successful interpersonal development. During adolescence, children are beginning to form their identity and are testing and developing the

interpersonal and occupational roles they will seek during their entire adulthood. Here is an interesting point: parental issues at the adolescent age of parenting include dealing with "rebellious" teenagers who didn't know freedom while they were smaller. This being a factor, adolescents look to peers and adults outside the family for guidance and models on how to behave inter-socially.

From the start, empathetic parenting engages the freedom essential to friendship. The beginnings of socialization are a natural instinct for the social human animal and, so, an integral part of our childhood is not only physical and intellectual development,

but also social development. Children love to play and interact, and as they mature into adolescence, their instinct to socialize develops into interpersonal ideation which will eventually formulate into interpersonal relationships. Teens will say, *We usually hang out together*, or, *My buddy and I play hoops one-on-one*, or, *We just like to talk and laugh and do stuff*. These together-relationships become socialization skills and are a result of reflective sharing and the empathetic mutuality of beliefs and values; concurrently, the natural follow-on is the enjoyment of reciprocal- and self-reliance.

Eventually, in late teens, young adults see the comforting emotions that occur as a result of their interdependent sharing of vulnerabilities and of self. When friends begin to depend on this mutuality, their relationship becomes interdependent and the natural compulsion to trust takes cognitive root, which in turn begins to feed on itself, to finally become the rhythm of friendship – or, which I refer to as the wonderful compulsion to enjoy the company of another. One doesn't have to explain how this relationship eventually grows into a life-long companionship, because we simply feel it and allow it to happen!

Emotional darkness can hamper an adolescent's social development – the darkness of violence and the terror of substance abuse. Psychologists will say that the effects of nature (environment and genetics) and nurture (love and security) are integrated with a third area of developmental influence called psychological development.

The normal balance of nature, nurture, and the psychological provide a healthy pathway toward social development; an imbalance can lead to characteristics of anti-social behavior and to the roots of low self-

esteem and intellectual solitude. The degree of imbalance proportionally delays or prevents the progress of social development in children, so that as young adults they see socialization as unfamiliar and even dangerous. Thus, they emotionally pull back from what otherwise would be the comforting emotions of interdependent sharing of vulnerabilities and of self.

Imagine the magical and explosive moment when a person, weaned and beaten during the darkness of her youth, finds the blinding light of a person who sees the diamond, reaches out, and grasps a lonely hand with emotions of trust and empathy!

Friendships happen no matter what. Why? Because humans love the need to love and to be loved. The Creator has decreed that one must love his neighbor as himself. Having commanded this, He has given every human the power to love and to be loved. Imagine the power of newlyweds who have married their best friend. Only in death will they part.



*"Why do some people find it difficult to make friends, and then keep them?"*

– Rev. Al Audette

*“Do you know what day it is?”*

## Sports are worthy, if you keep God as your coach

*“Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor.”*  
— Psalm 8:5

Spring has finally arrived! How wonderful to see green! Indeed, the fields are bursting with activity as new hopes and dreams of athletic greatness dance about in the hearts and minds of millions. From dawn til dusk, people everywhere are putting themselves to the test – running faster, jumping higher, and developing skills in a variety of activities that are meant to strengthen character and confidence – especially in the young.

The “language” of sports translates across borders and builds bridges among cultures. What joy the achievements of human excellence bring – the fruit of much labor. And in the high-tech age, sports provide a wholesome alternative to gadgets galore.

Very often, people gain great consolations by reaching new heights or pushing through difficult barriers through steadfast determination. What reasonable sacrifices am I willing to make to reach my best performance? Perhaps the best lesson of all is found in discovering our limits and humbly recognizing what we cannot attain. That takes courage. It’s particularly fruitful when that discovery prompts us to turn our gaze away from ourselves and, instead, begin to contemplate the One who knows no limits – the Infinite One who emptied Himself completely in order to share His Divine Life.

Team sports add the component of working together to accomplish a community goal. Clearly, each individual effort affects every other member of the team, and since responsibility to the community takes precedence over personal achievement, individual accomplishments may need to be sacrificed in order for the team to be victorious. Moreover, there must be a willingness to offer constructive criticism to teammates, even when it’s difficult.



