



FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



November 3, 2016



CNS/ALESSANDRO DI MEO, EPA

HOME: Pope Francis blesses a pilgrim during a special audience with homeless people in Paul VI hall at the Vatican, Nov. 11.

Rethinking Thanksgiving After the Year of Mercy

This year, Thanksgiving week starts right after the formal conclusion of the Extraordinary Year of Mercy. How do

we incorporate what we have gained from the prayers, talks, readings and reflections that most of us took part in during the year to shape the way we think about and celebrate Thanksgiving?

So much of our Thanksgiving pivots around what fills us with satisfaction and a sense of sufficiency. Like most people, my gratitude is tightly wrapped around all the good things or blessings in my life.

Elements of this long litany would include my loving husband and sons, the good health of my immediate family, success in our various engagements, fun and loyal friends and stability that insulates us from the economic travails that many others face. It is only natural and appropriate to give thanks for all the things that go well in our lives, may these be work, health, finance or relationships.

Yet the Year of Mercy called us also to be mindful of those things that don't go so well in our lives. We all, in different ways and to different degrees, wander away from the kingdom like the prodigal son who departed to the far country, straying from the family of God, mispending our endowments, abandoning virtuous habits and indulging in empty pleasures.

The Year of Mercy shone a light on God's love that far exceeds our flaws and willfulness: He is as persistent as the shepherd searching for his lost sheep and the woman searching for her lost coin and, like the father of the prodigal son, always on the lookout for our return.

Yet what brings us to the doorstep of God and the threshold of mercy?

Everything that causes us to question our self-sufficiency, control and

unexamined satisfaction with the way we handle relationships or form judgment. It is everything that humbles us, turns our hearts to God with an apology and makes clear our dependence on God.

It is exactly this dependence that helps us recognize the gift we are receiving. It is unlikely for those who have never experienced the excruciating pain of plantar fasciitis to appreciate the benefits of orthotics, or those who have 20/20 vision to plant reading glasses everywhere.

In a much bigger way, if we are not in touch with our own flaws, limitations and mistakes, we cannot really grasp the magnitude of God's love and what a treasure it is. God's generosity is more than what we can ever expect or think we deserve: God raises us to be heirs when we, like the prodigal son, would settle for being servants.

For me, one change this Thanksgiving will lie in what I give thanks for. Of course, we should thank God for our good fortunes, overflowing bounty, successes and "A's." But these pale in comparison to other gifts, such as second and unlimited chances, tenderness in judgment and grace that heals souls.

I am not proud of my impatience, harsh words, snap judgements, vanity, stinginess, inattention to what is deserving of attention and holding back on God. But I am unspeakably grateful when these faults turn me to God who assures all who are sincerely repentant that being "kinder, more loving, more generous" are definitely possible in all of our futures.

For Catholics, perhaps an additional practice to the celebration of Thanksgiving, in the context of mercy, would be a trip to the confessional.

Let us give thanks to God not just for things and fortune, but for mercy and grace.

Woo is president and CEO of Catholic Relief Services.

— Carolyn Woo

(This column is part of the CNS columns.)

Mom Was Right: Give It to God

I'm a worrier. And, what's worse is that I am a closet worrier. Those who know me know that I am the one who



keeps all worries to myself; however, my loved ones can also see that worrying eats at me constantly and is reflected in my mannerisms and physical appearance.

I worry about my children. I worry about my students. I worry that my schedule is too hectic. I worry about money. I worry about societal issues I can't necessarily control. And most of all, I worry that my faith may not be strong enough to overpower the worry.

I am, in every essence of the word, a worrier.

I never realized just how much worrying, though, can affect me both mentally and physically, not until I attended a workshop at a convention last week and learned about the harmful effects.

According to the speaker of the session I was attending, excessive worrying affects focus, job performance, sleep, relationships, lifestyle habits and appetite. It can cause panic attacks, paranoia and a sensitivity to fear. It can, realistically, cause a downward spiral that leads to depression, anxiety and physical ailments.

As I sat in this workshop and listened to all of the effects of constant worrying, I began to feel panic rise within me. How can I stop worrying all the time? What type of reassurance do

I need to overcome this worry?

The speaker's response was one simple word: Relax.

While some may relax by engaging in meditation, yoga or breathing exercises, I have found that the easiest way for me to relax is to quietly pray. It was during this session that I realized that even though I may not stop worrying, I have the tools, the support and the guidance from a higher power.

"Give it to God" is what my mother has always told me. And, she's right. Give those worries to God, pray for the strength to work through the worry and breathe a sigh of relief knowing that you are not alone in this fight.

My worries may be trivial or less tragic than what so many people in this world are facing; however, I do feel like I have my faith to get me through. And, I pray that my faith and my prayers can help others facing bigger worries in this day and age.

***WHAT'S NEW:** I am part of an exciting new venture with the launch of The Single Mom's Playbook, an online parenting resource for single moms. If you would like to contribute to the site, offering expert input or guest posts, please contact me at shphilpott@gmail.com. 'Like' us on Facebook ([facebook.com/singlemomplaybook](https://www.facebook.com/singlemomplaybook)) or 'follow' us on Twitter at [@momplaybook](https://twitter.com/momplaybook).

— 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/OSCAR MARTINEZ, Reuters

TORTURED PRIEST: Police officers guard the municipal building in Catemaco, Mexico, Nov. 14 after it was set on fire following the disappearance of Father Jose Luis Sanchez Ruiz, pastor of Twelve Apostles parish. The outspoken priest, who had been reported missing in the state of Veracruz, was found alive, but with signs of torture.

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.

Email us at cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org