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# JOURNEY IN LOVE

*A Catholic Mother's Prayers  
after Prenatal Diagnosis*

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KATHRYN ANNE CASEY

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Our Sunday Visitor  
Huntington, Indiana

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*For Summer, who counseled me along the  
road of grief, and Amanda, whose faith inspired me to  
see God's hand in all things.*



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## Introduction

**P**regnancy engages the whole person. From jumping up and down at the news (or processing the fear of an unexpected pregnancy), to the shock of the first hormone shifts, to morning sickness, it occupies and dominates the maternal body and soul. And so it should.

The life growing inside you — first so mysterious, then gradually felt, seen in its expansion, and suffered through morning sickness, loose muscles, and unwieldy size — shapes your constant awareness of your child. Your mind adopts the vigilance required to identify your child's desires, interpret his cries, suspect her mischief. Everything works so perfectly together.

Then come the test results, or the doctor reads the ultrasound. Whether the news is delivered by a technician poking his head into the room, in a paralyzing phone call, or after a tense wait in a private room, the day a mother and father receive a prenatal diagnosis is like no other. Happy dreams crash into a world of shock. We try to wrap our minds around what this news means — try to anticipate, try to pray, try to plan — but the reality feels as elusive as the child inside the mother's womb, whom we can sense but cannot touch. It affects our every moment, every facet of our lives, and yet we have no control.

Whatever the diagnosis, grief will arise. Your beliefs,

your background, your expectations, and the circumstances in which you found yourself with child will all shape the way in which you receive the news and how it penetrates your heart. My goal is not to tell you how to react, nor to say what reactions are right or wrong, but to share with you some of the well-worn steps of the emotional path ahead of you as you await the birth of your child and adjust to your new reality. It is also my goal to share with you the teachings of the Catholic Church in regard to a prenatal diagnosis, which are not always discussed.

Out of my seven pregnancies, two miscarried and two consecutive ones received a prenatal diagnosis. Peter's diagnosis, the first, was relatively minor in the grand scheme of things — a cleft lip and palate — but I grieved hard. He was born in January. Then, at two months old and still below his birth weight, he was diagnosed with “failure to thrive” and hospitalized. When we finally walked through our front door again, home from the hospital, safe from the crisis, we were met with boxes brimming over with medical equipment. We were met with our life reordered.

At the end of July, two lines appeared on a pregnancy test. It was impossible to process how we would make this new pregnancy work, so I procrastinated. During my first trimester, we learned that SPINT2, a genetic mutation my husband and I both carry, had caused Peter's condition. We also learned that the unborn child inside me had a 25 percent chance of inheriting it as well. We prayed that it would not be so. When the time for the ultrasound arrived, the diagnosis was much worse: Celeste, the baby growing within me, had no brain; she would not live long after birth.

I knew the teachings of the Catholic Church. Under no circumstances may one act intentionally to take the life of a child; abortion is out of the question. The facility was supportive of my personal beliefs, and managing Peter's care had empowered me, so perhaps it was easier for me than for others to say, point blank, “We will never consider termination.”

(For some, those words choke the heart. If you have had an abortion in the past, God will forgive you. If you have not confessed it already, please go to confession as soon as you can. Begin the process of accepting his forgiveness and seeking healing for yourself.<sup>1</sup>)

Once abortion was off the table, my doctor recommended early induction, which seemed acceptable to us as long as we waited until after viability. But then I read that the Catholic Church teaches that it is not morally permissible to induce delivery without medical necessity before the child is full-term, even when the child is likely to live only briefly after birth.<sup>2</sup>

Why? This seemed madness. The answer is that early induction deprives your child of the good of your womb, of that safe, beautiful place where he or she grows.<sup>3</sup> It cuts short a life that surely does exist. Your child feels you, you feel your child, and your expanding belly manifests his or her presence in the life of your family. When the diagnosis is life-limiting, the kicks and discomfort add to the short list of memories you have of your little one. This choice also publicly recognizes the value of life and the option to carry.

But I never wanted to be a poster child for the pro-life movement. I just wanted to stop suffering. The suffering is real. The loss is real, wherever the diagnosis leads.

This devotional will accompany you as you drink from the cup that has been handed to you and encourage you to face the tasks of grief. Emotions in themselves are neither good nor bad. Negative emotions, like physical pain, point to a wound that must be addressed in order to heal. Exploring, in prayer, what is already in your heart (whether or not

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1. Rachel's Vineyard (<http://www.rachelsvineyard.org/>) provides counsel, support, and retreats for just this purpose.

2. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Moral Principles Concerning Infants with Anencephaly." (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1996), <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/end-of-life/moral-principles-concerning-infants-with-anencephaly.cfm>.

3. "To terminate a pregnancy even after viability is deliberately to intend to deprive a child of his or her natural right to be protected and nurtured in the womb." Benedict Ashley, "Moral Principles Concerning Infants with Anencephaly: Observations on the Document," <https://www.ewtn.com/library/BISHOPS/bcdanen3.htm>.

you think yourself strong enough to face it) will allow God to guide you to the place where you will find life.

The temptation is to try, as the apostles did, to escape from suffering. The alternative is to stand by the foot of the cross, as John and Mary did, to embrace the most devastating moments of our lives. On the far side of suffering stands Christ, his glory, his resurrection, and a blessed reunion in heaven, where every tear shall be wiped away, the lame will walk, the blind will see, and we will hold those who died too soon in our arms once more.

Thank you for allowing me to join with you on this journey in love.

PART I

**The Diagnosis: Facing  
the Tasks of Grief**



THE FIRST TASK

## Accepting the Reality of the Loss

The ultrasound technician ripped the freshly printed photographs from the printer and tossed a towel onto my belly. Raising myself on my elbows, I inquired quizzically, “I thought you were going to show me ...”

“I just have to show these to the doctor.” She left me alone.

Perplexed, I angled myself up and twisted to see the computer screen. There was my baby: my jumping jelly bean whose presence had thrown our life into uncertainty, whose appointments I found it nearly impossible to make because my other child went into the hospital every other week. There it was at twenty weeks’ gestation, frozen on the screen but wiggling under my heart. My gaze alternated from the screen to the poster on the wall of an ultrasound infant at this stage of development. As I compared the images, I observed a difference: my baby’s head looked flat.

A man in a white lab coat poked his head through the door and, catching his breath, pronounced, “It looks like anencephaly.” He defined the term and added, “It’s bad.”

I stood up while the ultrasound technician logged out in silence. It seemed strange to ask the baby’s gender now, but I did.

“A girl,” she whispered.



Isn't it enough that we rearrange our hearts and organs to make space for these little ones? Isn't it enough that we are open to life? Isn't it enough?

Our visions grow around our babies just as surely as our bodies grow a new organ to feed them. We prepare baby clothes, rockers, bassinets, and blankets. We had a box of clothes that now belong to some other little girl that I still think of as "Celeste's." Though she never wore them, they belonged to her.

It is too much to process. Everything is the same as it was thirty minutes before, and yet everything has changed. You may have entered into the period of waiting for the next high-level ultrasound to confirm the diagnosis. You may be offering desperate prayers that it not be true. You may be buried already in hopelessness, imploring God to somehow make you accept it so that you do not die along with this little one still developing inside you.

The stages of grief are not neat and tidy, but they often follow this order: shock or denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.<sup>4</sup> Because we can move forward or backward, or skip a stage altogether, some therapists prefer to think of them as a set of tasks rather than sequential stages.

The first task of grief is **accepting the reality of the loss.**<sup>5</sup>

The loss stemming from a prenatal diagnosis is different from a death that happens and is final. As you wait to understand the nature of the diagnosis and its likely outcome, you go through the different stages again and again. Each bit of news brings with it more shock, more anger, more sadness. And you must love your little one as he or she continues to grow while at the same time grieving the loss of the perfect life you imagined or the death doctors predict will occur. In essence, you are liv-

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4. These are the five stages of grief defined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler.

5. J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* (New York: Springer, 2008), 39-52.

ing two realities at once, your heart balanced between the life strangers see and the upside-down reality.

It is not surprising that the first stage of the spiritual life is purgation. Even as we live in the midst of the world, God slowly draws us closer to him. To what are we attached? Perhaps a sense of security, expectations, images of what it means to be a mother or a father? All of this must pass away so that new life in Christ can be born, a life of waiting to see what God has in mind for us instead of what we would have chosen.

