



FAITH: A FRESH TAKE



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CNS/KAREN CALLAWAY, Catholic New World

Archbishop Blase J. Cupich of Chicago hands out Thanksgiving turkeys Nov. 26 at the St. Columbanus Parish Food Pantry. The pantry serves nearly 500 families every Wednesday and the special distribution of turkeys provided families with the items they needed to prepare a Thanksgiving meal.

Parenting Through Grief

Four years ago on Dec. 2, my family lost the rock of our family when my gram passed. She was the glue that held the family together and she was the one who never sugar coated the truth. She spoke her mind; she didn't mind who she offended in the process and she let you know if you were out of line at any time.



Her realistic approach didn't lessen her love for any of us, though. She was the first one to offer the harsh truth and the first one to wrap her arms around you when you walked in the room. She cherished her grandchildren and her great grandchildren more than anything and she taught us all how to look at ourselves honestly, but more importantly how to love.

I've always feared that as the years passed, I would slowly forget the details of her existence. We tend to remember those who have died with only positive regard and tend to focus only on what we want to remember or the grief that accompanies death. In four years, her memory hasn't faded one bit, primarily because my children were old enough to remember everything about her and they remind me when the details are foggy.

Although losing a loved one is never easy, what made my gram's death especially hard was watching my children cope with the loss. To this day, my daughter tears up when we find old pictures of her or when we hang her special angel ornament on the Christmas tree. She struggles on Dec. 2 and finds herself at a loss for words when the anniversary of gram's death rolls around.

As a parent, it is difficult sometimes to look past our own grief and set it aside to recognize the grief in someone else's eyes. We often see our own pain as primary to others. A bad day or disappointing news taints our mood, reduces our ability to smile at others

when they may need it the most. What we don't always realize is that a kind word can make a world of difference to a stranger, a friend or an acquaintance and offer healing for our own troubles. It allows us to put our own needs to the side for the sake of someone else at times when we can barely cheer up ourselves.

The wonderful aspect of parenting is that our needs are never more important than our children's — especially when it comes to their suffering. From day one, we disrupt our daily routines to meet the needs of that precious baby who needs to be changed, fed or rocked to sleep. We neglect our own sleep, our own meals and our own wants to put this miracle before ourselves.

When we find ourselves making an abrupt stop in a vehicle, we don't brace ourselves; instead, we throw a protective arm across the passenger seat to protect our children — no matter if they are teenagers or adults.

When my gram died on that Thursday evening, four years ago, with the entire family sitting at her bedside, I was consumed with grief, I wanted to flee and give myself some time to absorb the pain. But, as a parent, I saw the fear and the pain in the eyes of my children and realized that the best way I could heal was to provide support for my son and daughter. Instead of fleeing and running away from something that was too painful, I had my two miracles in my arms and that provided much more comfort than even a moment alone.

And, that is the way gram would have wanted it. I know that she would have wanted to have her arms around us as well while pushing back my bangs and telling me to get a haircut before those few strands would cause me to go blind.

— 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.

Of Saints and Missing Dentures

A guest staying at my house recently awoke in a panic to discover he couldn't find his bottom denture.



He had come home from a speaking engagement the night before and sat down in the living room with a couple of slices of pizza to finish watching the Green Bay football game with my husband.

The pizza was bothering his denture, so he stealthily removed it and wrapped his napkin around it.

Fast-forward to the following morning and time to get ready for another speaking engagement. Lo and behold, a missing denture. There was a frantic search of the trash can, and I, fearing the worst, even looked in the dog bed to see if Sunny had found a new chew toy. No denture.

After about 10 minutes, my guest proclaimed, to enormous relief, that the problem was solved. I didn't ask for specifics.

A Christian gentleman, he had audibly asked the Lord to aid in his search, and I laughingly said, "Joe [name changed to protect the innocent], if you were a Catholic you'd be praying to St. Anthony right now."

He laughed, probably thinking about this bizarre Catholic practice of communicating with long-dead people.

I'm a big fan of saints. I loved Jesuit Father James Martin's book, "My Life with the Saints," in which he writes about saints who have most influenced his life — some canonized, some not — and how he prays to them.

But I'm no fan of superstition. For example, I put my foot down firmly about having upside down statues of St. Joseph planted in my yard when we sold our house, even though I've known clergy who've done it. And I

really resent those little prayer cards that assure you that if you recite a certain prayer a certain number of times, you're guaranteed to get your request.

That's bargaining with God, and basically trying to control God. That's not what prayer is about. But moving with the saints through our lives is a comforting and wholly Catholic idea.

Once, I had a little talk with St. Anthony about this tradition that has made him the patron saint of lost items. How, I wonder, did people get the idea that you're waiting around to make the car keys manifest themselves? I habitually pray to St. Anthony when I lose something. So I asked if he really spends eternity listening to the pleas of panicked individuals whose wallets are missing, whose cellphones were left at the restaurant last night, or even those whose dentures are misplaced.

I thought the least I could do was give St. Anthony a little attention after I found the missing tax form or the lost check.

Prayer itself is a mystery. In essence, it is the opening of our hearts and minds to God. It is a silence in which, as the poet Mary Oliver says, "another voice may speak." Prayer is relating to a mystery that you believe is tugging at you, desiring you, wanting to guide you. We pray to discern the will in our lives to which this mystery calls us.

That's a long way from asking a saint to aid us in a simple task. Yet, saints are so human and so seemingly available to us, and God is so beyond our human understanding, that crying out to a saint once in a while can never be a bad thing.

After Joe proclaimed that the missing denture was found, I said, "Praise God," and he agreed. Then I murmured, "And thanks, St. Anthony."

— Effie Calderola

(This column is a CNS column.)



CNS/ESTEBAN BIBA,

People parade with red candles on World AIDS Day Dec. 1 at the metropolitan cathedral in

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.

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