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ISSUE 2

SANCTUS

SONGS OF HOPE



SAINT ANTHONY'S HIGH SCHOOL

PRINCIPAL'S NOTE

Peace be with you,

It is indeed an honor and a pleasure for me to offer all of you greetings as you sit back and enjoy reading the latest publication of Sanctus!!

In a world where the virtues of Faith and Hope seem to be in decline, it is so refreshing to read these messages from our students.

I am always so impressed with the writings of our young people. They give me HOPE each day that not all is lost in our world. In fact, the world is filled with goodness.

Please sit back, relax, make yourself comfortable, and enjoy these faith stories of inspiration from your peers.

Be certain of a place in my prayers. I ask you, if you have a moment, say one for me.

And remember, Brother Loves ya!!

Br. David Anthony, O.S.F.

THEOLOGY CHAIRMAN'S NOTE

Greetings in Christ our Lord and Francis our Seraphic Father,

It is my distinct honor and pleasure to welcome all readers to our second edition of *Sanctus*—and the first to appear in both print and electronic formats—a wholly and holy compilation of student spiritual reflections and *scripta*. It is altogether fitting and proper to draw connections between the experience of the Apostles at Pentecost (on the Vigil of which I pen these few thoughts), and the evident stirrings and the more profound ebb and flow of the ineffable workings of the Holy Spirit in the souls of many of our students at Saint Anthony's High School. As the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles in the form of tongues of fire, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in all tongues (Acts 2:1-4); we can likewise appreciate and give thanks to God for these phenomenal students who so generously share the contents of their hearts and souls in the reflections contained herein. Indeed, they are Holy—as the title of this Theology Department publication exclaims. I am edified by the love, piety, charity and hope that jumps from the pages, and I pray that all who will take the time to enjoy *Sanctus*, will likewise benefit from the food for one's own spiritual contemplation that it offers.

Pax et Bonum,
Bro. Geoffrey P. Clement O.S.F., Ph.D.
Chairman, Theology Department
Saint Anthony's High School
South Huntington, N.Y.

EDITOR'S NOTE

My beloved family in Christ,

This little book contains reflections and stories written by some of the most inspiring young men and women I have ever encountered. As a teacher, I often find myself learning from my students as often as I instruct them. May this second issue of *Sanctus* be an occasion for you to do likewise.

The color palette and decor in this book are all based on Saint Anthony's stunning chapel. Accordingly, I hope that this book be a "chapel in print" for the spiritual edification of our school! Pieces are selected from students' classwork. They testify to Saint Anthony's robust Catholic character. I cannot overstate my admiration for my colleagues, whose faith and love render such expressions of faith possible. As Editor, my task was to "cut the diamond," so to speak: to trim and polish these pieces so their beauty can shine forth. My edits mostly focused on structure, brevity, and clarity. I also furnished these pieces with fitting titles, most of them being originally untitled.

Hope is the theme binding this edition of *Sanctus* together. Each reflection in this book expresses firm confidence in Christ and His promises. The students that composed them are exemplary in their community for their faith, insight, and character. Consequently, they likewise impart hope that the future is bright if such young men and women will inherit it. It is my honor to present their writing to you. I hope you will find them edifying, as I do.

In Christ,
M.R. Bishtawi, Editor

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WITNESS TALKS

The following readings were originally presented as witness talks during the Saint Anthony retreat program. Witness talks are given by Seniors in the St. Maximilian Kobe retreat program. Due to the personal nature of these talks, some are published anonymously.



HEALING THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Marianna Regina

Can you imagine having a panic attack in front of your entire class in your Sophomore year? Totally embarrassing and scary, right? Yeah, well that was me... I actually had one right in front of my peers. Let me share my story with you. I definitely do not have it all figured out yet and am still in the process of learning where God truly is in my life. If you are anything like me, I invite you to listen to my story and we can take this journey together. I was brought up in the Catholic Faith and

was baptized at only six weeks old. Since then, I have been attending mass every Sunday and Holy Day of obligation. My parents have been taking me to confession ever since I could, and the concept of Lenten sacrifices was introduced and practiced when I was very young. I was doing everything “right,” but I still encountered hardships.

Many people were upset and devastated when the world shut down in March 2020; me, however? I was so elated, that I screamed for joy upon receiving the email that we were not returning to school. My reason for the excitement was that the bullying I was experiencing would finally come to an end. I was bullied from ages six through thirteen. On the first day of first grade, I cried because I was in a new school and completely overwhelmed.