*At the 1924 Olympics, Eric Liddell refused to compete in events which took place on a Sunday; he would not compromise his faith.*

Applied to the spiritual life, these lessons lead to a deeper understanding of love. St. Paul refers to this when he writes about the Mystical Body of Christ. He reminds us that as each member grows in holiness – “faith working through love” – the entire Body grows in holiness. Yet, if one member falls, the ill effect is felt by the whole Body. We are obligated to grow in holiness and to help others in their pursuit of a holy life as well. Sports *can* make a wholesome contribution.

Ah, there are a million stories. One Christmas Day during World War I, American and German soldiers crawled out of their bloody trenches and met each other in the middle – for a game of soccer. After their game,

they simply couldn’t go back to shooting each other. Consider, too, the most renowned athletic stage – the Olympics. At the opening ceremonies in Vancouver, athletes from Israel walked in procession with athletes from Iran, offering a bit of hope for people everywhere.

And how about the 1924 Summer Games? Do you remember Eric Liddell? He was considered to be the world’s fastest human. Yet, he refused to compete in three of the four events he qualified to run because *they took place on Sunday*. Liddell would not compromise the integrity of his faith. His heroic witness captured the attention of the entire world. Instead, he ran the 400 meters and set a new world record with his victory.

What place do sports hold in the heart of man today? Is it still an activity that builds character and friendships? Or, has it become an “end” in itself – one that governs the daily activity of families even *to the exclusion of honoring God?*

In many respects, sports have replaced religion. So few attend Church, yet many would not think about missing practice. Few seem to know the *Our Father* or the *Hail Mary*, yet many recite the entire history of their favorite sports team. Few seem to know the names of the four Evangelists, the most important books ever written, yet many can rattle off the starting lineups of their favorite team, along with accompanying statistics. Few can list the 10 Commandments, and fewer still the Beatitudes, but most can tell you the rules governing their sport, including obscure nuances for the most ridiculous scenarios. So few know the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but most know the story of Ruth, DiMaggio, and Mantle. So few seem to engage in a faithful prayer life, but missing a daily workout would be considered “*a mortal sin.*”

Truly, coaches and personal trainers are

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# “The Virgin has become for us the source of life”

**S**t. Gregory of Nyssa was the younger brother of St. Basil the Great. Theologian, ascetic, mystic, preacher, and Bishop of Nyssa in modern-day Turkey, he was acclaimed as the “Pillar of Truth” at the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. He died in 395. The following reflection on Mary, fitting for the month of May, is taken from two homilies on the Annunciation, rediscovered and published for the first time in 1909.

The angel comes to Mary,  
and entering, says:

**Hail**, o full of grace!

In an instant he exalts the maiden  
and treats  
Her as a woman,  
For she has become the mother  
of the Lord.

**Hail**, o full of grace!

Your ancestress, Eve, transgressing,  
Was condemned to bear her sons  
in pain.  
You, on the contrary, he fills with joy.  
She gave birth to Cain  
And with him, envy and death.  
You, on the contrary, beget a son  
Who is for all the source of life  
incorruptible.

**Hail**, therefore, and rejoice.

**Hail**, the serpent’s head is crushed.

**Hail**, o full of grace!

For calamity is at an end,  
Corruption is dissolved,  
All sadness now has ceased,  
Joy has flourished,  
The glad tidings of the prophets  
Have come to pass.  
The Holy Spirit foretold,  
Speaking through Isaiah’s mouth:  
Behold, a virgin shall conceive  
And bear a son.  
You are this Virgin.

**Hail**, then, o full of grace!

You are the delight of Him who has  
created you . . .



**“The Lord is with you!  
He who sanctifies all is with  
the handmaid of the Lord,  
with the Immaculate.”**

You are the delight of those  
who rejoice in the beauty  
Of the soul;  
You have found a spouse who protects  
your virginity  
Leaving it undefiled;  
A spouse who, out of such great love,  
Willed to become your son.

