



A journal for restless minds

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Receiving the grace of God

A WITNESS TO THE LIGHT

Testifying to the truth

DEACON'S DINER

Food for a restless mind

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

Seeing Is Believing

Receiving the grace of God

Perhaps the most memorable lines in all of the Star Wars films are those uttered by the diminutive Jedi Master, Yoda. Two come to mind for their simplicity and yet equally as much for the profound wisdom they impart: "Try not. Do or do not, there is no try." and "Fear is the path to the dark side.... Fear leads to anger.... Anger leads to hate.... Hate leads to suffering."

Life is neither simple nor easy. If it were, we would undoubtedly quickly find ourselves completely bonkers from the sheer and utter boredom of it. No, God gave us the freedom to choose and in doing so opened the door to sin, just as Saint Paul wrote, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not

want is what I do. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand" (Romans 7:15, 18-19, 21).

For rational beings we are inexplicably irrational at times. It is as if the mind has a mind of its own! As Frank Sheed puts it, "We have all had the experience of seeing what we ought to do, agreeing that we ought to do it, and doing the opposite; and this not only with things which we saw to be abstractly more desirable, or useful for the

good of others, but things which sheer self-interest should have made us pursue. ... And over and above all, ... there is the shapeless, nameless, horribly powerful, unpredictable thing which for want of a better name we call cussedness—an irre-

sistible impulse to do the unreasonable thing because it is unreasonable. There is in us a diseased craving for the irrational, a hunger and thirst for it."¹

Temptation has its way with us. We step on the scale each morning and make



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A Witness To The Light

Testifying to the truth

On the first day of creation “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Genesis 1:3) and in one week we will hear “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (Isaiah 9:2).

It is our nature, when confronted by darkness, to search for light, to illuminate our surroundings in order to see what lies before us. Our vocabulary is filled with expressions related to darkness and light, such as blindness and sight. When we learn something we say “I see”; when we have been working on some task for a very long time and the end is near we say “I see the light at the end of the tunnel”; or when we wish to exclude someone from some information we say that we are “keeping them in the dark.”

We also use darkness and light to define our emotional state. We use phrases such as “doom and gloom” to describe feelings of hopelessness and despair. For those who are depressed we tell them to “lighten up”.

Often we limit our vision by dimming or extinguishing the light; we take a “blind eye” to what lies in front of us because it is unpleasant or uncomfortable. We are blinded by what we want or don’t want to see. We put the blinders on and keep others in the dark every time we judge them by their appearance, their actions, or their

speech. By keeping our distance and avoiding contact we place ourselves in darkness and reject the light of Christ.

There are moments in every life when the darkness threatens to overwhelm us; times when the night lasts so long we begin to believe it will never end. Yet, however unrelieved our night may seem, there is always the promise of light; know that in the darkest hour, in those moments of our destitution, a light will come and change everything.



So much is hidden from us; there is more that lies forever hidden in darkness than what can be seen with the eye. Consider the human body; how little of it is visible to us. Deep inside cells are growing, dividing, and dying, nerves are sending signals to muscles, viruses and cancerous cells are being attacked by the immune system, organs are functioning even as they imperceptibly age. Everything works together, everything affects the whole, and everything does so hidden from our sight.

What is deepest within us is invis-

ble to us. And yet, we are comfortable in knowing what lies hidden from us.

We are the body of Christ. We are one in spirit, united in the love of Christ. “Inside the Body of Christ, we are present to each other and carry each other across the miles. Everything we do, good or bad, affects all the others. For this reason the church teaches that there is no such thing as a private act—of sin, virtue, or anything else. Nothing is private inside a body, everything affects everything. Moreover, our union with each other links us, even beyond death. Inside the ‘communion of saints,’ we believe that our loved ones who have died are alive, still with us, and able to communicate with us and we with them.

To believe this is to be both consoled and challenged. Consoled, in knowing that we carry each other in love and union, across all distance, even through death. But challenged too in knowing that everything we do, be it ever so private, is either a bad virus or a healthy enzyme affecting the overall health of the body of Christ and the family of humanity.”¹

For years a small marble statue stood in the entrance hall of the French Embassy in New York City. Parts of it were badly damaged but it had a quaint charm that made it a good conversation piece.

One day an art expert saw the statue and thought it matched the description of a long-lost statue by Michelangelo. After doing some research and analysis, it was determined to indeed

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be a statue of Cupid, an early work of the great master. It had stood in the entrance hall of the embassy for many years without ever being recognized.

What we do not know we cannot love; what we do not love will remain in the darkness and shadows. We are called to bring the light of Christ to those who live in the shadows and darkness of loneliness, fear, and despair. We have the opportunity to see ourselves and others more clearly, in a new light.

At this time of the year we are asked to remember the poor, those less fortunate, and to find ways to bring Christ into their lives. We are asked to look deeply within ourselves, to open our hearts to the light of Jesus, to remove the blinders and see what lies outside our comfort zone, to recognize Jesus in the people around us.

We hear it in the first reading of the prophet Isaiah: *"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God"* (Isaiah 61:1-2). We find it easy to believe these words were meant for "back then" and not for us in the "here and now." But Jesus would argue otherwise; insisting they were for the present, perhaps, even more so today.

And yet, we struggle with this. We ask ourselves just how much do we owe the poor, the brokenhearted, the

captive, and the prisoner? Where do we find them? What is our duty to them?

The first place we need to look is to ourselves, for the poor are found, not only outside our selves, but within our hearts and minds and spirit. We are the poor in spirit—in our sinfulness, our weaknesses, and our inability to love ourselves as God loves us.