From that moment on, the girls in my class were ruthless. As I got older the insults only became worse. They attacked all the things out of my control: being smaller than the other girls in my class, wearing glasses, struggling academically; they even targeted me for being sent to school with authentic Italian food for lunch. I was placed in an ineffective extra-help program and many of my teachers even began to give up on me, pinpointing me as helpless. I assumed from the way they treated me that I was stupid and different. Can you imagine how a little girl walks around with that? I now know that it was a lie that I believed. This was a negative environment and naturally, my mental health was impacted. As I look back now, I see the beginnings of my anxiety and my people-pleaser personality—that desire to

somehow have everyone like me. Every day I came off the bus and cried to my babysitter, who was always there to comfort me. Then I did not realize it, but as I ponder over this experience eleven years later, I see that God was speaking and comforting me through her. God allows everything to happen for a reason; those years shaped me into who I am now. Why it had to be that way I do not know, but I am working on letting God in so He can show me why.



Beginning high school right after the pandemic was frightening and overwhelming. There was this suffocating

feeling that my lungs were going to collapse. My head was always down and I was afraid to talk to anyone. After many prayers to Saint Anthony, I did eventually find my friends.

after Dr. V. told me after class that I was capable. No one ever told me that before: honestly, I never even thought I was. From that moment on, I saw that I could succeed and I did, with the help of Jesus.



My freshman year English teacher, Ms. Malangone, had encouraged me to take the AP Seminar/Research Capstone Program the following year. Unbeknownst to me, that program truly changed the course of my life, gave me hope, and showed me I was more capable than I ever imagined. However, the first time I presented, it did not go as planned; I had a panic attack in front of my entire class. My entire world shifted

I have always been a believer in “everything happens for a reason.” So, what happened in my childhood happened for a purpose. I do believe that it helped me become the person I am today. With that being said, “It is not in our power not to feel or forget an offense, but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession” (CCC 2843). I cannot

change what happened, but I can change how I view the experience. I want to learn how I can offer myself and my heart to the Holy Spirit, so I can finally get rid of the hurt and anger that I have been holding on to. I want my pain and memories to be transformed into something beautiful but I do not know how to do that yet. I want to learn how to let God take over and show me; I invite you to do the same. Let's open our hearts to Jesus so He can answer the question: "Why did you allow this?"

I struggle with understanding why God allowed all this to happen. As for anyone else who experienced what I did, I am sorry. We did not deserve that. I want to trust that was a part of His master plan to shape me into an amazing woman one day. I do not know why this all happened now, but I

cannot wait to learn.

If you struggle with this like I did, think you're not worthy, maybe you were made fun of, had cruel things said to you, whatever your story is, I invite you to take on this journey with me. I was truly only able to make sense of the all hurt by prayerfully looking back and realizing God was there all along. He was working through Ms. Malangone who told me to sign up for the class; and through Dr. V. who was there for the past two years encouraging me through every step. God was there through me signing up for a class my sophomore year, He is there for much greater things. (So, look back at a difficult time in your life look for the people that God sent and is sending you to help you along the way just like He did for me.

LESSONS FROM MY BROTHER

“Every life is incredibly precious and God-breathed.”

Have you ever been in Penn Station right after five o'clock when everyone gets off of work? It's mayhem. That's what it was like growing up as one of six kids. Having three older brothers and two younger sisters who all have very different interests, there was never a dull moment in our house. There was always someone to play with and to get in trouble with. In the midst of all the craziness in our family, there is my brother Chris. This is a story about how God put Chris into our life for a reason.

My brother Chris is twenty-one years old and has autism and cerebral

palsy. He isn't verbal or high functioning. Even though Chris can't talk to us, he still has a personality which has come out more and more as he got older. Whenever someone cracks a joke at someone else and everyone laughs, Chris will start laughing too. He also has things he likes and dislikes, for example he loves the *Toy Story* movies and plays them on repeat. He also hates hats. Whenever my dad or someone wears a hat around him, he throws it across the room.

My family wasn't the most religious family, but we all took religion classes at our local parish, we went to

mass about once a month and would always go to Easter, Christmas and other Church holiday masses. My parents were spread completely thin. Whether it was my dad traveling for work, me and my siblings having sports practice or helping Chris. To say they had their hands full is an understatement. The sacrifices they make to support our family inspires me to do the same for others.

As a kid, I went into church thinking it was just something I had to sit there for an hour and would often fidget with things around me, but as I got older I began to realize the meaning of what the priest was talking about. I became more curious and started to pay more attention in mass and in religion class. In fifth grade I became an altar server for my parish. I began to pray more, and started to think that God

had a purpose for me that I hadn't found yet.

Chris helped me understand that purpose. I believed God brought Chris into our lives for a specific reason. It took me a while to realize it but I believe it was to help others. As I got older and learned more about Chris's disabilities and others who have similar needs, I saw how much the social workers and therapists helped my parents and Chris. I felt the need to help others the way they helped Chris. I started to get involved with different volunteer opportunities helping kids with special needs. Through helping out with other kids, I have met so many kids and other volunteers that have made a lasting impact on me, my family and Chris. I have made lifelong friends and memories helping out other kids like Chris.



