



# FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



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CNS/MAX ROSSII, Reuters

**QUAKE DAMAGE:** A car covered by debris is seen near a collapsed house in Pescara del Tronto, Italy, Aug. 26. An Aug. 24 earthquake left hundreds dead.

## Move From Empathy to Action

One evening years ago, my family was sitting around the dinner table on a school night. Our oldest daughter, who had just turned 16 and gotten her driver's license, related that she had run over a squirrel on her way home from school.



Her high school was on the hillside of Anchorage, Alaska, and it wasn't unusual to see a moose on the road. It wasn't unheard of to see a bear. So, I was just happy that her encounter with wildlife had been minor and that she demonstrated good skills in not swerving recklessly to avoid the animal.

Our 7-year-old daughter, however, reacted differently. The words "I ran over a squirrel" were barely out of her sister's mouth when Maria burst into tears and began to sob uncontrollably. She was thinking only of the little squirrel that had lost its life that day.

The incident proved to me what I already knew: Maria had empathy. It's an important and vital human quality. And not everyone has it.

The term "psychopath" is thrown around a bit indiscriminately these days. In Jon Ronson's very funny but enlightening book "The Psychopath Test," he describes many of the attributes of a true psychopath and reveals that not all psychopaths are murderers. Many are white-collar criminals or the heads of major companies or even countries.

The key to a psychopath is not necessarily violence. It's a total lack of empathy for others. It's a "get-what's-mine by any means" mentality.

In Dave Cullen's masterful best-seller "Columbine," he relates how the two shooters in that high school massacre were very different personalities. But some believed one of them, Eric Harris, fit the profile of a classic psychopath.

Experts who studied his life and

journals found a teenager who could be charming and manipulative with no regard or remorse for the suffering of others. It just wasn't there. He wasn't capable of it. And the scary thing is there is next to no treatment for the problem of psychopathy.

So what does all of this mean for us? Aside from being a fascinating subject, psychopathy probably doesn't affect us, although you could argue that it's a good thing to be able to recognize it in others.

But most of us have a fair measure of empathy. Just think how we — and most of the world — responded to the recent photo of the little Syrian boy sitting bloodied and stunned in an ambulance after a bombing in Aleppo.

We should realize that our empathy is a God-given gift. Our brain is functioning as a human brain should function. But the real question is, how does that empathy translate into action in our lives?

How do we shift from normal brain function — I care, I feel — to soul function? How will I move from empathy to action?

We live in a world and a media environment that promotes empathy overload. Deep down, we know that the story of the Syrian boy is replayed daily in unremitting warfare. Sometimes, the temptation is to turn away.

In the story of the good Samaritan, the two men who walked past the injured traveler probably felt a measure of pain at his plight. But they were able to ignore that sense of compassion and prioritize their own needs.

They probably rationalized why it simply wasn't a good idea to stop. Avoiding ritual impurity? A schedule to keep? Too dangerous? They found their reasons and they passed on.

What do we do with our gift of empathy? Do we sigh and hope someone does something? Or do we ask what we can do?

— Effie Caldarola

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

## You're My Favorite

Any parent with more than one child can attest to the relentless argument about who is the favorite child.



For years, my cousins had a contest deciphering every compliment my grandma gave out, claiming the title of the "favorite."

As a parent of a boy and a girl, I have often used the phrase "You are my favorite daughter" or "You are my favorite son," but to no avail; my children want to hear me say: "You are my favorite child." I won't, though.

You can imagine my horror when I recently read an article that declared that parents are fooling themselves by claiming they don't have a favorite. The author stated that one child is always going to be the favorite and that children detect this, which is why we should just be up front and admit it, versus sparing feelings of all involved.

I will admit that there are things I like better about each of my children. My daughter is extremely driven, independent and motivated with everything she sets her mind to — from her studies, her personal life to her family relationships. I love that about her and I know it will serve her well as she heads off to college this year.

My son is entertaining, witty and a deep soul. He offers quips that make

me smile every day and finds joy in making others laugh. I love this aspect of his personality and I know that he shares this gift with his group of friends on the football field and in the classroom.

However, I don't like or love one of my children more than the other, and I refuse to believe that I'm fooling myself. The love I have for them is unique; it's different and it is the most fulfilling and diversified experience I have ever had.

It reminds me of how we think as new parents that there is one sure-fire way to discipline or coax our children to sleep. A strategy that was successful with my daughter rarely worked with my son. While my daughter responded to a firm tone, my son whimpered when a voice was raised. He responded better to logical discussions about his behavior whereas my daughter tuned me out — and still does to this day.

As faith-filled people, we have been taught that Jesus loves each and every one of us — without a hint of favoritism. He sacrificed for all of us. And, as a parent, I would sacrifice everything I am and everything I own for BOTH of my children, equally, and without avail.

— 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/GREGORY A. SHEMITZ

**MOTHER TERESA LEGACY:** A man exits a soup kitchen run by the Missionaries of Charity in an apartment building in the South Bronx section of New York Aug. 24. Blessed Teresa of Kolkata, founder of the Missionaries of Charity, will be canonized at the Vatican Sept. 4.

## 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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