



FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



March 23, 2017



CNS/GREGORY A. SHEMITZ

Children break from the starting line at the beginning of a fun run March 25 in the streets near St. Joseph School in Garden City, N.Y. The fun run and the 5K race that followed it comprise the annual Run for Tomorrow's Hope, a fundraiser that benefits the Catholic elementary schools of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, N.Y.

The Sins We Ignore

When I was a young woman, I saved my money from my first year of teaching and left for Ireland the following summer. Young and a bit naive, I simply purchased a one-way ticket for my lifelong dream and flew to Shannon.



My ace in the hole, although I didn't realize it at the time, was a remote contact. A nun on my school's staff knew an Irish nun in Florida who had a sister in the west of Ireland. Armed with her phone number, I headed off.

The Irish are known for hospitality, and this young woman became my big sister for my summer adventure, handing me her apartment key in Limerick while she went off to her parents' farm, guiding me, even introducing me to her sister with whom I ferried off to London.

In the decades since, we've remained friends and correspondents.

Inevitably, our chat turns to politics, from the earlier "troubles" in Northern Ireland to the election of Donald Trump.

Sadly, this spring there is this: Ireland is embroiled in yet another tragic scandal that casts a shadow on its revered Catholic past. A mass grave with baby and child remains has been discovered at a former Catholic mother and baby home in western Ireland.

A local historian had located almost 800 death certificates for children who had died at the home between 1925 and its closing in 1961, but no proper burial sites.

A government commission is investigating what had been long-standing rumors.

This follows in the wake of the well-documented revelations of the Magdalene laundries – facilities run by religious orders where "loose" girls or women were confined to hard labor and prisonlike conditions. "Loose" could mean anything from prostitution to unwed motherhood to mere flirtatiousness.

And then there was the 2013 film "Philomena," based on a book that chronicled one woman's struggle to find the child who had been taken from her in an Irish mother and child home and adopted out to wealthy Americans without her consent.

"We are all so horrified and ashamed," wrote my Irish friend, a devoted St. Vincent de Paul volunteer now in her 80s.

In a March entry in the daily devotional "Living Faith," Eve Tushnet writes, although not referring to the Irish scandal, words that strike me as appropriate here: "Every age has the sins it notices and the sins it chooses to ignore."

Ireland in the early-to-mid 20th century was obsessed by chastity. The sins that consumed "Holy Ireland," overwhelmingly, were sexual.

The sins it chose to ignore now seem obvious. It ignored sins against mercy and forgiveness. It ignored a mother's right to her own child. It sometimes ignored, apparently, the rights of a child to a proper burial if that child were conceived outside the rules. It sinned by tarring women exclusively for behavior that included men.

As an Irish observer wryly commented, "There were no fathers in the Magdalene laundries."

Catholic Ireland carried this obsession with sex to great heights, but it wasn't completely alone. Many of us who grew up in the U.S. in the '60s or '70s remember a friend being quietly spirited away during the school year, while a boyfriend remained behind. In my public high school, a pregnant teen was expelled from school while her boyfriend became homecoming king.

Ireland, the land of my great-grandparents, remains a wonderful, beloved place. But its latest shame should remind us all to examine the sins we notice and the sins we choose to ignore. It should prompt some soul-searching in all of us. Where am I blind to society's sin and my own?

— Effie Caldarola

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

God's Role in Our Relationships

Marriage is hard. In fact, relationships of any kind are hard.

This is why I'm a firm believer in

taking a direct approach when it comes to my friendships and my relationship with my soon-to-be husband. I've learned in my 40+ years that communication either makes or breaks a relationship. And, I'm the first to admit that my Type A personality strays me toward over communicating – at least, that's what my teenagers tell me.

Since communication is important to me, and rightfully so, important for healthy relationships, it is no surprise that I am now enrolled in a pre-marital counseling class with my fiancé. I approached this class with such excitement because I couldn't wait to create a plan for our marriage and communicate with one another about our likes and dislikes.

This class, though, has turned out to be one of the hardest feats for me personally. What I have realized after just a few short sessions is that even open communication with each other is not enough for a relationship to thrive if you don't have open communication with God.

I have had a few weeks to analyze and even over analyze my relationship with God. It's certainly not the first time I've thought about how I want to form, develop and preserve a partnership with him, but it is the first time

I've really had to think about specific actions to meet my expectations and the expectations of my spouse with God as the rock that holds us together.

Just one simple question stumped me: What role does God play in your life today?

At first, I was tempted to respond with something generic and expected, such as "God is always present in my life." However, after really thinking over the question, I realized that I have not always accepted God's presence in my life. I have not always seen his presence when I've felt emotionally or physically troubled. I have not always reached out to him when struggling with relationships and even when parenting.

I've been guilty of cutting off communication with God because facing my own adversities was too real and painful. As a result, because I didn't maintain my relationship with God, my personal relationships suffered. I prevented my own growth as a person, as a parent and as a partner.

Communicating with your loved ones is hard. Maintaining healthy relationships is hard. But, I have found that if I am willing to be open with myself and cultivate a relationship with God, a partnership with Him will be easy. And, I'm hopeful that by fostering my faith, I will be better equipped to foster my relationships.

— 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/PAUL HARING

Pope Francis greets a child during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican March 29.

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