When Chris was 16, we moved him into a home where he would be with kids just like him and this home was attached to his school so it gave him easy access to various therapy and accommodations. This was hard for us because we have spent so much time with him and now that is changing. It was hard to adjust at first because it was the first time that all six of us weren't all under the same roof. Thankfully his school is only a short fifteen minutes away

and we get to see him as often as we can. Chris turned twenty-one this past summer which means he aged out and graduated from his current school program. He had a whole Prom, graduation and party. Chris along with his other classmates who graduated are in the works of moving into an off campus house where they will have 24/7 care and access the resources he needs.

Genesis 1:27 says, "So, God created man in his own image, in the image of

God he created him; male
and female he created them.”
Every life is incredibly
precious and God-breathed.
Your child is nothing short
of a miracle. Your child is
worthy, beloved, and was
made in God’s image. We
are all works of God’s hands;
masterpieces molded and
shaped by our grand Creator.
When you find yourself
focusing on the obstacles, or
the shortcomings, or what
you and your child cannot
do, remember that all God’s
works are marvelous. This
quote stands out to me
because even though Chris
might not be able to do all of
the same things as us, he is
still made in the image and
likeness of God he was gifted
to our family for a reason.

“UNCLE THAN”

Do you guys have that one person that just gives the best hugs in your life? That was my Uncle “Than,” and this is the story of how God helped me grow in faith through one of the hardest times of my life. Hearing my mom’s screech go right up the stairs is something I will never forget. At first, I thought, “She’s only laughing,” so I dismissed it. On second thought, I went down to check on her, “just in case.” When I got downstairs, I could hear her outside, crying. My brother broke the news: “Uncle Than committed suicide.” I froze. It was so far out of left field and so sad that I couldn’t

even comprehend it. When my mom came back in, I started crying. Then, I left. Dad had told us that we should leave to get food. I spent the rest of the night at my friend’s house, too scared to go home.

Now, I was not very religious as a kid. Although my faith life had steadily grown, I definitely did not think that faith could get me through this on my own. Looking back, however, I now see that God had prepared me for this moment. That insight hit me the next day. While my mom was in Virginia to be with my aunt and cousins, I had a doctor’s appointment. One of my family friends took me to the appointment because my dad was at work and I was still too young to drive. He knew what happened, but we both avoided the subject after the initial,

"I'm so sorry for your loss." Honestly, that was what I was hoping for. On the way home, however, something happened that changed my outlook: his brother, another lifelong family friend, called him to check in. When I heard his brother say "I'm so sorry, we're all here for you and praying for you", something clicked. I realized that God was helping me get through this. More importantly, I realized that He needed me to be that help for my cousins.

that frequently definitely took a toll, but I needed to be there for my cousins. I always considered my cousins and this part of my family to have been more religious, so my constant thought was "how could God do this to a family like this?" Over time, I discovered that although they attended mass more than us, God was nevertheless missing in their home. I love my cousins to death—they're great people—but their family lacked a certain respect and love.



The next week and a half, I made three different trips to Virginia. Driving up and down the east coast,

After my Uncle's funeral, we all returned back to their home and looked at old pictures from when we

were young. That was the Uncle Than that I knew: the go-with-the-flow, super fun, gives-the-best-hugs-in-the-world Uncle Than.

Seeing all of this tragedy and sadness affect my cousins gave me a much needed new perspective on life. I started to realize how blessed I am and that I needed to be more thankful for the presence of God in my life. I often find myself giving myself little reminders about this perspective. If I'm irritated or annoyed at something for no reason, I remind myself that God is with me. I remind myself that if my cousins could get through losing their father to suicide, I could get through a little pain in my legs when I play basketball, or whatever stupid thing I'm annoyed about. Getting through this tragedy with God has also reassured me that I can get

through any true hardship in my life as long as I turn to Him.

Although I may have lost my uncle, someone I truly looked up to, I now know that I am closer to God. While things might be confusing at first, a Bible quote that helps me trust God is "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). As I continue to grow in my faith, I invite you all to join me and remember you can always reach out to your Theology teachers if you have any questions.

GOD WANTED ME TO EXIST

“God had a hand in everything to do with my upbringing...”

When I was eleven years old, I didn't really believe in God or a higher power. I didn't go to mass every Sunday, didn't pray when I should have, and didn't think there was any reason for me to believe in God. That was until my parents dropped a truth bomb on me that I never saw coming.

I remember the day clearly. I had just gotten home from school, oblivious to the atmosphere around me. My parents were acting, well, off. It was almost like they had discussed something amongst themselves and decided something without

me. Eventually, I got called downstairs to talk to them, I thought nothing of it. Happily, I trotted downstairs to receive the shocking news. They sat me down, and told me that I was adopted. Adopted? What does that even mean to an eleven-year old? I didn't have a clue. They explained it to me, and then it started settling in.

