



FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



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CNS/MOHAMED AZAKIR, Reuters

POLIO VACCINATION: A child receives polio vaccination at an informal settlement of Syrian refugees in Bekaa, Lebanon, Oct. 16. Msgr. Giampietro Dal Toso, secretary of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, who just returned from a visit to Syria, said “the humanitarian situation is worse than I thought.”

A Modern Synod for a Modern Family

I will be honest – the recent Synod of Bishops on the family was not a topic of discussion at our dinner table.

Finding half an hour for our family of five to scarf down the latest concoction in the slow cooker before we splinter off to the next band practice, Girl Scouts meeting or religious education class can be challenging enough without igniting a theological debate about the place for divorced, civilly married, cohabitating and gay Catholics within our church community.

It's not an easy conversation to have, especially with young Catholic minds whose biggest internal struggle most Sundays is deciding which of the three gets to put the envelope in the collection basket.

Lest those bishops worry, they may not have been on my tongue, but they certainly found a home in my heart and my prayers. The questions they took under consideration represent my family, my messy, nontraditional, perfectly imperfect amalgamation of people God divinely deemed to put in my life.

They represent me, a child of divorced parents, who is still a practicing Catholic. Understand this: I love my church ferociously. I love my parish family, whose members squish into the pew to make room for us each week, even though we are perennially five minutes late and one of us will undoubtedly step on their feet – twice – while needing to go to the bathroom before Mass is over.

It's like the church hymn come to life: All are welcome.

At least, that's what we say. But I haven't always seen myself – and those I love – reflected in the depictions of modern, big-C Catholicism. Let me re-

phrase that: I have seen those images, but they suggest that somehow we are less Catholic than others who followed a more linear path to the Lord. The easiest knock on us is that we are the “a la carte Catholics,” the ones who can't afford the whole meal of faith.

So, my gay family members are welcome, but not exactly. Ditto for those who have divorced or the unmarried couples who share the same address but haven't yet donned the white dress to say, “I do.” And thank goodness for that annulment, or else my mother, who attends daily Mass and brings Communion to the sick each Sunday, would not be able to fully participate in the faith that is as wrapped around her soul as the skin covering her body.

Homosexual. Divorced. Remarried. Unmarried. These are adjectives we use as weapons within our faith, that somehow are used to justify that it's OK to take away someone else's space at the table. All are welcome – as long as they aren't one of those.

In the end, the bishops stuck with familiar language, dialing back earlier versions that offered a more welcoming and tempered tone, especially with regard to homosexuals in the church. And really, I'm not surprised.

But I am hopeful that these conversations will continue about the very real people who make up our church. I pray that what was once a whisper in the back of church – divorce, homosexuality, civil marriages – may be amplified to the front.

— Kelly Bothum

(This column is part of the CNS columns package. Bothum, a mother of three, is a freelance writer and former newspaper reporter.)

The Perfect Plan

On a daily basis, I catch myself repeating the word “perfect” over and over again. When a meeting or plan is finalized, I respond with “That's



perfect.” When my children leave in the morning with beds made and rooms ‘somewhat’ picked up, I tell them “That's perfect.” As my students arrive on time for class or club meetings, I reiterate how “perfect”

it is.

The reality, though, is that life is not perfect. In fact, it's far from perfect. Perfect implies that there is no room for improvement, that we have reached the top in our goals and that all is right and well with the world. Sadly, it's not. Too many people wake up and go to bed each night without any food, nourishment or even water. Our streets are riddled with crime and greed. Some are suffering physically and mentally without family or community support systems. Compassion for others is at an all-time low in many communities and the idea of entitlement and the “me” philosophy is running rampant.

Life is not perfect, we are not perfect and our faith has not been perfected yet.

Closer to home, our thoughts, actions and even parenting styles are imperfect. I know first hand because I am an imperfect parent. I hover when my teenagers need their space, I nag them continuously to clean up after themselves and I lose my cool when attitudes flare. We don't make enough time for each other, enjoy enough quality conversations over dinner and strive for enough times of reflection

and prayer.

Imperfections are a part of life. Injustices are a part of life. Disappointments are a part of life.

For me, the key to a life full of “perfect” moments is to recognize that life doesn't have to be perfect. We need to embrace our imperfections to learn how to improve ourselves – both through our actions and our thoughts.

Instead of beating myself up over how I handled a disagreement with my daughter, I need to focus less on how my parenting needs to be “perfect” and more on how I can improve those imperfections and make amends. Admitting wrongdoing and showing your human side promotes genuine, honest effort toward working on yourself. I need to share my own faults with my children so they can see that I'm not “perfect” nor should I be “perfect.” I need to use these imperfect moments as a means to work on relationships, work performance and household issues.

Trying to maintain a perfect life, household, family and career is exhausting. And, it's unrealistic. Our faith teaches us that even those we worship the most faltered, picked themselves up and worked toward peace and unity on behalf of all people. Maybe, if we focus more on trusting our faith and trusting God's guidance to help us work through those imperfections, we can accept ourselves as imperfect people striving toward a better – not perfect – existence.

In my opinion, that plan of action, is perfect.

— Shannon Philpott

Shannon Philpott is a freelance writer and college journalism instructor, but most of all a mother of two teens. You can see her work at www.shannonphilpott.com.



CNS/PAUL HARING

GREETINGS: Pope Francis greets an addict from a detention and treatment center for alcohol and drugs in Eboli, Italy, during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Oct. 22.

Fresh Take: a way to look at faith from a different perspective

This is an online-only page dedicated to young adult Catholics, their interests, their needs, their challenges and their faith.

We want to give young adults something to “chew on,” to think about when they're looking for something

more than an on-line horoscope or the latest star news. This page offers columns we believe will interest our young adults. Let us know.

Email us at cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org with questions, suggestions or for more information.

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