



# FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



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CNS/GREGORY A. SHEMITZ

Martha Hennessy, granddaughter of Catholic social activist Dorothy Day, reads the December issue of *The Catholic Worker* at Maryhouse in the East Village neighborhood of New York Dec. 4, 2012. *The Catholic Worker* is the official publication of the Catholic Worker Movement, which was co-founded by Day.

## Facing Pain With Strength

We all have memories that cause instant anger or sorrow. Memories of moments in our lives that we want to hide, and memories we wish had never occurred.



Regardless of how we feel, or what we're told, those bad moments do not make us who we are. Instead, we are defined by how we respond to those

moments. When we meet others, they don't know our past. They only know the choices we make in the present. It's our present action that matters.

Recently, someone asked why I'm always so cheerful. I had to pause for a moment because I'd never thought of myself that way. Inside, in my thoughts, I'm anything but peppy. However, to the outside world, that's exactly how I appear.

Upon reflection, I came to an unexpected realization. How I project myself to others is a direct response to the memories that haunt me on a daily basis. Without realizing it, I've chosen to isolate my pain with a truly positive attitude that prevents those memories from negatively affecting who I am.

I'm pretty sure this method won't work for everyone, and even if it did, I don't know that I'd recommend it. There's something to be said about moving past our anger and hurt. I have no doubt there's a definite time for that. For me, that time is not now.

Until the proper moment arises, I've unknowingly created rules for myself to cope with memories I'd rather not yet face. They help me act like the person of strength I wish I could be, until I can truly become that person on my own.

For those dealing with these issues, I'd recommend, first and foremost, know who you are and be that person.

If you're not true to yourself, every choice you make is suspect. I am a person who chooses not to be defined by the past, even if I'm not yet capable of letting it go.

Next, understand your moral code, and stick to it. If you know your definition of right and wrong, the proper decision to make when faced with a tough choice becomes clear. You have to always be willing to accept the consequences of all actions, good and bad. I am a person who fights strongly for what he feels is correct, but easily admits fault when wrong.

Finally, no matter what happens, positive or negative, never forget you control your life. You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. Some days end and I feel I'm on top of the world. Some days, I feel beaten down. Every day, I can look in the mirror without flinching because I know I did the best I could do.

Living by these guidelines, I've overcome the anger and sadness that can unexpectedly haunt my life. We each have these moments of personal discomfort. They lurk in the deepest corners of our mind. Our darkness is our own.

Over time, I've learned to let go of much anger and sorrow. I've made the choice to let go of the pain caused by others through actions for which I had no control. Holding on can't help me. It can only hurt.

Unfortunately, there is much I can't yet release. I'm not ready to move past those memories. They still come to mind at random moments, leaving anger or sorrow in their wake. Until the moment arises when I can let them go, I will continue to exude happiness.

Otherwise, the past would win and I see a future far too bright to let that happen.

— Erick Rommel

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

## Those Life-Changing Four Words

I recently came across a post on social media that prompted the question: What are four words you would tell your 17-year-old self? I followed this thread intently as I wracked my brain trying to come up with just four words. I could write a book on this, I thought.



The comments from people across the world began to pour in. Phrases such as "Always trust your gut" and "Listen to your instincts" were common. People also took to posting comical phrases such as "You don't know everything," "Save your money, fool" and "Don't forget the Tylenol" also littered the online post.

I still couldn't come up with my own words of wisdom, so I took to asking my family for their input. My philanthropist sister chimed in with "Work as a community" and "Buy experiences, not things." My 30ish-year old cousin offered "Slow down and enjoy" and "Your parents are right."

The not-so-young but often wise family members contributed with "Always be self sufficient," "Confidence comes from within," and "Believe you can do."

It wasn't until I thought long and hard about what I took for granted all those years ago that I finally came up

with "You're strong. Have faith." As a typical 17-year-old, I, too, was caught up with my own drama and wasted too many hours to count worrying about why my world seemed helpless, dramatic and anguished. I was nervous about the future that was right in front of me. I focused on my weaknesses instead of the strengths I possessed but didn't yet appreciate.

If I could tell my 17-year-old self those four words, I would, but I'm not sure I should. Life experiences and lessons — no matter how difficult at the time — shape us into who we are. I had strength within as a 17-year-old, but I grew much stronger when I faced adversity, challenges and struggles that forced me to rise above, survive and rely on my faith. I had to recognize my strength and renew my faith on my own terms.

Although my faith was the foundation for conquering the obstacles through the years, I didn't always know it. And, even 24 years later, I still lose my way at times. However, with those four little words in the back of my mind at all times now, I have a bit more confidence to find my way back.

— 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).*



CNS/ANGELO CARCONI, EPA

Pope Francis welcomes a young pilgrim before hearing confession April 23 in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. Youth from around the world flocked to Rome for a special Year of Mercy event for teens ages 13-16.

### 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](mailto:cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org) with questions, suggestions or for more information.

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