Whether a child lives only seven weeks in safety inside you, two hours after coming into the light, five years before a tragic accident, or eighty years surrounded by his or her great-grandchildren, our children are never really our own. Coming to grips with that reality hurts. Everything in our maternal body reorients itself to owning this child, except the blood. Our blood goes to the baby, but the baby's blood does not return to us. In the same way, we are asked to give and they will take all of our heart, but we do not get it back.

We give. We let go. We relinquish. This is the first stage: full of anticipation, not without questions, and with very few answers.

Even now, while we wait in anticipation of the trials that lie ahead, still safe but suffering, Christ says to us, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ... I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you" (Jn 14:27, 18).



THE SECOND TASK

## Processing Your Grief and Pain

There were three healthy babies. Doctor's appointments, other than revealing the sex of the baby, were routine. But my fear of miscarriage never left, even at twenty weeks. My husband and our oldest daughter accompanied me. At age five she could appreciate what she saw on the ultrasound screen.

"I just want the baby to be okay," I put forward to the ultrasound technician, using words to pass the time.

Staring at the screen, she intoned, "I've almost never seen anything that could not be fixed ... " She finished clicking the photographs, announced Peter's sex, handed me a towel, and left the room.

In the next room, the nurse practitioner/midwife, whom I loved, began to decipher the news for us: he had a cleft lip, possibly a cleft palate. Surgery. Hospital admission. No nursing. Further surgery. In the middle of many words she added, "If I could choose one defect, this would be it because it can be repaired with surgery."

No nursing. Could I acknowledge that this loss was my greatest grief? The thing I most delighted in, maybe the only thing I could delight in during those sleepless nights, was the sweet suckling of the infant beside me, drifting to sleep as I did.



Who can predict what we will miss most? The diagnosis marks a departure from security, from expectations, from a world that made sense before the technician captured those photos. This changed world means new appointments, follow-up tests, meeting doctors, and learning terms you never knew or existed and hoped never to define. Maybe a surgery down the road will fix everything, maybe ten surgeries down the road will fix everything, maybe there is a chance time will clear it up.

What matters when the thing you lost is gone? With kind platitudes inviting you to look on the bright side, can you gather your courage to look at the darker side? To question yourself: where does it hurt most? Fear paralyzes us, tempts us to sit and wish the problem away, pray for a miscarriage, pray for a miracle, pray that somehow the problem disappears by the end of the forty weeks. The pain is too intense. It is easier to distract and numb this storm of emotion with mindless scrolling, with shopping, with alcohol.

**Confronting our pain and processing our grief** is the second task of grief.

I questioned how I could bond with my baby if I could not nurse him. Yet in those late hours after he was born — while pumping, then feeding, then catching his emesis, then lying with him in desperate need of sleep — I discovered we could bond. As I stroked his arm while he lay listless in the pediatric intensive care unit, I realized we could bond. I posed this question to our case manager: “If the worst was going to happen, what would it look like?” She explained that he would stop responding uniquely to me, his mother.

What have you lost? Maybe your situation seems better than those of the other women in the waiting room. Maybe your situation is so much better than the last time when the pregnancy ended in miscarriage or stillbirth. Maybe your situation is the most devastating you have ever experienced.

Maybe this is the moment when you can no longer put up with what God dishes out.

Where is the darkness of your loss? As the surges of emotion shake us — shock, anger, despair — as reality sinks in, we must first name that darkness. Only when we name it and bring it to Christ, only then can his indescribable light shine in those dark places, illuminating our brokenness and restoring us.

God hears the desperate questions we ask: *If God is good, how can this happen? Why does evil come upon one person and not another? Could I have done anything to avoid this? Why me?* Even if we received an answer, it wouldn't be enough. Evil is the privation of the good. It is irrational where the good is rational. It is impersonal where the good is personal. When sin entered the world, death and suffering entered the world (cf. Rom 5:12). But in allowing this, God knew we could still obtain perfect love. He gave us free will so that we could choose him, because love under coercion can never be love.

God can step into history (even if we do not recognize him as the one we long for) and move events or people to achieve some good we cannot imagine. My marriage survived the months-long separation of hospital admissions. A doctor and friend altered the course of our story. These acts are miracles, even if Celeste was not born alive. Sometimes the answer to prayers is not a physical miracle, but the strengthening of bonds that could have broken under the weight of grief. In these miracles, God brings good to those who long for him.

From the diagnosis onward, you may have time to search for these answers. There are luminaries along the way to uncover the answers you need and search within your heart. These stars in a dark sky may be your spiritual director, a saint's writings, a blogger's journey, a therapist at the hospital. Keep an eye open for them. Even in the shadows, you are not alone.

As your baby grows inside you, let the questions grow, let the opportunities for answers grow. Do not be afraid to petition, to be naked in your searching, to be vulnerable enough

to let God heal you even if he does not heal your child. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn 1:5).

THE THIRD TASK  
**Adjusting to the World as It Is Now**

**M**y phone rang as I sat numbly in the antique green chair I'd inherited from my grandmother when she moved to a senior living center. The voice of my cousin's wife greeted me on the telephone. She talked on. Among other updates, I reported how Peter was.

Then it began: she sympathized with me over the diagnosis of my current pregnancy, expressed how sorry they were. She offered me a cord related to Saint Gerard Majella, a sacramental. Heaving sighs and tears, I pushed the phone into the hand of my husband. I could not do it. With the anxiety I experienced on a day-to-day basis, I could not hope that God would make a miracle, that we would go to an ultrasound and there would be a brain where there formerly was none. It would make me sick with anticipation and disappointment. In my heart, I knew that was not our path.

• • • •

For me, accepting this outcome was part of the third task of grief: **adjusting to the world as it is now.**

We are allowed to pray for miracles, and it is good to pray boldly. But a miracle of physical healing is not always the way God will answer our prayer. A prayer for physical healing

must be balanced with a prayer to accept the will of God. We did not pray for healing for Peter; we prayed for acceptance. We did not pray for healing for Celeste; we prayed she would be born alive. Beyond that, I could not pray. I prepared.

For Peter, I bought every sort of cleft bottle. I detailed our birth plan. I researched. I joined “Cleft Mommies” on Facebook. In my third trimester, I looked at photographs of other children with cleft lips and palates to mitigate the shock I might experience at seeing him.

For Celeste, I typed the birth plan, the childcare plan for our other children, and the funeral plan. We conferenced with doctors to review it. With the help of my therapist from the palliative care team, we advocated to transfer my care from obstetrics and gynecology to the fetal treatment center, a more sympathetic department. I gathered mementos. I sat by the Sacred Heart statue with Michelle, whose baby was stillborn; drank coffee with Stephanie, whose baby had anencephaly; and pored over *Mothering Spirit*, the blog of Laura Kelly Fanucci, whose twins died after birth. I savored their stories. My heart gathered up hope and peace from their experiences.

Adjusting to the world as it is now is impossible without the fifth stage of grief, acceptance. Even as you pray for a miracle, will you pray for acceptance? Even as you pray for an escape from suffering, will you pray for the strength to bear it?

The strength germinates in the darkness as a small seed, emerging to new life from the hollow of grief and death. It pushes through the pain of anger, argument, and depression, and finds the light. There is no timeline for this process, but there will come a time when we can hide no more. Whether or not we are ready, it will be time for the light to shine into the hollow of our heart. Are we ready to face the world as it is now? To turn away may leave some wounds unhealed.

The world now is not only a diagnosis, but a living foundation built around you. Consider who and what anchors you. Hold fast to the belief that somehow the world makes sense, that there is meaning and purpose in the things that

take place. That is your starting point today. You are called to dig deeper as new experiences challenge you at the very core.

Grief breaks us down in order to rebuild. Our pieces are the same, but they must join together in a different way to support our new life.

For a period of time Peter needed something every hour: refresh the breast milk, prime the pump, attend to its beeping, flush reflux medicine through the g-tube, try to feed, try to burp, clean up after he vomited, pump breast milk, start the total parenteral nutrition cycle, end the cycle, lock with heparin, wash, rinse, repeat.

All I could do was to try to accept in silence, but in some moments, the bitterness grew. This new reality was hard. As soon as we found some rhythm to life, he would spike a fever, and we would return to the hospital. My heart bled as I blamed myself for his illness. I asked myself, “What could I have done?” I thought, “I should have protected him.”