**The Lord is with you!**

He is in you and in every place,  
He is with you and of you . . .  
The Son in the bosom of His Father  
The Only Begotten Son in your womb,  
The Lord, in the way known alone to Him,  
All in everyone  
And all in you!

**Blessed are you among women!**

For you have been placed  
above all virgins,  
For you have been found worthy  
To give shelter to the Lord,  
For you have received within you  
the One who is  
So great  
That nothing in the world  
could Him contain,  
You have received Him who fills  
all with Himself,  
For you have become the place  
In which has come to pass salvation,  
For you have been the vehicle  
that has ushered in  
The King to life,  
For you have appeared as a treasure,  
a spiritual pearl.

**Blessed are you among women!**

Come, people, let us all sing  
Of Him who is born of the Virgin. . .  
Let us take courage and,  
led by the voice of the angel,  
Thus acclaim the Holy Virgin:

**Hail**, o full of grace,

The Lord is with you!  
To you is gladness due  
For the Lord of all  
Has dwelt in you  
In mysterious ways which He alone  
does know.

**Hail**, o full of grace,

The Lord is with you!  
No worldly spouse,  
But the Lord Himself is with you,  
The father of chastity,  
the guardian of virginity,  
He who sanctifies  
and makes incorruptible,  
He who gives freedom and salvation,  
And is the governor of peace;  
The Lord Himself is with you,  
For in you is placed the grace divine.

**Hail**, o full of grace,

The Lord is with you!  
Adam no longer has to fear  
The one whom he deceived,  
For the One who is born of you

Has destroyed all the power  
of the enemy.  
The human race no longer has to fear  
The deceit and shrewdness  
of the serpent,  
For the Lord has crushed  
the serpent's head  
In the waters of baptism.  
I no longer fear to hear: you are dust  
And to dust you will return:  
For the Lord in holy baptism  
Has erased from me all stain of sin.  
I weep no more, I grieve no more,  
Nor do I speak:  
In my pain, I do not twist  
in piercing thorns,  
For the Lord has taken the thorns  
from our sins  
Crowning His own head;  
My sin has vanished,  
My old calamity dissolved,  
The tree of life and grace  
Flourishes through the Holy Virgin. . .

In effect, the Holy Virgin became for us  
The source of life;  
Source of life for those who believe  
in Christ,  
Being the point from which flows  
spiritual light.

*Hail, full of grace,*  
The Lord is with you and of you!  
He who is perfect in holiness  
And in whom dwells the fullness  
of divinity.

*Hail, o full of grace,*  
The Lord is with you!  
He who sanctifies all  
Is with the handmaid of the Lord,  
with the Immaculate;  
He who is the greatest among  
the sons of man  
Is with the most beautiful one,  
To save mankind, created in His image.

**The St. Monica Institute for Patristic Studies of the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist offers informal study groups utilizing English translations of important Church texts. The groups are open to all; no prior study of theology needed. For more information, please call (203) 324-1553, ext. 21, or visit [www.stjohnsstamford.com](http://www.stjohnsstamford.com).**



# The Arts at the Basilica

## Clark Eno Jazz Quintet

Friday, May 7 • 7:00 pm • Msgr. Nagle Hall  
Dance away a lovely evening of Jazz music.  
16 years and older, please. Good will offering  
of \$5; no tickets sold. Beverages and snacks will  
be for sale. Information: (203) 324-1553, ext. 21

## The Manhattan String Quartet

Thursday, May 13 • 7:00 pm • The Basilica  
Thrill to the soaring music of Haydn, Shostakovich, & Mendelssohn.  
10 years and older, please. Good will offering of \$5; no tickets sold.  
Please call for more information: (203) 324-1553, ext. 21.

## The Lumina String Quartet

Saturday, May 29 • 7:00 pm • The Rectory  
A free and elegant evening of outstanding music. Seating limited;  
please call for tickets: (203) 324-1553, ext. 21.



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not “God,” even though they might be revered as such by some.