My biological mother lived in Garden City. When she gave birth to me, she was nineteen years old. *Nineteen!* My biological father, learning about me being conceived, cut all ties with my biological mother. My parents adopted me before I

was born, and a day after I was born, I went home with my mom and dad. Imagine being eleven and learning all this information. Just like anyone would be, I was completely overwhelmed. I couldn't stop looking at the situation in a negative light and, although I looked ok, I definitely didn't feel it. Until one day, that all changed.

manner. I woke up the next morning feeling... better, in a sense. I finally started to look at the bigger picture. God had a hand in everything to do with my upbringing. First, I was never supposed to be conceived in the first place. That was a complete accident by my biological parents. For some reason, God decided to put me on this earth.



I decided that it wouldn't help praying the Rosary I had lying in my room. I prayed a decade of the Rosary, asking God to give me the strength to get through this tough information in a positive

Secondly, I was adopted by a family who was much better off than my nineteen year old biological mother. Honestly, I probably would have been a hindrance to her. Not my parents though. They welcomed me with

open arms, and if it wasn't for God's light guiding them to go through the process of adopting me, I wouldn't be here, right now. I don't blame my biological parents, either. I am forever grateful that by some miracle, I was put on this earth.

If I'm going to be honest, I still have a lot to work on in my faith life. I don't go to mass every Sunday, although I try to make it when I can. I don't always submit myself to God, letting him take over my burdens. I make mistakes. But we all make mistakes. It's how you can spin those

mistakes that matters.

Here's a question for you, should the act of me being conceived be counted as a mistake? I don't think it should be. Sure, there are some terrible actions that people do in the world, and some that we, as humans, deem unforgivable. Not God though. God forgives all of us, for all of our actions, and all He asks in return from us is faith in Him. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. (Matthew 6:15).



SHORTER REFLECTIONS

The following reflections are selected from the writing of Theology students at Saint Anthony's High School.



WE ARE NEVER TOO BROKEN

Julia Judge

In the Parable of the Lost Sheep, Jesus poses the question: if one man were to have ninety-nine sheep yet one went astray, would that man not go after the one sheep? Upon finding that lost sheep, the man would rejoice more over the one sheep who turned back to him rather than over the ninety-nine others. "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance," he says (Luke 15:16).

We are never too broken for Christ. God sent His only Beloved Son down from Heaven to take up not just some of our burdens, but all. God is always with us, He knows our plan, He knows we have sinned and we will continue to sin; yet He does not turn His back on us like we may do to Him. When I find myself feeling guilt and shame from my sins, wondering "how could I ever compare to the spotless Lamb of God?" I realize that I can't. I don't go to Heaven based on how many good deeds I perform or how many sins I avoid; it's based on trusting in what He did for us, which outweighs anything I can do. We perform our good deeds to show and to spread the love of God, not to prove that we are worthy of Him. We will never be worthy of God according to human logic, which is why the devil places doubt, guilt and shame in our hearts.

Humans will turn their backs on us, that is assured. God won't. Sometimes, I feel like that one lamb who was on the right path but got too curious with the world, and decided to switch trails. Jesus will always come looking for us and knock upon our door, but He will not force it open. It is up to us to let Christ in and repent for our sins. Contrary to human beliefs on earth, no sin is unforgivable in the eyes of God. One mistake doesn't result in complete separation from Christ; separation is a choice made by us. God did not create the Kingdom of Heaven for those who never sin, but He created it for those who lean on Him in times of despair and repent of their wrongdoings.

I have hope that Christ will never stop looking for His lost sheep in good times or in bad: we are never too broken for Him. I feel guilt even in writing this: who am I to speak so highly of God and then go out into the world and sin? However, if God wanted us to be perfect He would have made us that way. We are made in the image and likeness of God, we were not made to be God. My sins do not define who I am, but God does. I pray that whoever is reading this finds comfort in the fact that no matter how shattered we may seem to the world, we will always be salvageable to God.

“SEEK YE FIRST . . .”

Connor Sanford

Of all of the things I've learned this year, the difference between praying for earthly goods and spiritual goods sticks with me. Understanding the difference between earthly goods and spiritual goods makes me better understand myself and all that I wish to do for God. Personally, I'm always praying for earthly things: to do well in school, to pursue my dreams, that my family is healthy, that I'm a better person, and so on. Although I understand that there is nothing wrong with that, I realize that I have to pray for spiritual goods just as much as I pray for earthly goods. Those spiritual goods are called grace: they're gifts that help us be more like God. In the end, everything that we have and own won't matter, but what will matter is the good that we did and the connection that we have with God. *That* will ultimately get us living with Him forever in Heaven. I want to be praying for more spiritual goods, as I don't feel as in touch with my faith as I should be. Through this lesson, I've learned a lot about my faith and I've also learned about myself and what I want with my faith. I want to be connected with God.