But that was impossible. The understanding came slowly as I learned to see death around the corner, haunting my son. The studies on his condition all repeated: “High risk of mortality.” The words dug into my heart. I finally saw that every step I took in this, our new normal, kept him alive.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux teaches that the way to holiness is to offer the smallest moments to God as acts of love and sacrifice. Thus, I began to realize, each medical procedure, each time I addressed the beeping of the pump, was an act of love. It was in those little acts, that I learned how to live life as a “medical mom,” to see the gentle hand of God beyond the suffering. He would bring good out of it all. The Scripture I clung to in the darkest moments rang true as our life, as it is now, came into focus:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ... Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we

ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. ... We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. (Rom 8:18, 26, 28)

## THE FOURTH TASK

### **Maintaining a Connection with What Has Been Lost**

My thoughts swarmed around the woman in the pew. Directly in my line of sight at Mass, she stood there with her baby girl, just where she had stood when we were both pregnant. The ache and the anger gnawed at me. In the end, I had to look away and close my eyes. My grief would not disappear.

The evil of a child dying does not disappear, even with acceptance and knowledge of the good things given to us.

A priest's words returned to me: "We cannot know why this is happening. But we can cling to God for dear life to help us get through this dark night." I could stop looking for answers. It was okay not to grasp the answers, because I could trust God to get us through and somehow, one day, turn the darkness into light.



You are not the person you were before the diagnosis. A year from now, you will have evolved even more. As you adjust, sometimes helplessly, to whatever your new normal is, the day will come for you not only to accept life as it is now but to once again accept life as it was. Remember life as it was? Waves of panic crashed into me when I first tried. Can I look with mer-

cy on the carelessness of my carefree life? Can I forgive myself for the times I wished it all would go away?

Saint Zélie Martin was the mother of Saint Thérèse. Three of her children died in early infancy and one in early childhood. She wrote:

When I closed the eyes of my dear little children and when I buried them, I felt great pain, but it was always with resignation. . . . Several people said to me, “It would have been much better never to have had them.” I can’t bear that kind of talk. I don’t think the sorrow and problems could be weighed against the eternal happiness of my children. So they weren’t lost forever. Life is short and full of misery. We’ll see them again in Heaven.<sup>6</sup>

The fourth task of grief is **maintaining a connection with what has been lost**.

I will likely never breastfeed a child again. I think I will always turn my head at the familiar beep of a medical pump. I will not see my daughter again on this earth.

In accepting reality as best I could, in questioning God about who he is and faithfully listening to his answer, in unearthing the courage to look at the losses I grieved most (no matter how superficial), in allowing the waves of grief to wash over me without hardening my heart against them or my husband, I found a path forward. I made mistakes, spending too much money and consuming too much alcohol on some days. But I moved forward.

As you actively seek peace, as you submit your questions to God and listen thoughtfully to the answers offered, as you attend to your heart and allow your grief to breathe,

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6. Zélie Martin to her sister-in-law, October 17, 1871, in *A Call to a Deeper Love: The Family Correspondence of the Parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1864–1885)*, ed. Frances Renda (New York: Alba House, 2011), 90–91.

you may uncover memories you never expected to cherish: relationships with medical professionals, bonding through the vulnerability when someone comforts you, the kicks of your child on your ribs. There were moments that might have seemed filled with darkness, but looking back carefully, we can see the stars.

Time passes. It feels like forever while you live it, but the shock, the anger, the heartache will lessen. The day will dawn when you will breathe again. And when you do, consider writing your story, if only for yourself or your family. Allow yourself to explore what happened and why, as best you can. Piece together the time before the diagnosis and during your transition with your story as it is developing. It will take time, and that is okay.

Look to the communion of saints — real people who desire to help us find our way, who pray for us. Consider the lives of Saint Monica, Saint Zélie Martin, Saint Gianna Molla, Blessed Concepción Cabrera de Armida, and Servant of God Chiara Corbella Petrillo: all laywomen who suffered in love for their children. In your darkest moments and in the moments of light, the saints intercede for you. You are never alone.



PART II

**The Fog: When You  
Cannot Pray**



IN WHOM WILL YOUR HEART FIND REST?

## **The Power of Friendship and Intercessory Prayer**

Camille emailed me every day. I knew no other woman with a prenatal diagnosis who spoke so openly and asked for prayers. She was the one I knew whose life had been rearranged by that visit to the doctor, who relocated for a safe delivery for her child, whose body was marked when they took her living child out of her and brought him into the light. After enough time and surgery, that season for them ended, but her wisdom remains a gift she shares with others.

Camille also shared prayers. She told me she would like to invite others to pray a novena for Peter, and was there any particular saint they should pray to? In those days, prayer was lost in the fog of shock. God was a thought, a Being whom I begged for strength, to whom I lifted my eyes and weakly pleaded, “Hold me up! O God, get me through.” Camille observed that there are times when our heart is so occupied with the present that we cannot pray. “In those times, let us pray for you,” she offered. Thus, recognizing that we had not the strength to lift our own, others lifted up their prayers for us.

My aunt, likewise, emailed daily. She dedicated herself to responding quickly, prompting me for news and non-news — about my walks, about how I spent my time — and wrote about her own doings, allowing me a view into the world be-

yond what I could see from the hospital window.

The friends and family closest to me came eagerly to care for our other children. A handful of people entered my life and carried me with their love and faithfulness. At the same time, other friendships moved out of season. The movement of friendship is mysterious. We must allow it to be so, as enough tears are spilled in the days of sorrow. Instead of adding grief over faded friendships, we should look with an open, grateful heart on the new relationships around us.

I struggle to trust. I struggle to believe the affection is genuine. I struggle to be vulnerable and remain so with those who love me. How do you struggle in relationships?

As Peter's health improved and we were in the city less and less, I missed those friendships that had emerged at his hospital bedside. Living in the hospital, away from family, friends, and neighbors, I purchased a book of letters titled *A Call to a Deeper Love: The Family Correspondence of the Parents of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus (1864–1885)*. In reading her correspondence, I sensed Zélie joining me on my path. Mother Teresa also befriended me in her letters and spiritual correspondence. Even if you are physically alone, the saints are spiritually near, ready to walk alongside you.

Accompanying us even more poignantly is the Virgin Mary, whose child was born to die, whose son was lost as a twelve-year-old, who was reminded at every key event how little he belonged to her because he belonged first to God.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, quoting *Lumen Gentium*, tells us, "Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness. ... [T]hey do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus. ... So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped."<sup>7</sup>

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7. Catholic Church, "The Intercession of the Saints," in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012), 956.

The Church Triumphant (in heaven) reaches out to the Church Militant (on earth) and into the hearts of the Church Suffering (in purgatory) in a blessed communion that has the power to raise our minds and hearts to Christ Jesus even in the loneliest of times.



HOW WILL YOU LIVE?

## **Maintaining a Sense of Self Apart from the Crisis**

**T**he anger boiled up inside me to the bursting point. Sick of the heartache, sick of the tears, sick of the suffering, I felt my rage spill over. To the nurse, I proclaimed, “I’m taking a break!”

Storming out of my son’s hospital room, down the elevator, and out the hospital doors into the bright, clear sunlight of a warm San Francisco day, I began to walk. In a fury, I walked and continued walking until the rhythm of the steps overcame my thoughts. The pace of my breathing outstripped the emotion surging in my heart. I kept on walking until my eyes could look outward. Buildings, the sky, came into focus. I felt the breeze again. The scene around me glowed with color. I felt curious.

In the autumn, Rebecca visited my son’s hospital room daily. She inquired after my watercolor paintings, the dabbling I had taken up to pass the time; we talked about design as I showed her tile samples; we talked about psychology; we talked about the difference between social work and psychology. She gave me something unique in those days when everything concerned my baby: she gave me a sense of self.

At Christmas time, my husband bought me a mat cutter, a large four-foot-long tool used to cut mats for picture framing.

As though I was playing a game of Twister, I maneuvered my pregnant body around a crowded office framing anything and everything I could. My thoughts flowed over the numbers, the mathematics, the art of color, shape, and size, the hunt for antique picture frames. Every bit of it took my mind off my present circumstances and made me feel alive again.

Pregnancy is consuming. Motherhood is consuming. Then add the complicated nature of a prenatal diagnosis: more appointments, more miles driven to see specialists, more purchases, more plans, more worries, more adapting of one's home to accommodate needs, more adapting of one's heart to expect the unexpected.

In the hormonal, bodily, and cognitive changes of pregnancy, as the presence of the little one inside you saturates your awareness, it is all too easy to crowd out aspects of pregnancy unrelated to little ones. Your heart is disposed to give everything you possess to your infant. Yet you also embark here on a very long road as a caregiver or as a grieving mother. The road is long and tiring. Adopting self-care routines now can buoy you up for the season when the bad days seem to outweigh the good days.