As faithful Catholics, our dignity is realized in our relationship with God. The virtue of Religion falls under the Cardinal Virtue of Justice. We fulfill that virtue by keeping the Commandments. “*In creation, God laid a foundation and established laws that remain firm, on which the believer can rely with confidence, for they are the sign and pledge of the unshakable faithfulness of God’s covenant. For his part man, must remain faithful to this foundation and respect the laws which the Creator has written into it*” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #346*). Skipping Mass in favor of a sporting event clearly indicates a lackluster desire for God. A faithful prayer life would have prevented the tragedy of turning a wholesome activity into an “end” in itself.

We have been made to share in the Divine Life. We are meant to be crowned with glory and honor, in heaven. It is a crown that comes through faith, hope, and love, and is the fruit of following the One True God in this life.

Sports ought to contribute to the growth and development of the human person rather than serve as a conduit of self-absorption, whose logical end is the exploitation and commoditization of the human person and the loss the true dignity – union with God.

– Rev. Terry Walsh

## Jesus was good looking, for all the right reasons

**M**y present assignment as the Spiritual Director and religion teacher at Kolbe Cathedral High School in Bridgeport has offered me many opportunities to discuss the Catholic faith with my fellow faculty members and my students, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

During the past Lenten season, one of my non-Catholic Christian students wanted to discuss a sermon she had heard at her place of worship the previous Sunday. Her minister had concluded that Jesus must not have been a nice-looking man because, had He been attractive, people might have “followed” Him for the wrong reason.

I must admit that I had never heard anything quite like this before, and that I had never really thought much about how Jesus must have looked beyond the fact that He was a Middle Eastern Jewish man who was probably fairly robust, given that He did manual labor as a carpenter and walked everywhere He went. He also had the advantage of not being tempted by fast food restaurants and ice cream shops on His way back and forth to work each day.

There is, of course, the matter of the Shroud of Turin. Proponents of the Shroud’s authenticity claim that is the burial cloth with which Jesus was wrapped when He was placed in the tomb. The cloth shows the mysterious image of a man who suffered and died in a manner consistent with that of the Lord’s Passion and death. The Shroud has been studied by scientists representing many disciplines who have proposed various theories of how the image was impressed on the cloth, how old it actually is, and whether or not it could be the cloth in which Jesus was buried.

At present the results of these studies are hotly debated, often contradictory, and inevitably controversial. The Church has taken no official stance on the matter, but since the time of Pope Pius XII

(1958), the image has been approved for devotional use by the faithful. Pope John Paul II urged scientists to continue the work of studying the image, arranged for its display in conjunction with the Great Jubilee in 2000, and visited it himself. Pope Benedict XVI will visit the Shroud, which is on display again this month.

But what of the appearance of the man whose image is impressed upon the Shroud? He has long hair and a beard. His face is not particularly striking (in my opinion), partly from the fact that that it appears swollen and wounded. If this is the face of Jesus, He seems to me to look like a regular guy, and I say that with all the respect due the Lord of the Universe.

Returning to my classroom full of students, as I quickly thought about the possible ways to approach the question of Jesus’ attractiveness, my mind lighted on a verse from Isaiah. I had the students open their Bibles to Isaiah 52, where we read, “Behold my servant . . . his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of sons of men . . .”

The inquisitive student exclaimed, “Hey, that’s the passage my preacher read for her sermon! How’d you know that?”

I explained that this passage is one of the so-called “Songs of the Suffering Servant” with which Isaiah prophecies how the messiah would suffer and die for his people. The passage almost certainly does not intend to describe how Jesus looked all the time, but how He would look after His Passion.

Since most of the class agreed with this interpretation, we were able to move on to



*“Who could fail to be attracted to a man completely free from sin, and who loved everyone He encountered with the very love with which God loves us?”*

discuss the fact that Jesus, because He was perfectly human, i.e. without the stain of sin, regardless of whether He looked like a movie star or like a regular Middle Eastern Jewish fellow, must have been attractive. Who could fail to be attracted to a man completely free from sin, and who loved everyone He encountered with the very love with which God loves us? It was only their own sin and consequent lack of love that made many of the people He met want Him tortured and killed. It was only their sin and consequent lack of love that made Him “unattractive” to them.

