



FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



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CNS/TANNEN MAURY, EPA

People gather belongings left by a tornado as cleanup begins March 1 in Naplate, Ill. Deadly and destructive tornadoes that moved through regions of the Diocese of Peoria, Ill., on the eve of Ash Wednesday have led to extra prayer and charity in the first days of Lent.

To Be in God's Hands

Like most Catholics, I planned for Lent. I had my list of suggested "give ups," "to dos," goals. I like to be in control. There are aspects of this personality trait that are positive, but essentially wanting control is often a futile endeavor.

So on the morning of "Shrove Tuesday" or Mardi Gras depending on your name for the festive, feasting day before Ash Wednesday, I woke up about 3 a.m. realizing that I was completely out of control.

I huddled under the blankets with chills, fever and a wheezing noise emanating from my chest with every breath I took. Ecclesiastes 1:14 scoffed at my well-laid plans: "I have seen all things that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity."

I had gone to bed feeling healthy. I woke up to a week of illness.

Far too sick to join in Ash Wednesday services, I nevertheless found it easy to contemplate that I was, indeed, dust, or as I half-jokingly termed my condition, toast. I never used to get this sick, I thought. It must be the creeping onslaught of old age.

I felt sorry for myself. I basked in my own mortality, not a bad thing to do during the first week of Lent. I found myself weeping easily, moved by sentimental stories on the news or Facebook. I decided I might as well feel sorry for the whole world.

Then, I thought of Jesuit Father Pedro Arrupe.

Father Arrupe was the 28th superior general of the Society of Jesus, a man tasked with leading the Jesuits in 1965 right after the Second Vatican Council had caused the earth to move under our feet.

Father Arrupe is my hero. In my pantheon of personal saints, Father

Arrupe is one to whom I pray most consistently. A famous poster of him praying at Hiroshima, where he was when the U.S. dropped the atomic bomb, hangs over my desk.

Father Arrupe led the Jesuits to a new commitment to the poor, to a faith that does justice, to viewing education's purpose as preparing us to be men and women for others. Some compared him to the order's founder, calling him a second Ignatius. He even resembled the saint, who like him was born in the Basque region of Spain.

But the reason I thought of Father Pedro Arrupe as I endured illness was because of famous words he spoke at the time that he had to step down as the Jesuits' leader in 1983. He had experienced a debilitating stroke, and though he lived for several years, he never recovered.

"More than ever," he told his Jesuits, "I find myself in the hands of God. This is what I have wanted all my life from my youth. But now there is a difference; the initiative is entirely with God. It is indeed a profound spiritual experience to know and feel myself so totally in God's hands."

Those are powerful words, spoken by a man who was used to being in a position of power. To be totally in God's hands, Father Arrupe discovered, is to no longer be in control.

We don't get to choose what we surrender.

I realized my little week of unexpected retreat at the beginning of Lent was actually a gift. I thank God for taking away my control of the first week of Lent and for reminding me I am never truly in control.

I thank him for the example of people who allowed themselves to fall totally into the hands of God, like Father Arrupe and like Jesus with whom we walk during this season.

— Effie Caldarola

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

Catholic Education, Foundation for Life

I recently came across an article and slideshow online depicting experiences that only children who attended



Catholic school may remember. Although it was meant to be humorous, and yes, the different shapes and blobs of ashes on each child's forehead was comical, the article did prompt me to seriously reflect

on my childhood and my faith-filled upbringing.

When I was in grade school, I didn't fully understand, nor appreciate, the Catholic foundation provided for me. As I look back, I went through the motions, attended all-school Masses and received the Eucharist just like my classmates. However, those moments seemed routine to me.

Now that I am older, though, I realize that the religious instruction, the involvement in youth group (then called CYO) and the preparation for sacraments formed my faith. I appreciate now that my Catholic education helped shape me as an adult.

Without involvement in service projects, I would not be as inclined as an adult to give back my time and talents to my community. Without the mandatory memorization of prayers and hymns, I would not be able to actively participate in Masses and services.

Most importantly, without the

friendships I formed with my classmates, who understood my faith, my religion and my beliefs, I would not be as open to forming new friendships and participating in small prayer groups or Bible study sessions.

I may not have appreciated the religious foundation my mother worked hard to provide for me as a child at the time, but I do now and chose the same path for my own children. Yes, just like I did, my children griped about getting up early on Sunday morning to attend church and complained about wearing a uniform to school.

My hope, though, is that someday, if not already, they realize that these sacrifices were small compared to the benefits of learning how to embrace your faith, allowing God to lead you through life and embracing faith as a foundation.

I hope, too, that they have fond memories of lining up to practice for their Confirmation, baking bread prior to their First Communion and realizing that Reconciliation is not as scary as it seems. And, if they continue to stand in line to receive a perfectly drawn cross or a blob of ashes on their forehead each Ash Wednesday, then they, too, will always remember that their Catholic foundation never fades.

— 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/ANGELO CARCONI, EPA

Pope Francis greets a girl during a March 12 visit at the Rome parish of St. Magdalene of Canossa.

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.

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