We are physical, emotional, relational, intellectual, and spiritual beings. Each of these dimensions must be fed. The pressure to care for oneself physically during pregnancy is unavoidable. But when a prenatal diagnosis is life-limiting, it can be easy to stop caring, to give in to the whims of eating or drinking, to stop exercising and start loafing. We hurt. We're tempted to give up because the reasons not to strike us as useless. "Why not drink?" I thought. "She doesn't have a brain." So I drank to numb the feelings of grief.

Your emotions need to be felt, expressed, and processed according to your needs. You might need to journal, to talk to a friend, to seek out a spiritual advisor or a counselor. A counselor from our hospital's palliative care team accompanied me through my grief process with weekly phone calls.

Relationships may mature, suffer, or fall away, but you

need people in your life. You need a team behind you — with you — to help you face what lies ahead. Some fear that sharing their sorrow is simply complaining, but complaining is a distortion of the real need. Begin by sharing openly and honestly with a person you can trust, whose sympathetic responses allow you to feel, flourish, and find grace. Lighthearted friends who were experienced in the art of nonjudgmental acceptance took me out or sent me emails, according to my need.

You are a whole person capable of learning new words and new skills. The doctors will teach you what your child will need, and you are capable of managing it. In the meantime, you can learn other things as well. A calligraphy workshop and a watercolor workshop filled my soul with light as I embraced the power of beauty and dedication to a new skill. Mat cutting, walking, and reading fed my intellectual capacity. I found myself pushing back the depressive response, alive again.

It was hard to stand in a church, to stare at the tabernacle and the other families — the places and hearts that were full — and not drop into the gulf of anger and hatred of what was happening. God reached me instead through my other human faculties, through skills, hobbies, and an appreciation of beauty.



WHERE WILL YOUR HEART DWELL?  
**Approaching God through Beauty**

Your pregnancy is physical. Its toll is physical. The diagnosis is physical. When the ingredients and new circumstances are part of the material world, the healing will be not only spiritual, but beautiful.

Father Thomas Dubay, in *The Evidential Power of Beauty*, defines beauty according to Saint Thomas Aquinas's definition of beauty: "Beautiful things are those which, when seen, please." Beauty engages both our mind and our senses; the two are related and depend on each other. "The inner radiant form of each thing shines forth in its specific richness, delights the beholder/listener, and so attracts the person to itself: the more alive one is, the more one desires to continue listening or gazing. When the experience is especially deep, one can be so strongly drawn that ecstasy, being drawn out of oneself by intense joy or delight, occurs."<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Margaret Laracy, PsyD, teaches that beauty is therapeutic.<sup>9</sup> Anxious thoughts intrude into the mind, building a layer of fear, looking for danger, assessing the risk, blind to the good. Depressed thoughts drown the mind in a cyclical path of concern, ruminating and tempting the heart to hopeless-

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8. Thomas Dubay, *The Evidential Power of Beauty* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 36.

9. Margaret Laracy, "The Healing Power of Beauty: Surprising Psychological Benefits," *Mind & Spirit*, July 23, 2015, <http://mindspirit.com/the-healing-power-of-beauty-surprising-psychological-benefits/>.

ness. When we are introduced to beauty, the power of wonder can draw our broken heart out of itself again to see the good and the hope that lies ahead. Beauty lifts us up.

Father Dubay writes, “The glory of the Lord, therefore, is the supereminently luminous beauty of divinity beyond all experience and all descriptions, all categories, a beauty before which all earthly splendors, marvelous as they are, pale into insignificance.”<sup>10</sup> God himself is the fullness of beauty. The beauty of God pulls us forward, and through beauty, God comes to us.

Even in the hollow of grief, Jesus said to Martha, “Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” (Jn 11:40). You will see the glory of God. “God is *superpulcher*, superbeautiful, absolutely and supereminently. Scripture calls this his glory.”<sup>11</sup> When we dry our eyes and look around after the long cry, we will see vestiges of God’s glory. When we travel outside the hospital room and the doctor’s office, we will see the fingerprints of God all over creation.

At Celeste’s funeral reception, I entered my mother’s kitchen and, glancing around, noticed a granite countertop illuminated by a prism of fruits and vegetables with a vibrancy that captivated my heart for a moment in those hours of pain. When we returned home, a wild mass of sweet peas invited me out of my grief and into my house. That spring, I drove to my mother’s house twice a week and collected armfuls of sweet peas from her free-flowing garden of fragrant flowers. For two years, I sought the consolation of flowers.

Death made me acutely aware of the presence of beauty around me. Beauty’s power wrapped around me like a mother’s arms. Its clarity calmed the overwhelming clutter of my thoughts when their noise deafened me. Its balm soothed the wounds whose pain seemed never-ending. Its simplicity built space for me to breathe, to contemplate, and to sense that, in

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10. Dubay, *Evidential Power of Beauty*, 45.

11. *Ibid.*, 43.

all my complexity, I am enough. Beauty drew me back from that complexity to grasp the goodness of being a child of God.

At the same time, the ugliness of bad art, bad music, bad politics, and bad taste pushed upon me the understanding that the broken parts in the world still exist, and I am one of them. In beauty, I perceived the Divine; I perceived hope and felt that somehow everything would be okay.

We can know with beauty, although we cannot define that knowledge scientifically. When beauty, true beauty, is present in its elegant simplicity, God is near. Beauty lifts us away from the burdensome moment with its confusion to remind us that the universe is expanding, that there is so much more to life than what happens now. Beauty reminds us that the cross cannot last forever.

Even in suffering, there is beauty, because there is Christ, the wounded healer. When you question the goodness of God in this diagnosis, when reason fails to explain why your child must suffer, seek God in the beautiful. Clear away the clutter, the technology, the stimulation. Get lost in a poem, a hymn, a painting. Walk outside. Encounter nature. And allow the Lord in his supereminent beauty to lift you up.



PART III

**The Light: Traditional Prayers  
of the Church**



## The Holy Rosary

The Rosary is a Scripture-based prayer. It begins with the Apostles' Creed. The Our Father introduces each mystery, centered on the events of Christ's life, that we meditate on through the following ten Hail Marys. There are four sets of mysteries: Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful, and Glorious. The structure of the Rosary "is meant to lead one into restful and contemplative prayer related to each Mystery. The gentle repetition of the words helps us to enter into the silence of our hearts, where Christ's spirit dwells."<sup>12</sup>

### *Apostles' Creed*

I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ,  
his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;

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12. USCCB, "How to Pray the Rosary," accessed May 31, 2019, <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/rosaries/how-to-pray-the-rosary.cfm>.

he descended into hell;  
on the third day he rose again from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;  
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting. Amen.

### *Our Father*

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who  
trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

### *Hail Mary*

Hail Mary,  
full of grace,  
the Lord is with you;  
blessed are you among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners now  
and at the hour of our death. Amen.

*Glory Be (Doxology)*

Glory be to the Father,  
and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning,  
is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.

*Hail Holy Queen*

Hail, holy Queen,  
mother of mercy,  
our life, our sweetness, and our hope.  
To you we cry, poor banished children of Eve;  
to you we send up our sighs,  
mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.  
Turn, then, most gracious advocate,  
your eyes of mercy toward us;  
and after this, our exile,  
show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.  
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,  
That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray:  
O God, whose only-begotten Son  
by his life, death, and resurrection  
has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life,  
grant, we beseech thee,  
that meditating upon these mysteries  
of the most holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
we may imitate what they contain  
and obtain what they promise,  
through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

## ***The Joyful Mysteries***

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### **THE FIRST JOYFUL MYSTERY: The Annunciation**

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But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. ... And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be ... ?" (Lk 1:29, 34)

Shock, surprise, mystery. How little seems to have changed, yet everything has changed. Mary hears the announcement from the angel and considers, "How will this be?" What makes her question different from that of John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, for which the angel silenced him? It is that she asks the question with a simple, wondering heart. *How will this be? What has God planned?* And she opens her heart to his will.

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### **THE SECOND JOYFUL MYSTERY: The Visitation**

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[Elizabeth exclaimed,] "And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy." (Lk 1:43-44)

Though she turns outward to her friend, Elizabeth's words turn her inward, to this child nurtured inside her. Mary's presence, her voice, reaches into the hearts of others and transforms them.

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### **THE THIRD JOYFUL MYSTERY: The Nativity**

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But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. (Lk 2:19)

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the

Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." (Mt 2:13)

Mary sits, holding her son, as strange events unfold before her. Perhaps she feels pushed back a little, as we do the moment medical professionals take over the care of an infant. Perhaps she feels helpless before the workings of God as she takes it all in. Mary nourishes her son, giving him all he needs from her by holding him close to her breast.