We concluded that anyone who followed Jesus did so not because of how He looked, but because they recognized who and what He was. And that must have been attractive.

I was thankful to have been able to propose a more reasonable suggestion about how Jesus may have looked without having to criticize a fellow “preacher.” At the same time, I had been able to make the unspoken point that the Scriptures cannot be left open to individual “interpretation.” Even though the Bible does not tell us exactly how Jesus looked, reason suggests to us that He must have “looked” pretty good to any and all who were willing to see who and what He was.

Two millennia later, He still looks just as good as He did then.

– Rev. F. John Ringley, Jr.

## Our Redeemer's Visible Presence in the Sacraments

*Each day, Priests and Religious around the world dutifully pray the Liturgy of the Hours (LOH). Indeed, they have made a solemn promise to pray the "Prayer of the Church," as it is known, at various hours of the day in order to sanctify the day and to bring grace to the Church. Each day, the LOH begins with the Office of Readings, and continues with Morning Prayer, Day-time Prayer, Evening Prayer, and, finally, Night Prayer. Each "Hour" is composed of various psalms, readings, canticles, and prayers.*

*Many lay people have come to recognize the spiritual value of entering into this prayer. Perhaps the most popular part of the LOH is the Office of Readings, especially the Daily Reading from Sacred Scripture, followed by a reading taken from the writings of the Saints which offers insightful commentary on Divine Revelation.*

*One such selection this month was written by Pope St. Leo the Great and sheds light on our Lord's Ascension into Heaven 40 days after His Resurrection. Pope Leo the Great was named a Doctor of the Church, since through his spiritual discernment we have received a deeper understanding of Theology. He died in 461 A.D. and is one of only two Popes to be distinguished with the title, "The Great." St. Gregory is the other, and the next could very well be Pope John Paul II. Contemplating the Ascension of our Lord (observed this year on May 13), Pope St. Leo the Great wrote the following:*

**“**At Easter, beloved brethren, it was the Lord's Resurrection which was the cause of our joy; our present rejoicing is on account of his Ascension into heaven. With all due solemnity we are commemorating that day on which our poor human nature was carried up, in Christ, above all the hosts of heaven, above all the ranks of angels, beyond the highest heavenly powers to the very throne of God the

Father. It is upon this ordered structure of divine acts that we have been firmly established, so that the grace of God may show itself still more marvelous when, in spite of the withdrawal from men's sight of everything that is rightly felt to command their reverence, faith does not fail, hope is not shaken, charity does not grow cold.

“For such is the power of great minds, such the light of truly believing souls, that they put unhesitating faith in what is not seen with the bodily eye; they fix their desires on what is beyond their sight. Such fidelity could never be born in our hearts, nor could anyone be justified by faith, if our salvation lay only in what was visible.

“And so our Redeemer's visible presence has passed into the sacraments. Our faith is nobler and stronger because sight has been replaced by a doctrine whose authority is accepted by believing hearts, enlightened from on high. This faith was increased by the Lord's Ascension and strengthened by the gift of the Spirit; it would remain unshaken by fetters and imprisonment, exile and hunger, fire and raving beasts, and the most refined tortures ever devised by brutal persecutors. Throughout the world women no less than men, tender girls as well as boys, have given their life's blood in the struggle for this faith. It is a faith that has driven out devils, healed the sick, and raised the dead.

“Even the blessed apostles, though they had been strengthened by so many miracles and instructed by so much teaching, took fright at the cruel suffering of the Lord's Passion and could not accept his Resurrection without hesitation. Yet they made such progress through his Ascension that they now found

joy in what had terrified them before. They were able to fix their minds on Christ's divinity as he sat at the right hand of his Father, since what was presented to their bodily eyes no longer hindered them from turning all their attention to the realization that he had not left his Father when he came down to earth, nor had he abandoned his disci-

ples when he ascended into heaven.