HOPE IN DARK TIMES

Kyle Verlizzo

In our society, there is evil everywhere. It is a glaringly obvious problem in our society. Some atrocity takes place every day. People are discriminated against and persecuted everywhere for so many different reasons. Although evil is everywhere, Christians should always have hope. Christians should have hope knowing that God is by their side through everything. Christians should also have hope knowing that by using their faith, they can change society and fight evil. The Gospel rebukes evil and by being Christians we can help spread the virtues in the Gospel. Despite the media, there are many things to be hopeful about as Christians. Every day, humanity is getting closer and closer to a cancer vaccine. Although climate change is still

a major issue, steps are taken every day to combat this issue. Trees are being planted daily, and new scientific technology is created daily to help out. These are just some things we can be hopeful about in society. Christians can be hopeful about continuing to spread their faith. We can also be hopeful about strengthening our connection with God. Christians still have plenty of hope despite what society says.



MY FAITH JOURNEY

Anthony Sguero

Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar once wrote, "What you are is God's gift to you, what you become is your gift to God." This quotation is one of the many religious sayings that I like to live by as a student. My parents always tell me to work hard and that God is always watching me. I try to take their words of guidance to heart and use their advice to make myself a better person.

I was baptized shortly after birth and was raised in a religious, Italian household. There have been many benefits of me being raised Catholic. Firstly, I have been brought closer and closer to God throughout my entire life and have been taught how important God is in my life. My earliest memory of being raised Catholic is being prayed for every night by my parents. They would pray for my safety and health. I would also sleep at my grandparent's house over the weekend once in a while and, when I did, I would go to the Sunday mass with them at their local church. Stubbornly, I would try to resist going to the mass because I thought it was boring at the time. Eventually though, I gave up on resisting and went to the Masses with them without complaints. I remember when I received my first Holy Communion, I thought that the Eucharist was delicious and wanted to eat more of it. I was too young to understand that the Eucharist

was Christ's presence, which is why it is shared at mass. My first Confession, I remember being very nervous because I thought I was going to be judged by the priest for my unholy actions. I had not yet understood that the real reason we do penance and confess our sins is to be relieved of our sins and become closer to God.

My true understanding of the Eucharist, prayer, Penance, and the Mass developed only within the past few years. I began praying every night for forgiveness of sins and for the protection of my family from evil spirits. Since then, my resistance to school and Mass have diminished severely and I have enjoyed every moment that I share with God. The most recent Sacrament I have received was Confirmation. I love the experience of receiving a new Sacrament and celebrating with my family afterwards. All of my siblings and cousins are following a similar path of holiness as me and are receiving their Sacraments as well. My grandparents still attend mass every Sunday and my parents still pray for me every night. My parents and grandparents are my biggest role models as they are very holy and set a great example on how I can become a successful person.

I hope Saint Anthony's High School will help me continue to draw closer to God. I love my life and the relationship I have with God, thanks to my parents' guidance and me drawing closer to Him every day through prayer. I thank God everyday for my beautiful life and am able to enjoy everything I do because of Him.

BREAD OF LIFE

Sean Newman

Throughout my Theology classes this year, what stuck with me was learning about how Jesus is the Bread of Life. This lesson stuck with me because Jesus tells us that only He can satisfy our deepest hunger and no amount of food can fill our spiritual needs.

In life, I think that finding God will make you happier than trying to obtain worldly things. Finding Jesus and eating and drinking His Body and Blood also helps us do this because we become a part of His kingdom and it brings us closer to Him now so we can be with him eternally in Heaven. Jesus uses the Eucharist to fulfill and replace the Passover and achieve what the Old Testament prepared us for: total communion with God.

When I consume the Eucharist at Mass it makes me feel a part of God's family and strengthens my connection with Him. I've found that throughout my life, anytime I put my faith in God everything just comes together. Going to mass and understanding what everything means is a large part of how Jesus can fill you up spiritually as opposed to filling yourself up with worldliness.



GOD WON'T ABANDON

Jake Soliman

In our world today, it is increasingly hard to have hope in humanity or to stay faithful to our Christian beliefs. Christian values are being suppressed and it almost feels like it is wrong to live with these values nowadays. What gives me hope to stay faithful and strong during these times is my family. My parents were immigrants from Egypt in a society where Christians were persecuted for their faith and had limited opportunities in a country full of Muslims. They immigrated to America with the hope that they could provide a great life for their children and have the chance to prosper in a free country. I am now living an extremely blessed life in a free country where I have unlimited opportunities and can practice my faith freely. This gives me hope that, even when



it feels like the world is against you and you're backed into a corner, God is watching over you. I always remind myself that God never abandons His children and He wants to see us prosper. These truths motivate me to strengthen my relationship with Christ and give hope that Christ will bless me and my future. So, even when we Christians feel lost or hopeless, stay hopeful because Christ won't abandon you and He will reward your faith.