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**THE FOURTH JOYFUL MYSTERY: The Presentation in the Temple**

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Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." (Lk 2:34-35)

"A sword will pierce through your own soul also." It should have been a joyful day. It should have been dominated by the promise of glad things. Mary's experience is augmented by each new discovery of what life will be like in the only experience of physical motherhood she will ever know.

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**THE FIFTH JOYFUL MYSTERY: The Finding in the Temple**

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And when they saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." (Lk 2:48)

And now, the fear. The fear goes before her as her son is lost to her. Searching through the caravan, searching among family, she and Joseph cannot find him. Where is he? When she meets him again, she implores him, “Why have you treated us so?” If the Mother of God, the Immaculate Conception, the Queen of Heaven, can ask this question, so too can I, as long as I enlarge my heart to receive God’s answer.



### *The Luminous Mysteries*

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#### **THE FIRST LUMINOUS MYSTERY: The Baptism of Christ in the Jordan**

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[A]nd you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Col 2:12)

Baptism is a death. We are buried with Christ to rise with him when he comes again. We can expect to suffer in this life. We are told, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor ... and come, follow me” (Mk 10:21). When I hand God my expectations, my dreams of how it should have been, he will transform them through this death into something radically new.

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#### **THE SECOND LUMINOUS MYSTERY: The Wedding Feast at Cana**

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When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” (Jn 2:3-5)

“My hour has not yet come,” he says. In doing this, Mary knows she is letting go. She is letting go of the child she raised, the man he grew to be. He will go his own way now. His time has come. Mary will do all she can to love him now. That means consenting to the path he must walk.

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**THE THIRD LUMINOUS MYSTERY: Jesus’ Proclamation of the Coming of the Kingdom of God**

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And he said to all, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Lk 9:23)

If I give my life to God, he is going to ask me to walk the way that he walked. There is no escape from suffering this life. In Christ, suffering is transformed. Will I accept this cross? Will I drink the cup that he drinks?

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**THE FOURTH LUMINOUS MYSTERY: The Transfiguration**

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Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep but kept awake, and they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. (Lk 9:32)

For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” (Mk 9:6-7)

God prepares me through a glimpse of beauty, a kind word. Those are the transfiguration moments, the moments that will strengthen me for whatever will be; the moments that anchor me when I am desperate to flee, to fight, to numb my grief; the moments that remind me who Christ is, who my child is, what my vocation is.

**THE FIFTH LUMINOUS MYSTERY: The Institution of the Eucharist**

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Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. (Jn 14:27)

Peace is possible, even as the warnings sound in Mary's ears, even as the disciples hear the crucifixion foretold, even as Christ breaks the bread he transforms into his body. Peace is possible. Peace is not a matter of believing everything is okay, or even of having knowledge that everything will be okay. Peace is unearthly surrender to God, allowing him to act, walking with him. He gives himself completely to me in the Eucharist. He asks me to give myself completely to him.

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***The Sorrowful Mysteries***

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**THE FIRST SORROWFUL MYSTERY: The Agony in the Garden**

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And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this chalice from me; nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. (Lk 22:41-43)

We can pray. Jesus petitions the Father to allow him to avoid, if it is possible, the appalling trials he sees as he looks ahead. But the Father calls him to empty himself out, to show us the way of total self-gift.<sup>13</sup> The saints and angels stay beside me, praying for me, ready to tend my broken heart.

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13. Richard John Neuhaus, *Death on a Friday Afternoon* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 224.

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**THE SECOND SORROWFUL MYSTERY: The Scourging at the Pillar**

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When he was about to die under the blows, he groaned aloud and said: “It is clear to the Lord in his holy knowledge that, though I might have been saved from death, I am enduring terrible sufferings in my body under this beating, but in my soul I am glad to suffer these things because I fear him.” (2 Mc 6:30)

His blood pours down his body. The tradition goes that Our Lady later absorbs his fallen blood in linen.<sup>14</sup> She saves every drop, preserving the suffering her child endured. I can imitate her by staying in the moment, by facing the cross ahead, by looking deeply into the eyes of my child on the ultrasound screen.

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**THE THIRD SORROWFUL MYSTERY: The Crowning with Thorns**

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So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!” (Jn 19:5)

They mock him and crown him king, a king of fools. And yet he is a king. It is Christ’s presence that teaches us that glory and strength are not about power.<sup>15</sup> To be weak is not to fail or to be less. Christ’s power is made perfect in weakness.

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14. Anne Catherine Emmerich. *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (El Sobrante, CA: North Bay Books, 2003), 137–138.

15. Alice von Hildebrand, *The Privilege of Being a Woman* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2002), 24.

**THE FOURTH SORROWFUL MYSTERY: The Carrying of the Cross**

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And he said to all, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it."  
(Lk 9:23-24)

Is this the way I must walk? Is this what God asks of me? If he is the perfect example, then look! He is not alone. Veronica wipes his face. Simon helps carry his cross. He meets his mother, whose heart breaks alongside him. God does not choose for me suffer alone. He will send me souls to comfort me as his loved ones comforted him.

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**THE FIFTH SORROWFUL MYSTERY: The Crucifixion and Death**

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Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:45-46)

And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. (Mt 27:59-61)

Christ cries out to his Father. At the apex of the cross, he is abandoned, his heart torn. There is no comfort. What will happen after my child is born? Where will I abide with God? However my path develops, Christ walked this way before me.



## *The Glorious Mysteries*

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### THE FIRST GLORIOUS MYSTERY: **The Resurrection**

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They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” (Jn 20:13)

Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rab-boni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” (Jn 20:16-17)

The blessings may be unseen, unrecognizable because they are unlike the blessings we knew before the diagnosis. Yet here they are. I cannot remain in the past; I must move forward, I must go out as my life, too, proclaims the good God has done for me. There is a hidden light waiting to reveal itself, and its glory is beyond our comprehension.

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### THE SECOND GLORIOUS MYSTERY: **The Ascension**

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He said to them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. (Acts 1:7-9)

God gives his promise. Even as he seems to leave me, even

as the security I rested in disappears, God promises. He will send his Spirit. I shall find strength. There will be power as he works for good in all things.

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**THE THIRD GLORIOUS MYSTERY: The Descent of the Holy Spirit**

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“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (Jn 14:26)

Mary sat among the disciples as the Holy Spirit descended with tongues of fire. Of all those whom Christ encountered during his life and ministry, there was no life more touched than Mary’s, no voice more filled with the power of his proclamation. She is his mother always.

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**THE FOURTH GLORIOUS MYSTERY: The Assumption**

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For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thes 4:16-17)

Mary’s assumption is the promise of what is to come when Christ returns and our fallen bodies rise from the dead, glorified as the Father glorified Christ’s body. Whatever the defect, whatever way my child’s body did not develop as it was meant to, it will be healed. And yet the marks of the love, the prayers, the strength through suffering that developed in my child’s mind and soul will never be erased. He or she is my little one and will always be.

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THE FIFTH GLORIOUS MYSTERY: **The Coronation of Mary**

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After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands. (Rv 7:9)

“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Lk 11:28)

I carry my child, I give my devotion, facing whatever the consequences of this diagnosis may be. I do it for love, for duty, for the sake of my call to be a cocreator with God. This gift is not forgotten, however imperfectly I give it. When I stand before God, he will ask me when I saw him naked and clothed him, hungry and fed him (cf. Mt 25:37). Then the angels will witness and my children will cry out, “She gave all for us!”



## The Stations of the Cross

“The Stations of the Cross began as the practice of pious pilgrims to Jerusalem who would retrace the final journey of Jesus Christ to Calvary. Later, for the many who wanted to pass along the same route, but could not make the trip to Jerusalem, a practice developed that eventually took the form of the fourteen stations currently found in almost every church.”<sup>16</sup>

You can also pray the Stations at home. Take as much time as you need with each station. You might meditate on one a day or all fourteen throughout the course of the day, or you could take the time to pray them from beginning to end without interruption.

In this meditation, the salutation “Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love” is taken from Saint Catherine of Siena, who closed each of her letters with this dedication. An excerpt from a prayer written by Saint Alphonsus Liguori (“I love you, Jesus, my love ...”) concludes each reflection. Some like to conclude each station with an Our Father, a Hail Mary, a Glory Be, or all three prayers, while others end with a verse from a hymn. The verses provided here to act as a transition between stations are from an ancient hymn, the *Stabat Mater*.

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16. USCCB, “Stations of the Cross,” accessed May 31, 2019, <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/stations-of-the-cross/index.cfm>.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let us enter into the presence of God and ask him to inspire us.