“The truth is that the Son of Man was revealed as Son of God in a more perfect and transcendent way once he had entered into his Father's glory; he now began to be indescribably more present in his divinity to those from whom he was further removed in his humanity. A more mature faith enabled their minds to stretch upward to the Son in his equality with the Father; it no longer needed contact with Christ's tangible body, in which as man he is inferior to the Father. For while his glorified body

retained the same nature, the faith of those who believed in him was now summoned to heights where, as the Father's equal, the only-begotten Son is reached not by physical handling but by spiritual discernment.”

**The Liturgy of the Hours is available in Catholic bookstores and online. The 4 volume set follows the Liturgical Cycle: Volume I, Advent and Christmas; Volume II, Lent and Easter; Volumes III and IV, Ordinary Time. Alternatively, one may purchase a handy abridged volume which would include the Office of Readings for the Year.**



*“Such is the power of great minds and truly believing souls that they put unhesitating faith in what is not seen with the bodily eye.”*

## “Saint of the Impossible” inspires peace, vocations

**F**or years, my spiritual director in the seminary, Msgr. Charles Elmer, would disappear from the seminary for about one hour each day. He had landed at Normandy and fought throughout France and Italy during the Second World War, entered the Pontifical North American College in the Vatican in the late 1940's, and was ordained in 1952. By the time I arrived in Rome for my seminary studies, Msgr. Elmer had returned from the United States to serve as the spiritual director of his alma mater on the Janiculum Hill overlooking the Vatican. His secretive daily wanderings proved to be daily pilgrimages to a small 18th century church across the street from the first North American College, the Casa Santa Maria around the corner from the Trevi Fountain – there was a shrine to St. Rita of Cascia. His devotion to her was contagious: nearly every one of the hundreds of men who were in his spiritual charge, and who were ordained priests, followed his example, developing a devotion to St. Rita, and this is why.

St. Rita was born in 1381 in the village of Roccaporena, near Cascia in the central Italian province of Umbria. Her parents were poor but devout Catholics, and their daughter followed their example. Early on, she expressed her desire to become a cloistered nun. But the times were not conducive to the religious life, since the Church was divided into allegiance to no fewer than four men claiming to be the legitimate pope, each supported by the financial and military might of different rulers. Nationalism had been born, and its first casualty was the unity of the Church. Likewise, Italian society was a violent one, based upon loyalties to family and city states, which too often turned violent. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is a perfect expression of that devotion to clan and *vendetta*. For Rita's aging parents, the only course was to arrange a suitable marriage for their daughter to a man who would protect and support her and them.

A marriage was arranged with Paolo Mancini, the watchman of the town, and the couple were married, producing two children – possibly twin boys – along with much sorrow. Paolo proved himself a cruel, abusive husband, prone to drink and violence. Through years of prayer, fasting, and patience, Rita finally converted her husband, who suffered a violent death at the hands of his enemies. Her next trial came from her two sons – urged on by a misplaced sense of honor through *vendetta*, they vowed to avenge their father's murder. Rita's prayers for them, likewise, turned their hearts from violence and revenge, and they died peacefully, reconciled to God, before they could commit their planned revenge.

Rita now entered into a life of more intense prayer, fasting, and penance, and decided to apply for admittance into the local cloistered Augustinian Convent of St. Mary Magdalene. She was refused admittance three times, possibly because the Mother Superior and other members of the convent community were family members of the man Rita's husband had killed in a drunken brawl. Rita approached the family of the slain man, begged their forgiveness, and, by her own example of forgiveness for those who had killed her husband, succeeded in bringing peace between the two family houses. She was finally accepted into the convent in 1411.

During the final 40 years of her life, St. Rita excelled in her spiritual life of prayer, fasting, acts of charity, and peacemaking. Her



*St. Rita of Cascia shared daily in the suffering of Our Lord through a wound similar to the Crown of Thorns.*

powerful devotion to Christ Crucified urged her on to penances in imitation of Our Lord's Passion.

One day, as she knelt in prayer, she felt a violently powerful pain in her forehead. After the agony subsided, it was discovered that the deep wound, which bled for the remainder of her life, was similar to that experienced by Our Lord from the Crown of Thorns; and Rita understood that she had been judged worthy to share some of the physical sufferings of Our Lord for the salvation of the world.

