



# FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



March 24, 2016



A student from the Jericho Mosaic Center cleans a mosaic in the Franciscan section of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Old City of Jerusalem March 17. It's quiet and dark in the cavernous gallery above Jesus' burial place in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Raed Khalil and his small team of trained restorers have been patiently and methodically cleaning off centuries of soot and dirt from 39 ancient mosaics and two carved marble pieces, some of which may date back to the Byzantine period. All but one of the restorers are Muslim.

## Nature and Nurture at Their Best

I thought it was a joke. The newspaper photo of a smiling man in a white bird costume with a whooping crane hand puppet seemed more fit for the April Fool's Day issue than a Sunday in March.

But as I read through the accompanying article, originally published in the Baltimore Sun, my sense of humor gradually turned into one of those obvious "aha" moments that are very worth sharing here as we approach Mother's Day and Father's Day.

Turns out that a 15-year project in which adults dressed up as whooping cranes in order to teach basic living and survival skills to real whooping crane chicks ended in more tragedy than triumph because, researchers concluded, whooping crane parents are better suited to raise their chicks than costumed humans.

Whooping cranes are an endangered North American bird. To ensure their survival, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with several public and private organizations, formed the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership.

At the Patuxent Research Refuge in Laurel, Maryland, whooping crane chicks are bred and raised, taught to eat and how to survive in the wild, and, with a human piloting an ultralight aircraft, shown how to migrate.

Human intervention was key in each stage of the project. Protocols included:

"Costumes, designed to disguise the human form, will be supplied by (the project) and used in conjunction with hand-held puppets of adult cranes and recordings of crane calls."

"Absolutely NO TALKING will be tolerated within earshot of the birds."

"To reinforce the 'follow the aircraft' response, efforts will be made to minimize the number of times a chick is led by a walking handler. However, during early conditioning, it may be



safer to lead chicks to the aircraft rather than to carry them."

But as carefully designed as the project was, and as earnest as all the participants were to save and increase the number of whooping cranes, the "human touch" turned out to be much less successful than allowing whooping crane parents to raise their own chicks.

In January 2016, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service went "back to nature" and future generations of whooping crane chicks born at the Patuxent Refuge will be raised by their feathered mothers and fathers.

As I consider the results of the Patuxent project, I can't help but see a parallel with human parenting.

From television as baby sitters to computers as teachers, in today's rapidly changing and demanding world, it can be tempting to leave at least some of human parenting to gadgets. As children age and move into their brash new world, the energy required to keep track of and steer children away from every negative influence and pitfall can seem nearly impossible to muster for an overworked mom or dad.

And, as society imposes more pressures on parents to cede their authority to others for even the most basic of their responsibilities, it might seem as if the simple family structure — and the nurturing it provides — is obsolete.

But this tale of humans and whooping cranes, although on the surface one of failure, is actually one of hope and promise: Parents are crucial to the raising of their children. Children learn most effectively and first from their parents. The value of the family shines brightly against any mechanical or superimposed, completely unrelated entity.

Put another way, my life would have been vastly different and, I dare say, a complete catastrophe had I been raised by whooping cranes!

Long live Mom and Dad!

— Maureen Pratt

(This column is part of the CNS columns package.)

## Signs and Symbols from Above

Several years ago, my young cousin died in a tragic accident when he was only 22. The grief his parents have endured was and still is a daily challenge. He was young. He was full of life. He was their son.

The entire family has tried to grasp why this happened for years. He was taken too soon. He was taken before anyone could say goodbye.

When we lose our loved ones, our thoughts often turn to ways we can communicate with them. I still have my grandma's phone number in the address book of my phone, even though she has been gone for five years. My cousins and I still honk every time we drive by her apartment, just as we did when she was still alive.

Just as we ask for signs from God, part of the grieving process involves this same wish from our loved ones who are no longer physically with us. These signs or symbols come in many forms.

For example, my grandma used to always get excited when she saw a penny on the ground. Now, whenever any of us sees a penny, we pick it up and think of her. It is a sign that she is somehow still with us.

— 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](http://www.shannonphilpott.com).*



Pope Francis greets the faithful as he arrives at the Our Lady of Providence Center in Rome April 17, 2015. Vatican officials announced the pope will celebrate the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper with young refugees in Castelnuovo di Porto,

about 15 miles north of Rome. "Washing the feet of the refugees, Pope Francis is asking for respect for each one of them," wrote Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the main organizer of the Vatican's Year of Mercy initiatives.

### 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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