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**THE FIRST STATION: Jesus Is Condemned to Death**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. [genuflect or bow]  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world." Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" ...

Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him. And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and clothed him in a purple robe; they came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no crime in him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" ...

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.  
(Jn 18:33-38; 19:1-5, 16)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

My child's condition is not my fault. My child is innocent, as you were. Jesus, you are the way, the truth, and the life. How can I recognize you in the face of this prenatal diagnosis? What can I request of you?

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

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

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THE SECOND STATION: **Jesus Carries His Cross**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. (genuflect or bow)  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him. (Mt 27:27-31)

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha. (Jn 19:17)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

Vulnerable ... humiliated ... exposed. Even with every illusion stripped away, I can see you, I can turn toward you as you turn toward me.

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

*Through her heart, his sorrow sharing,  
all his bitter anguish bearing,  
now at length the sword had passed.*

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THE THIRD STATION: **Jesus Falls for the First Time**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. (genuflect or bow)  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
he was bruised for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,  
and with his stripes we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned every one to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.  
He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he opened not his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,  
so he opened not his mouth. (Is 53:4-7)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

God, you would bear my sorrow. All that I can bear, you have borne. You have fallen, and you teach me how to fall.

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

*Oh how sad and sore distressed  
was that Mother highly blessed,  
of the sole-begotten One!*

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THE FOURTH STATION: **Jesus Meets Mary, His Mother**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. (genuflect or bow)  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,

“Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.” (Lk 2:33-40)

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?  
Look and see  
if there is any sorrow like my sorrow. (Lam 1:12a)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

Naked, twisted, abused, mocked — Jesus, you are no longer recognizable, but your mother sees you, knows you, and loves you.

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offend-

ed you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

*Christ above in torment hangs;  
she beneath beholds the pangs  
of her dying, glorious Son.*

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**THE FIFTH STATION: Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry His Cross**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. (genuflect or bow)  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mk 8:34)

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. (Lk 23:26)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

This is the way you would have me tread, the way of the cross. No one else can experience it the way I feel it, yet you do not intend for me to go alone. You yourself did not walk this path alone. Rather, you showed me how others can accompany me on it.

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

*Is there one who would not weep,*

*whelmed in miseries so deep,  
Christ's dear Mother to behold?*

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**THE SIXTH STATION: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. (genuflect or bow)  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Is 53:2-3)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

The love I show my child — whatever my mood, whatever the condition — is a love that touches on the supernatural love of God. It is a love that knows no bounds. I reach for you. Christ, show me how to love!

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

*Can the human heart refrain  
from partaking in her pain,  
in that Mother's pain untold?*

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**THE SEVENTH STATION: Jesus Falls for the Second Time**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. (genuflect or bow)  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

I am utterly spent and crushed;

I groan because of the tumult of my heart.  
Lord, all my longing is known to thee,  
my sighing is not hidden from thee.  
My heart throbs, my strength fails me;  
and the light of my eyes — it also has gone from me.  
My friends and companions stand aloof from my  
plague,  
and my kinsmen stand afar off. ...  
But for thee, O LORD, do I wait;  
it is thou, O LORD my God, who will answer. ...  
For I am ready to fall,  
and my pain is ever with me. ...  
Do not forsake me, O LORD!  
    O my God, be not far from me!  
Make haste to help me,  
    O LORD, my salvation! (Ps 38:8-11, 15, 17, 21-22)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

Let me fall into your arms! You will not abandon me. Let me fall. I do not need to be strong all the time.

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

*For the sins of his own nation  
saw him hang in desolation,  
all with bloody scourges rent.*

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**THE EIGHTH STATION: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. (genuflect or bow)  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him.

But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (Lk 23:27-31)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

Jesus, you wept, and you invite me to weep. There will be a time bear to up and a time to succumb. If the tears will fall, let them fall, fiercely. Let my heart pour out its grief.

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

*Bruised, derided, cursed, defiled,  
she beheld her tender Child,  
till his Spirit forth he sent.*

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**THE NINTH STATION: Jesus Falls for the Third Time**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. (genuflect or bow)  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb 4:15-16)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

As I fall, you will lift me. Each time I am crushed under fresh news, a new diagnosis, a new turn of events, you strengthen me. God, you enlarge my heart.

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

*O thou Mother, fount of love,  
touch my spirit from above,  
make my heart with thine accord.*

*Make me feel as thou hast felt;  
make my soul to glow and melt  
with the love of Christ, my Lord.*

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**THE TENTH STATION: Jesus Is Stripped of His Clothes**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. (genuflect or bow)  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. (Lk 23:33-34)

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." (Jn 19:23-24a)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

Even in my grief, I must submit to tests, to questions, to passing comments of strangers. Is my last dignity to disappear? Lord, weave these experiences into the fabric of my life, creating a tapestry whose design only you can see.

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

*Holy Mother, pierce me through;  
in my heart each wound renew  
of my Savior crucified.*

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THE ELEVENTH STATION: **Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. (genuflect or bow)  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Lk 23:39-43)

[T]hen they sat down and kept watch over him there. And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." ...

So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down

now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Mt 27:36-37, 41-43)

So the soldiers did this. But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. (Jn 19:25-27)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

God, you call me. You call my child. You may not perform a physical miracle to save us from suffering. Does that disprove your love? There is something greater than my expectation here, though I cannot see it now. Mary stands by, waiting.

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

*Let me share with thee his pain,  
who for all my sins was slain,  
who for me in torments died.*

*Let me mingle tears with thee,  
mourning him who mourned for me,  
all the days that I may live.*

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**THE TWELFTH STATION: Jesus Dies on the Cross**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. (genuflect or bow)  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani?" that is, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" ... But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." (Mt 27:45-46, 49)

[W]hile the sun's light failed ... the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. (Lk 23:45-46)

And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. ... When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Mt 27:51-52, 54)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

Lord, prepare my heart for delivery, for the moment when my child will pass from the safety of my body into the light. I entrust him or her to you. You show me what can be accomplished by the power of the cross!

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

*By the cross with thee to stay,  
there with thee to weep and pray,*

*this I ask of thee to give.  
Virgin, of all virgins blest,  
Listen to my fond request:  
let me share thy grief divine.*

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**THE THIRTEENTH STATION: Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. (genuflect or bow)  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. And Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. And he bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud, and laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. (Mk 15:42-46)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

Seeing the body dressed in linen, your mother abides. The women who love her and who loved you remain. They will keep watch. Whatever else unfolds after this frightful day will pass. They keep watch.

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

*Let me, to my latest breath,  
in my body bear the death  
of that dying Son of thine.*

*Wounded with his every wound,  
steep my soul till it hath swooned  
in his very Blood away.*

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**THE FOURTEENTH STATION: Jesus Is Placed in the Tomb**

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*We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you. (genuflect or bow)  
Because, by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Then [Joseph of Arimathea] took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud, and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. (Lk 23:53-54)

Nicodemus also, who had at first come to [Joseph] by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds' weight. They took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. (John 19:39-40)

And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. (Mt 27:59-61)

The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid; then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the

commandment. (Lk 23:55-56)

Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love!

In a garden, in an unused tomb, I bury my dreams, my expectations. Lord, help me to stay with my grief, to wait with it, to understand it. Transform it, Christ, as you were transformed when you rose from the dead.

I love you, Jesus, my love; I repent of ever having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me what you will.

*Christ, when thou shalt call me hence,  
be thy Mother my defense,  
be thy cross my victory.*

*While my body here decays,  
may my soul thy goodness praise,  
safe in paradise with thee. Amen.*

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CLOSING PRAYER OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

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Do not look forward to the trials and crosses of this life with dread and fear.

Rather, look to them with full confidence that as they arise, God, to whom you belong, will deliver you from them.

He has guided and guarded you thus far in life.

Do you but hold fast to his dear hand, and he will lead you safely through all trials.

Whenever you cannot stand, he will carry you lovingly in his arms.

Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow.

The same Eternal Father who cares for you today will take good care of you tomorrow and every day of your life.

Either he will shield you from suffering or he will give you the unfailing strength to bear it.

Be at peace then and put aside all useless thoughts, vain dreads, and anxious imaginations.

Amen.<sup>17</sup>

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17. Philip Kosloski, "Worried about the Future? Pray This Comforting Prayer of St. Francis de Sales," *Aleteia*, September 18, 2018, <https://aleteia.org/2018/09/18/worried-about-the-future-pray-this-comforting-prayer-of-st-francis-de-sales/>.