Her life of devotion, penance, prayer, and reconciling of enemies, resulted in numerous miraculous cures, reunions of broken families, peace treaties

between warring city states, and an increase in Catholic devotion of her fellow townspeople. Her final years were spent as an invalid, and her final penance was to live a life of humility by being dependent upon the charity of those to whom she had been charitable in her more active days.

Saint Rita died on May 22, 1457 at the age of 76. Thousands attended her funeral, and miracles began to be attributed to her intercession soon after her death. She was canonized in 1900, and popularly known as the “Saint of the Impossible.” Her feast day is May 22.

The statue we have in the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist (*pictured at left*) dates from the turn of the 20th century, soon after Rita was canonized. St. John's opened its doors to all Catholic immigrant groups: founded by Irish immigrants, it continued to bolster the faith of the tens of thousands of Polish, Czechoslovak, and Italian immigrants who made their way to Stamford soon after 1900. The immigrant parishes of St. Benedict, Holy Name of Jesus, and Sacred Heart began here at St. John's.

Fr. James O'Brien purchased the statue of St. Rita for the Italian community of the parish. When I arrived in 1998,

I found her in the basement, next to the furnace. She is now repainted and in the church – a proper shrine is now being prepared using an altar donated to the parish by the Lodato Family – to inspire others who might need her help.

Who knows? Maybe St. Rita will inspire more young men to become priests – good, healthy, normal men, just as she did on the beaches of Normandy in June 1942 for Msgr. Elmer, and, through him, for the hundreds of alumni of the Pontifical North American College in the Vatican, including your present pastor.

– Msgr. Stephen DiGiovanni, H.E.D.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Mexico, and my new family: my St. John's friends. St. John's feels just like home. It is also a home to my daughter who has attended Mass most days of her life there. After every Mass, we usually light a candle in thanksgiving at our Blessed Mother's altar.

Two months after my daughter was born, two new priests were ordained in our Diocese. We attended the Ordination Mass at St. Augustine Cathedral and then, the following day, the first Masses of two of the newly ordained priests, celebrated here at St. John's. It was in the month of May; Mary's month. That day I thought, as she is walking with me in this new chapter of the story of my vocation as a wife, now as a mom, here she is with these newly-ordained priests as they start a new chapter in the story of their vocations. I did not think then that one of the priests was going to come to back to St. John's as a parochial vicar a year later or so. What a blessing!

Around the fourth month of my daughter's life, I faced the hardest challenge: Go back to work and be separated from her during the workday. But then, I thought of all those courageous women who have their babies without a husband, with little or no support from family, with

a limited number of friends, and who have to work to provide for them and their children. And there was Mary again, walking with me, strengthening my heart, always interceding so that all resources necessary for me to handle the day-to-day, through His Providence, were lined up just as I needed them, or better. She has continued to be there for me every moment, to this day.

Motherhood has taught me a deeper meaning of humility, patience, prudence, self-giving. When I run out of ideas, I go to Mary for guidance and protection. I know that, in the same way, I will always be there for my daughter, Mary is there for me. Knowing how much she cares about me and that she is the way to Jesus and to the Father, gives me great hope. I believe in her special relationship with the Holy Spirit and that, through her intercession, His gifts will be poured upon me to succeed in this quest in the world.

I know that if I persevere in fidelity to God and His Church, in His mercy and infinite love, He will let me unite myself with Him in Heaven. Mary will be there waiting for me, and then I will continue to pray for my beloved daughter and my husband until I see them there, too.

– Margarita Ucero

**Margarita and her husband, Roberto, have been married for 15 years. Their daughter, Ana, is now 6 years old.**



THE VIEW FROM THE  
BACK PEW

When it comes to the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church (rearing its ugly head now in Europe, sadly), the media's favorite term is "defrock." Why wasn't this priest defrocked, reporters demand? Why didn't the pope defrock more often? Reporters' knowledge of Church teachings is gleaned from ghastly sources like Wikipedia, so they assume that defrocking is a magic bullet that makes everything better. In the case of priestly abuse, it's not.