LESSONS FROM THE PRODIGAL SON

Brooke Capuano

“The Parable of the Prodigal Son” both angers me and gives me hope. In the story of the Prodigal Son, there are two brothers who work for their father. One of the brothers turns to their father and asks him for his inheritance money, as though the dad were already dead. He takes the money and leaves him to go off and enjoy his newfound riches. He goes off to another town and spends all of his fathers money on whores and beer. After years of this, the money runs out and the son is forced to work and live amongst the pigs in order to make a living. One day he finally has enough and swallows his pride, going back to his father. Instead of bashing him, the father rejoices that his son has returned and throws a great feast in his honor. That is the part that gives me hope: God completely forgets our wrongdoings the moment we truly seek Him and ask for His forgiveness.

However, something I never liked in the Bible was that the other brother asked his father about why he had never been given a feast. He had remained by His father's side and worked faithfully for Him. Yet the dad literally did not care at all. This is seen a lot in the Bible, like in the good shepherd, leaving ninety-nine to save the one. Jesus also says things about how He is here not for the righteous

but for the wretched. I first read those stories as a little girl and I remember thinking, “If He doesn’t care if I stay by His side or not, and only loves those who have strayed and then returned, why on Earth would I bother dedicating my life to Him?” I struggled with this for a while, thinking God doesn’t love me because I already believed in Him. That He was busy with other more important people. That I would have no feasts in my honor and would be left behind to wait with the other sheep.

As a little girl, my problem was that I thought I was perfect. It took me a while to realize that every single Catholic is the lost son. None of us lived a life without straying from God. And those sheep were left in safety and peace. And if any of them had tried to leave God would have searched for them just the same.



MY GROWING FAITH

Kristen Nerko

Faith is a gift from God. Some choose to accept that gift, and others deny it. Those who accept the gift, can practice their faith in all different ways. Everyone has a different way of practicing and living out their faith. Living out your faith is a long journey but, with God's help, it's possible. Here's how my faith journey is going.

The first time I remember being introduced to my faith was with my Nani. My Nani has always been my model of faith: I wish I could have her relationship with God. She's always told me, "No matter what the situation is, no matter where you are, no matter what time it is, He's always there." One day Nani bought me and my cousins a white rubber-band bracelet that reads "God's Got This," and on the back "Joshua 1:9." I wear mine every single day—so long that the words are no longer on the bracelet. This bracelet is my encouragement and what I believe has helped me continue to grow my faith. My Nani also works in campus ministry here at St. Anthony's; she even teaches a few theology classes. She goes to Mass every Sunday, no matter where she is or who's with her, and she also goes to Mass at school whenever she can. I believe that my Nani's faith helps her have better relationships with everyone around her! She draws everyone she's near closer to God by spreading His word and just being herself.

My faith is something I struggle with. My immediate family doesn't really go to mass every Sunday but more just on the big holidays. My parents have never really forced prayer, reading scriptures, or any of that. It's just not something they ever did themselves and, so, I struggle too. I've always wanted to partake in Sunday Mass, but almost felt embarrassed to ask. I have the rosary, I have the Bible, and I have the ability to pray, I just don't do it as much as I should. I've always struggled. Ever since my Nani gave me that bracelet, though, I've been really putting more effort into growing closer to God and spreading His word, especially the verse I wear on my wrist everyday. I've been trying very hard to pray more, read scripture, listen to the Gospel, and really pay attention in theology. I will admit I struggle with sin like gossip, and cussing, and all the things that this generation for some reason has normalized. Everyone should be trying to grow closer to God and be the best version of themselves they can be.

My life is a gift, just like my faith. I still struggle a lot, and I am nowhere near perfect, but now I am trying and I do find myself holding myself accountable for not doing what I should. I'm on my journey and I know being in Saint Anthony's will be a big help which is part of the reason I chose to go to this school. I hope that by the end of my senior year, I'll be stronger in my faith and I will continue to grow it. My faith is a gift. My life is a gift. Both are worth living out. With the help of God, my family, friends, and Saint Anthony's High School I believe I can flourish on my faith journey.

HOPE FROM THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Katielynn Goncalves

When I first read the story of “The Woman at the Well,” it stuck out to me. In his Gospel, John writes, “There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:5-30). This passage struck me because Jesus shows that He cares about everyone, regardless of social status. During their encounter, Jesus encourages the woman to repent by bringing her past sins. Rather than reject her, He reveals Himself to be the Messiah! At the end of the story, the Samaritan woman’s enthusiasm for proclaiming the good news of Jesus can likewise serve as an inspiration to us.