## Praying with Scripture

There are many ways to pray, but none contains such wealth for meditation as praying with Scripture. When Saint Augustine read the Bible prior to his conversion, he thought it too simplistic, not nearly as remarkable as the ancient works he studied and enjoyed. It was later, as his heart grew raw and turned toward the Lord, that he discovered the richness of Scripture; he realized that it speaks to the high and the low, with wisdom for every circumstance.<sup>18</sup>

*Lectio divina*, Latin for “divine reading,” is a method of Scripture-based prayer that moves slowly through a scriptural passage to engage the mind and soul more deeply than a swifter reading. Traditionally, *lectio divina* has four steps: read, reflect, pray, and rest. You can go through all four steps or condense them to fit your time, ability, and needs.

I invite you to meditate on any of the Scripture passages in this devotional using the directions below, in which I have integrated helpful tips from Saint Francis de Sales borrowed from his *Introduction to the Devout Life*<sup>19</sup> with the basic steps of *lectio divina*.

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18. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 40.

19. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 49–52.

***Lectio Divina with Saint Francis de Sales***

First, place yourself in the presence of God. Ask for his aid. Remind yourself that “He is everywhere, and in all, and that there is no place, nothing in the world, devoid of His Most Holy Presence.”<sup>20</sup> Next, “call to mind that God is not only present in the place where you are, but that He is especially present in your heart and mind, which He kindles and inspires with His Holy Presence, abiding there as Heart of your heart, Spirit of your spirit.”<sup>21</sup>

Recall that our Lord is watching over you. This is not “mere imagination, it is very truth, and although we see Him not, He is looking down upon us.”<sup>22</sup> Now, picture Jesus “in His Sacred Humanity as if He were beside you just as we are wont to think of our friends, and fancy that we see or hear them at our side. ... Ask of Him grace to serve and worship Him in this your meditation.”<sup>23</sup> Pray, “Show me your Ways, O Lord, and teach me your paths.”<sup>24</sup> Then, begin your *lectio divina*.

- *Read*: Read the passage you selected slowly and reflectively. If anything catches your attention or strikes your heart, stay with it. Do not rush on ahead. It does not matter whether you read only one sentence or ten. Stay a while.
- *Reflect*: Explore the passage. What does it mean to you? What does it mean in the context of its writing? What sights, smells, and sounds can you imagine in the setting? If it is a narrative, can you imagine it as vividly as if it were a movie? Place yourself in the story as one of the characters or a passerby.
- *Pray*: Next, allow yourself to simply be. Slow your thoughts down, and stay in this mental state in-

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20. De Sales, *Introduction*, 50.

21. *Ibid.*, 50.

22. *Ibid.*, 51.

23. *Ibid.*, 51.

24. *Ibid.*, 52.

duced by your reflection. Direct your thoughts to God, remembering his presence and love.

- *Rest:* Try to discover silence in your heart to listen to what the Lord desires to say to you. Hold the mental image from the passage that has led you to this prayer. What is God saying in your heart? Is he speaking, reminding you of the lessons you once knew? Is it a point of consolation? Or does Christ seem to be asleep?

Saint Francis de Sales encourages us, at the end of the time of prayer, first to review what thoughts or emotions arose during this time of prayer, and second to form a special resolution or commitment inspired by our prayer.

Close by thanking God for the ways he has inspired you, for his mercy and goodness. Offer your thoughts, emotions, and resolution to God. Beg God to bless you and help you put this resolution into practice. Pray for your intentions and for those of others in your life. It is fitting to close with an Our Father. As you finish, choose one thought from your meditation to review in your heart throughout the day.



## Scripture Readings for Reflection

### *Isaiah 54:1-11*

“Sing, O barren one, who did not bear;  
break forth into singing and cry aloud,  
you who have not been in travail!

For the children of the desolate one will be more  
than the children of her that is married, says the  
LORD.

Enlarge the place of your tent,  
and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched  
out;

hold not back, lengthen your cords  
and strengthen your stakes.

For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left,  
and your descendants will possess the nations  
and will people the desolate cities.

“Fear not, for you will not be ashamed;  
be not confounded, for you will not be put to shame;  
for you will forget the shame of your youth,  
and the reproach of your widowhood you will re-  
member no more.

For your Maker is your husband,  
the LORD of hosts is his name;

and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,  
the God of the whole earth he is called.  
For the LORD has called you  
like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,  
like a wife of youth when she is cast off,  
says your God.  
For a brief moment I forsook you,  
but with great compassion I will gather you.  
In overflowing wrath for a moment  
I hid my face from you,  
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,  
says the LORD, your Redeemer.

“For this is like the days of Noah to me:  
as I swore that the waters of Noah  
should no more go over the earth,  
so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you  
and will not rebuke you.  
For the mountains may depart  
and the hills be removed,  
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,  
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,  
says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

“O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted,  
behold, I will set your stones in antimony,  
and lay your foundations with sapphires.”

***Lamentations 3:17-23***

[M]y soul is bereft of peace,  
I have forgotten what happiness is;  
so I say, “Gone is my glory,  
and my expectation from the LORD.”

Remember my affliction and my bitterness,

the wormwood and the gall!  
My soul continually thinks of it  
and is bowed down within me.  
But this I call to mind,  
and therefore I have hope:  
The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,  
his mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning;  
great is thy faithfulness.

***John 11:3–5, 20–29, 32–44***

So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it.” ...

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world.”

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ... Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; and he said, “Where have

you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus wept. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

### ***Romans 8:18-28***

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning with labor pains together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do

not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.



## Recommended Songs and Hymns

**M**usic is a powerful way to lift the soul when the mind is weighed down. Consider listening to or singing the following selections when you enter into prayer or a quiet moment of reflection.

“Abide with Me” (hymn)

“Be Still, My Soul” (hymn)

“Nothing Can Trouble” (Taizé chant)

“O God beyond All Praising” (hymn)

“Take, Lord, Receive” (worship song by John Foley)

“What Child Is This?” (Christmas carol)



PART IV

**The Year: Meditations for the  
Liturgical Seasons**



## ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

### He Was Born To Die

“**A**dvent is a time of waiting.” I have heard these words throughout my life. One, two, three, four candles. Waiting. Trust. Hope.

The angel of the Lord appeared unto Mary ... and gave her a prenatal diagnosis. Is that too far to take it? What is a prenatal diagnosis, other than a prediction that this new life will be extraordinary — outside of what we consider ordinary, outside our normal?

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High;

and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,

and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever,

and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (Lk 1:31-33)

Mary is aware that this child will be different but knows not how. He will be great. He will be God! His story will be unlike any other story ever told, this much she knows.

So too will your child’s story be unlike other stories. Your child will be great, no matter how different your new normal

may look from the normal of those around you. You and your child are both born into the priesthood of Christ, so your child's sufferings and yours can make up what is lacking in the suffering of Christ (cf. Col 1:24).

You can anticipate what the data predicts and look at photographs ahead of time, but in its deepest space, your heart must enter into an eternal waiting. With groans too deep to hear, the Spirit prays for you. Your spirit heaves with the weight of a diagnosis, the worry, the anxiety, making it hard to trust. But God hears your prayer.

Creation, made subject to futility, awaits with eager longing (cf. Rom 8:19-20). The world is passing away. Whatever the handicap, whatever the illness, whatever the deformity, this too shall pass.

Stopping in front of the crèche, I can no longer think of Saint Francis creating the first nativity scene, or of the Israelites longing for their Messiah, or of the purple and pink candles lighting my dark dining room. I think of the empty manger. Pausing, enraptured by the scene, I hear in my mind "He was born to die." My arms wrap around my belly and sense the life within me. When she is born, she will die.

"He was born to die." It is not a complete theology. The death did not save us. Death was the veil that hung over his life:

"Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel,

and for a sign that is spoken against

(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also)." (Lk 2:34-35a)

There is the diagnosis. What will happen to the child, you cannot yet know. But you know your heart will break. It will be pierced. In her pierced soul, Mary kept all these things.

But his death was not the end. He rose from the dead.

## ORDINARY TIME

### If Any Man Would Come after Me

**Y**ou see him in the distance, on a hill or in a boat, saying things you probably should hear, life-changing things. Something about him compels you to wonder, *What does he say?* “But Jesus answered, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the chalice that I am to drink?’ They said to him, ‘We are able’” (Mt 20:22).

Early in life, I met the Lord. My personality of the poet-romantic, the idealism of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux crying out to give all to God, the spirit of the child Teresa of Ávila running away from home to experience martyrdom, the dramatic hymns from the Life Teen Mass — all of these compelled me to offer everything I had to the Lord. I would enter the convent to marry my Lord as soon as he called. I was thirteen.