To "defrock" is to "laicize" an ordained member of the clergy. He is formally dismissed and returned to the lay state. He is forbidden to exercise his ministry (except in rare circumstances, such as hearing Confessions when death is imminent). Yet the Church's zero-tolerance policy of the past 10 years means that any credibly-accused priest is removed from ministry and unable to act publicly as a priest. In other words, he's off the team, minimizing his threat to kids. This is broadcast to the authorities and for all to hear. While "defrocking" is a serious final step, in this case it's really a formality. The media needs to do its homework and note the Church's past diligence and present commitment.

“I don’t have a favorite on the menu; every dish I present is prepared to complement my guests,” says Gabriel Brandi, Executive Chef of **Shelly’s On The River**. “Tastes are different. If you see what you like, it will taste just right. Everything is fresh and cooked to its best flavor.”

Chef Brandi is an upbeat and striking man with a handshake that sets the tone of the man in charge. He is master of the kitchen at the restaurant in the Hampton Inn & Suites, beside the exciting and evolving Mill River Park. Assisted by Sous Chef Tim Depelteau, and with the blessings of owner Shelly Nichani, Chef Brandi displays the confidence honed from years of experience as a cook and restaurant chef, as well as training at the elite New York Restaurant School.

So, Chef, were you to cook for a special lady this beautiful Spring evening, what would you prepare?

“First, a little white wine,” he says. “Ladies like fish, so I’d fix my crab cakes – no filler, just fresh Maine crab with a little egg, mayo, and spice.” Why Maine crab? “Because the icy waters give the meat its firmness, nice chunky pieces.”

## THE SECRET INGREDIENT



NEW YORK CUT STEAK AND ALL THE TRIMMINGS  
AT SHELLY’S ON THE RIVER.

“And you, Mr. Roast, what would you like for your dinner tonight?”

Hummm, the menu is very nice. How about a New York-cut steak, mashed potatoes, and gravy? On the rare side, please.

Somewhat surprised by my basic request,

Chef Brandi smiled and, like in *Iron Chef*, rushed to the kitchen.

Simple request? Not at all! How does one make gravy with a N.Y. steak? How will it cut? Will the potatoes be fresh mashed? Seems easy – it ain’t!

Not long later, the dish was slipped before me: the steak sliced perfectly and done “just right.” The gravy was reduced Merlot, beef broth, and shallots – what a great taste, black as can be, with a touch of something soft, not sweet, a delicious hint of femininity. And the potatoes? Fresh mashed!

So I asked, “Chef, what did you add to give the gravy such a perfect little zest?” Insidiously, he smiled and replied, “Why, the secret ingredient, of course!”

Unquestionably I’m going back – crab cakes? Mahi-Mahi? I think I’ll have another steak. Gravy...Ohhh, the gravy!

– **Charles K. Roast**

**Shelly’s on the River is located at the Hampton Inn & Suites, 26 Mill River St., Stamford. Open for dinner Mon.-Sat., 5:00-11:00 p.m. Closed Sun. Tel. (203) 353-1000 or visit [www.shellysontheriver.com](http://www.shellysontheriver.com).**

## Save These Dates & Join Us!

**Friday, May 7, 7:00 p.m.:** The Clark Eno Jazz Orchestra will provide an evening of Jazz favorites in the Msgr. Nagle Hall. Free will offering requested. Ages 16 and older, please.

**Thursday, May 13, 7:00 p.m.:** The Manhattan String Quartet will perform classical favorites in the Basilica. Free will offering requested. Ages 10 and older, please.

**Saturday, May 29, 7:00 p.m.:** The Lumina String Quintet will perform free in the Rectory. Seating limited; call for tickets.

**Thursday-Saturday, June 10-12, 7:00 p.m.:** The Rectory Players present *The Mousetrap* by Agatha Christie, in the Rectory. Tickets: \$20; seating limited. Please call for tickets.

**Every Friday, 7:00-8:00 a.m.:** The Holy Name Society invites all men of the parish to the Rectory for fellowship, Adoration, a brief spiritual talk, and Benediction.

*Mark your calendars and join us – bring a friend or two!  
For more information, please call (203) 324-1553, ext. 21.*

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