This gives me a sense of hope because if people back then could proclaim the word of God with such passion, people can do the same now, starting with young people like me. God has given us promises of freedom from sin—promises that offer us hope. Scripture is replete with hope because of the gift of eternal life made attainable by God’s son, Jesus Christ. Whatever our circumstances, temptations, or suffering, we may always cling to the hope that God offers us.

Hearing this story at church changed my life for the better because it helped me realize the importance of listening to the stories the priest is reading. I feel grateful and blessed to have related to this story because I now feel more connected with God each day. The fact that God knew the Samaritan woman's story before meeting her shows how God knows what I have been through too. After she realized that he was the Messiah she spread the Gospel to others. Moving on from this my goal is to spread the Gospel just like her to let others know His work.



GOD IS LOVE, EVEN WHEN IT HURTS

Julia Judge

God is love is a Catholic teaching that each of us has heard at least once in our lives, be it during a school mass, a mass at our local parish, Sunday school, or maybe even in the comfort of our own homes. When things get rough, we know that God loves us and that God is love. However, in dark times, that statement is not always at the forefront of our minds. We don't turn to God as much as we should. Writing this and reflecting on my own life, I find myself in that category too.

If God is love, and we believe in God, then shouldn't we always feel loved? The answer is yes and no. Just because we agree with the teachings that God is love doesn't mean we always feel loved. God sometimes forces us to feel pain to spark a change in our lives, yet that pain is still a manifestation of His love. God always has a "method in the madness," when it comes to us and our lives. God doesn't want to make us feel pain, but pain is necessary for our growth as people. Sometimes God must turn our favorite people into lessons in order to show us the love we truly deserve.

No amount of love one human shows another can compare to the love God has for us. Whether it be our

parents, cousins, boyfriends or girlfriends, the love they condition us with has to come from somewhere. That “somewhere” is God. When we welcome God and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit he offers to us, we feel loved. Additionally, we gain the ability to spread that love to others. When we let God take control of our lives and trust His plan, it’s like a weight lifted off of our shoulders, because God is love.

As we’ve learned in class, sinning is inevitable. Since the beginning of creation, humanity has sinned against God, because of doubt. The devil is constantly in our ear placing doubt in our hearts. Doubting our own self worth, and doubting our trust in God. Eve ate the apple because she doubted God’s word, and Adam followed. God punishes Adam and Eve for their bad deed, and while many interpret that differently, God was punishing their disobedience not them as people. God never falls out of love with creation like how we may fall out of love with a significant other, because God is love.



IMITATING CHRIST'S HUMILITY

Jacob Vaccariello

Christ would not ask us to do something that He wouldn't do Himself. One way that Christ shows this is His baptism. In Jesus's time, baptism was a ritual that represented washing away an individual's sin. Although Christ had no sin, He got baptized anyway because His mission was to take on our sins. He Himself was baptized so that He could support us on our journey to baptism.

The Gospels contain many similar passages that show Christ's humility and lowering Himself for us. When Christ does this to Himself, it shows us that He is just like us and inspires us to be more like Him. He knows what we go through. We could be like Him when we act like Jesus. When we do this, we are closer to Him and able to relate to Him more throughout our journey.

Realizing that God became just like us, and loves us, and wants to be there for us, makes me want to have a better relationship with Him. He is the most important part of our lives, and nothing is more important than our relationship with God.



THE BREAD OF HEAVEN

Victoria Antoine

When Jesus was speaking with the people who are asking for earthly bread and worldly happiness in John 6, He explains to them that earthly goods are not what they need. Jesus explains to the people that the bread that they ate, the manna, was given to them by God from Heaven, and that He is the real bread and whoever believes in Him will never go hungry or thirsty. These people that are speaking to Him do not initially realize that what they really need is faith in God, and not the earthly wants that they ask for, until Jesus reveals to them that He is the One that will fulfill them. While learning about this I took a moment to look at myself and think of how much I have done that same thing in my own life: looking for earthly things to make me happy



and to try and fulfill me when what I really needed in those moments was a belief and a relationship with God to help. It really allowed me to look back and think about what earthly things I have asked for before trying to believe and have a stronger relationship with Christ and it has helped me be able to reflect on myself in a way that I never usually think to do.

PEACE MID THE STORMS

Lara Khoury

Throughout my life, I have witnessed how the Holy Spirit brings comfort in times of trouble. Recently, my cousin became ill, plunging our family into worry and anxiety. As we struggled to cope with this situation, an even bigger blow came when my cousin's sister was diagnosed with cancer.

In such situations, we found comfort in the words of Scripture and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Amid uncertainty and fear, we experienced a peace that surpassed human understanding. We were sustained by a Divine strength that enabled us to face each day with hope and confidence. As the power of God's comfort transforms our lives, we feel a deep calling to share it with others. Our suffering has enabled us to understand the pain of those around us, and this has given us a renewed empathy to comfort those facing similar struggles. By sharing our story of faith and overcoming, we can offer a light of hope to those during the darkness of adversity. We can be a living reminder of God's steadfast love and the redeeming power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, our journey of trial becomes an instrument of comfort and encouragement to others.