The long, slow road of maturity led me to discern that the convent was not God’s plan for me. Then a dashing, awkward, quiet musician knocked at the door; and with him came the butterflies, the foolish talking, the innocent flirtation. God called me to marriage and to children. Easy conceptions, unremarkable pregnancies, smooth-enough labors. We thought that the Lord planned to give us many children. Pregnant with our fourth, I quit my job, became certificated as a life coach, remade the office, and commenced business.

*You do not know what you are asking.* As the news trickled

in, shock upon shock rocked our reality. *Are you able to drink the chalice that I am to drink?* I recalled lessons of the youth ministers. One hears the Scriptures over and over, reads testimonies of suffering and stigmatic saints, but it never seems real.

When it happens, when the cross becomes real and heavy, will you remember his words? Will you listen and let those words penetrate your heart? *For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it* (Mk 8:35). This is the path to holiness; this is the path to life. You cannot know why you are suffering, but you must hold onto our God for dear life. The night is dark. The storm grows loud.

These lessons are not new. They have been taught these 2,000 years. Just as he did those centuries ago, the Word pleads with you to return to life: "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life. . . . Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Mt 6:25a, 26).

And lest the words "do not be anxious about your life" seem too small for the trials at hand, recall these words:

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (Jn 11:21-26)

Hope prevents fear from falling into despair.<sup>25</sup> God will not leave us orphans.

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25. Thomas Aquinas, "Fear," *Summa Theologiae* 2-2.125.2, New Advent, accessed November 21, 2018, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3125.htm>.

## LENT

### At the Cross Her Station Keeping

Saint Zélie Martin wrote in a letter to her sister-in-law, “When I closed the eyes of my dear little children and when I buried them, I felt great pain, but it was always with resignation. . . . Several people said to me, ‘It would have been much better never to have had them.’ I can’t bear that kind of talk. I don’t think the sorrow and problems could be weighed against the eternal happiness of my children. So they weren’t lost forever. Life is short and full of misery. We’ll see them again in Heaven.”<sup>26</sup>

We labor under an illusion of control in this life. Planners, vitamins, supplements, EKGs, thoroughly and scientifically practiced natural family planning; and yet our path in Christianity is built with the stones of letting go, of accepting, of permitting Jesus to sleep even as the boat of your soul is thrown about.

I conceived Peter in May, quit my job in July, launched a business in September, and received Peter’s diagnosis in October. In the months leading up to Celeste’s birth and death, I quit the business, took a three-month break from the newspaper column, and continued to live at the hospital with my

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26. Zélie Martin to her sister-in-law, October 17, 1871, in *A Call to a Deeper Love: The Family Correspondence of the Parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1864–1885)*, ed. Frances Renda (New York: Alba House, 2011), 90–91.

son. Everything I built up was torn down. In my own life and in my own way, I was Job.

We pray for control. We pray for healing so the situation will be in our control. We pray for the doctors to gain control over the illness. And what happens when nothing improves, when it goes exactly as prognosticated? In the hospital bed, as they dressed my stillborn daughter, I prayed Job's sorrowful and self-emptying words: "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Jb 1:21).

The desperate grief of our first prenatal diagnosis tore my heart in two. But our Lord knew what lay ahead. Father Richard John Neuhaus wrote, "The Greek word for this self-emptying is *kenosis*, it is the surrender of all that we hold most dear, and for Mary, it was the surrender of her dearest. Long before they looked at one another on Golgotha's place of strangest glory, they had been prepared by many little surrenders for this surrender by which all was restored."<sup>27</sup>

During Lent, this call to surrender emerges at the forefront of our liturgies and our practices: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." What control have we? "At the cross, her station keeping / stood the mournful Mother weeping / close to Jesus to the last" (*Stabat Mater*). That is our control. We choose whether we will run or accept: "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (Jn 10:18).

A popular quote, oft attributed to Viktor Frankl, Jewish psychiatrist and World War II concentration camp survivor, says, "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."<sup>28</sup> We cannot change the reality around us, but we can lean into the present moment, face it without avoidance, and trust that there is meaning and hope embedded deep in this world of pain. "God meant for you to have this baby," a friend assured me. Phrases like that

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27. Richard John Neuhaus, *Death on a Friday Afternoon* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 79.

28. Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill, *First Things First: To Live, to Love, to Learn, to Leave a Legacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 59.

run rampant in modern Christianity, but she knew enough of my world to say it and enough of her world to mean it.

During Lent, we journey with Christ. We accompany his sorrowing mother, whose soul a sword is piercing. We join the weeping women of Jerusalem. We join those who suffer, who met fear and stood against it. With them, in this great communion, we are united in a new way, finding a solidarity in suffering, a new power. And in this power, we find new wisdom, becoming a light for others even as we walk in darkness.

At the foot of the cross, even, we are not alone. We join Mary there, abiding, keeping her station even as she sorrows to see her son suffer, completely joined with him in love. As a youth, I prayed to join in his passion: “Let me mingle tears with thee, / mourning him who mourned for me, / all the days that I may live” (*Stabat Mater*). Here is my opportunity.

Will we keep our station with Mary? Can we keep watching this one hour? This hour of life will pass. Stay awake and alert, allow your emotions to pulse through you without running to the salves that numb them, allow your heart to break. Even if you cannot look at Christ, he looks at you and waits to mold your heart anew.



## EASTER

### What Is Easter When Your Child Dies?

Though the emptiness of the manger overwhelmed my vision, I recall that the first Christmas and Easter made hope possible. Christ was born, lived, died, and rose from the dead. He opened the gates of paradise. He shows us the way. He will come again in the resurrection of the dead when our immortal souls will unite with our risen bodies.

Advent feels empty; Christmas feels joyless; Easter feels false in these early days following the loss. Yet these are days of gratitude, hope, and longing — longing, like the Israelites'. Theirs is a spirituality I can understand. Our hope is not yet fulfilled. The world celebrates as if the hope is fulfilled, complete, satisfied. That is why these feast days feel empty while we are suffering. The world and we are looking for the here and now.

But it is not yet. At the height of suffering he came,<sup>29</sup> in the fullness of time.

We talk about a new normal. Grief is not a different way of seeing the world, one more worldview or perspective; it is a deeper way. You plunge into the depths. You grasp more because you suffered. You cannot undo this awareness of death

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29. Francis de Sales, "Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 20, 1620," *The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales for Advent and Christmas* (Charlotte, NC: Tan Books, 1987), 41.

that is reality. We will die. We are slowly moving closer to that unknown day. Now you know it, though others walk through life unaware.

When your child dies, these thoughts about death are commonplace, unavoidable, haunting. Your world looks different, your Christmas looks different, your Easter looks different. Some years will be easier, and some years will be harder, but never again will they be the same as before. These celebrations are now bound up in the promise of the days to come, the promise that our truest celebration is not yet here.

Your soul will gradually shift until your child's life is intimately knit into the fabric of your everyday existence. This is how you carry your child, now that your child has passed. Grief, though healed, never truly leaves. It becomes part of who you are. I compare my suffering today to what I have borne. I count blessings in relation to what I have lost. I feel indescribably close to those who are suffering now.

You were called to bear children to bring them into life with Christ. Your child was born into eternity. You answered your call. But now you travel in the newness of this terrible normal. You can never again look at the horizon without seeing heaven peeking through the veil, beckoning you, calling you to remember, to live on so that one day, you will see your child again and cradle him or her in the light of hope fulfilled.

The day is coming. "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thes 4:16-17).

When the day comes, when you have done all you can and have sought the Lord, following his word and commandments, you will see your child again, see his or her face perfectly formed, his or her body without blemish. And you, in your own resurrected body, will have arms to hold your child for all eternity.

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## **About the Author**

KATHRYN ANNE CASEY is a Northern California native who studied gender complementarity and psychology at the University of St. Thomas and clinical psychology at Divine Mercy University, a program firmly grounded in Catholic theological and philosophical tradition. She worked for the Center for Human Services, a local nonprofit serving youth and families, providing prevention and early intervention services to help youth develop coping skills.

Facing her daughter Celeste's diagnosis of anencephaly, after a brief stint as a life coach, Kathryn retired from working traditional jobs and became a freelance writer on faith, art, psychology, and the importance of local community for the *Hughson Chronicle & Denair Dispatch*; for her blog, [www.KathrynAnneCasey.com](http://www.KathrynAnneCasey.com); and through regular contributions to *Mind & Spirit*, an online magazine integrating psychology and faith. She lives in Hughson, California, with her husband and children and occasionally at Benioff Children's Hospital in San Francisco with her son Peter.