In these difficult moments, our pain can be transformed into a means of victory for others. Our experience of being comforted by the Holy Spirit empowers us to be agents of comfort and hope for those facing their battles. May they be instruments of peace in a world that so needs God's restorative love.

TO REPRESENT CHRIST

Taylor-Marie Smith

One thing that resonates with me about Palm Sunday is how, when Jesus was arrested, the same people who praised Him joined the crowd in demanding that He be crucified. When the crowd turned against Him, fear made His faithful followers turn against Him, too. Siding with the crowd was an act of betrayal. How could faithful followers who benefited from His ministry act as if He didn't do anything for them?

This touches my heart because we do the same thing, even today. Being a representative of Christ is not popular because the world doesn't want to hear the truth about God's word. When you stand up for what is right, cancel culture will make sure you are crucified verbally. The fear of being attacked has caused many believers to remain quiet or go along with the crowd. As a Christian, it is sometimes scary to share how God is making a major impact in my life. We are living in a world that prefers to live in sin, but needs to hear the Gospel. I struggle with wanting people to like and accept me, so sometimes I remain quiet. The feeling of being left out is so hard as a young person, but I also don't want to disappoint God. I believe that many young people experience something like my inner struggle. It is our responsibility as followers of Christ to share God's love with others no matter what. I am asking God to give me the confidence to share His gospel even though I'm sometimes afraid and it's not popular with the crowd. I really want to be an example of a faithful Christian.

THE CONVERSION OF PAUL

Lucia Mercado

St. Paul's encounter with Christ challenges me to reflect on my own life journey and the potential for transformation because of how his entire world was flipped upside down. He was, in the beginning, very zealous in persecuting the Christians and probably thought he was doing the right thing. It raises the question in my own life if I have preconceived notions about things that aren't true. Most of us aren't perfect, but many of our imperfections are things we don't even think of as bad. But, if I am challenged in something, am I willing to change my viewpoint in pursuit of the truth and not just to defend my own opinion? I hope so. In this way, I need to be open to the idea of transformation within me and the other things in my life.

I always say that I am willing to surrender myself to God. But actually surrendering is the tricky part. It's easy to say that you give everything to God, but when challenges arise, I hope I truly can give it to God. The busyness and noise of life can make it easy to forget to surrender. Even now, with my busy schedule, it's easy for me to sink into stress and anxiety. But at its core, anxiety to me is like losing faith in God that He will support you no matter what. St. Paul gave his whole life to God at a moment's notice.

He wasn't afraid of the trouble it would cause him, or the uncertainty of it all, because he knew all that mattered was that God was on his side. I want to strive for this with everything I have. I want to do God's will in each and every thing I do so that I can make a gift of my life to Him in return for all that He has given to me. After all, the only thing that I can give Him is my will to do His.

His example challenges me to examine my priorities and make choices that align more closely with God's will by giving me an example of how to put God first in my life. St. Paul chose to do many great things and make sacrifices for God. In Acts, the Lord says to Ananias that He will show Saul "what he will have to suffer for my name" (Acts 9:16). Evidently, St. Paul accepted this. I want to be willing to suffer for Christ and His Name. Truly love is strengthened through tests. So if I am to love Christ, I want to show it by suffering and sacrificing for Him. This means giving up things in my life for Him.

JESUS THROUGH MARY

Gabriella Sampino

Cardinal Van Thuan reassures his readers that one cannot love Mary too much by referencing multiple saints and their love of Mary. This message went straight to my heart. It's so easy for me to picture a mother's love because it feels so tangible. I have always felt a strong connection with the Blessed Mother: I was born on September 8, the Nativity of Mary; I say the "Angelus" every day at school; I even learned the "Hail Mary" before learning the "Our Father!" The "Memorare" is my favorite prayer.

I have always been nervous, however, that my love for Mary was misplaced. I have since learned that my love for Mary only amplifies my love for God. Two nights ago, I got very anxious and I knew I needed to calm down so I grabbed the "Magnificat" prayer card that was on my nightstand. As I prayed about the glory of God, my heart rate slowed down. It was exactly what I needed. This moment is possibly one of the clearest ways I can understand how Mary brings me closer to God. Just as Cardinal Van Thuan's whole life is his own Magnificat to God, my own Magnificat will only be strengthened with my love for Mary.

Mary truly helps us live our lives radically for Jesus Christ. Every time I pray a "Hail Mary," the "Memorare," or the Rosary, I know that every word is a way for me to mirror Mary and grow closer to God. I no longer fear my devotion to Mary but am confident in my ability to harness that love to progress in my own faith and act as God wills.



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