"We are the impoverished, not only in the matters of our unfulfilled desires, material or otherwise, but in the more secret matters of our personal vulnerability, our inability to save and heal ourselves, our utter incapacity to manage our way through life and love.

And it is we too who suffer broken hearts in those very lives and loves and labors that mark our existence. There is no woman, man, or child I have ever met who has been exempt from this condition. There are many of us, however, who have repressed or ignored that very fact. The receiving of the prophecy is the recognition of our truth.

So it is with our blindness before grace, to the bounty of life, to the gift of each breath and movement of our hearts. So also with our inability to see the wounds and gifts of those near and far. We have eyes but see not.

We too are captive: prisoners of barred rooms and closed roads, unable to see our way out of failure, our betrayals and egoisms, our fears that paralyze, our attachments that hold us frozen."²

In order to bring light to others we must first dispel the darkness that blankets our souls; we must receive and accept the abundant joy of

Christ within our hearts.

As we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus, we should remind ourselves that through the light of Christ we are called to bring light to those who live in darkness so that all can receive the abundant joy of Christmas.

Just as John the Baptist was sent to "testify to the light," as Christians, we too are called to give witness to the truth that is Jesus Christ. To give witness authentically, two things must be true: you must know of what you are speaking and you must speak truthfully of what you know to be true.

To give witness has never been easy, and in today's culture, even more so. "Witness" comes from the Greek "martyria," as is the word "martyr." One of the most direct ways of giving witness to Jesus is by talking about our relationship with him, and for Catholics that is something we are reluctant to do. Yet, as John gave witness to Christ's coming, so must we, even though witnessing to Christ comes with a price. Just as *witness* is derived from the word for *martyr*, like John, we must do the same. Although people will probably ignore or ridicule us, our duty as Christians is to give witness to others and suffer the consequences, whatever they may be. Amen.

Homily for the
Third Sunday of Advent (B)
Isaiah 61:1-2A, 10-11
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

1. Ron Rolheiser, *In Exile: The Mystical Body*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.
2. John Kavanaugh, SJ, *Gaudete: Rejoice*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.

the same solemn vow we made the day before: to stick to our diet so as to rid ourselves of those annoyingly stubborn, unhealthy pounds we have so inexplicably accumulated. And then, we proceed to eat that marvelously delicious chocolate muffin (or two,) so chock full of delectable, irresistible calories, all the while knowing what we are doing is precisely what we ought not be doing!

No matter how hard we try to lose weight, those pounds cling to us like super-glue, and that's our story and we're sticking to it. It's not my fault, the devil made me do it, I couldn't let it go to waste. Excuses, excuses, excuses. And all the while we hear Yoda: "Try not. Do or do not, there is no try."

Not long ago, over lunch, the conversation gravitated toward the purpose of and necessity for confessing one's sins to a priest rather than taking them directly to God. This is a common enough question, one which, inevitably, always seems to focus on the need for a middle-man, in this case, a priest.

While I knew with some confidence that only mortal sins required the confessional, I could not with any degree of certitude explain why that was so. Unsure as to how to adequately and accurately respond, I therefore begged off in answering, offering to do some research, so as to be able to provide a reasoned and appropriate response.

Reconciliation, or Confession, is first and foremost a Sacrament. This

may not sound important but it is perhaps of the utmost importance to understanding its purpose and necessity. So, to remind ourselves: "The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions."²

Sacraments are efficacious (i.e. effective, helpful, useful) "because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies."³ Most importantly, sacraments are visible, outward *signs*, signifying the invisible divine grace bestowed on us by God through the Holy Spirit.

Consider the Sacrament of the Eucharist: The visible sign of consecration, affected through the actions of the priest, signifies the invisible: the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Without the sacramental consecration, how would transubstantiation be manifested? Without the sacrament, the bread and wine are but symbols, not the real presence of Christ's Body and Blood.

Each of the seven sacraments was instituted by Christ and specifically entrusted to the Church through his apostles.

"During his public life Jesus not only forgave sins, but also made plain the effect of this forgiveness: he reintegrated forgiven sinners into the community of the Peo-

ple of God from which sin had alienated or even excluded them. A remarkable sign of this is the fact that Jesus receives sinners at his table, a gesture that expresses in an astonishing way both God's forgiveness and the return to the bosom of the People of God.

In imparting to his apostles his own power to forgive sins the Lord also gives them the authority to reconcile sinners with the Church. This ecclesial dimension of their task is expressed most notably in Christ's solemn words to Simon Peter: 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven' (Mt 16:19). The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of the apostles united to its head.

The words bind and loose mean: *whomever you exclude from your communion, will be excluded from communion with God; whomever you receive anew into your communion, God will welcome back into his. Reconciliation with the Church is separable from reconciliation with God.*⁵

"Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation) for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification."⁶ There are two equally essential elements of the Sacrament of Reconciliation: first are the acts of the one who undergoes conversion through the action of the

Holy Spirit, namely, contrition, confession, and satisfaction; and second, God's action through the intervention of the Church. *"The Church, who through the bishop and his priests forgives sins in the name of Jesus Christ and determines the manner of satisfaction, also prays for the sinner and does penance with him. Thus the sinner is healed and re-established in ecclesial communion."*⁷

To honestly answer the question of why one must confess sins to a priest, is to recognize and acknowledge our reluctance to do so. Our difficulty in disclosing our sins, from a purely human point of view, generally falls under the domain of fear. We are afraid of what another (the priest) may think of us. We fear the shame that may befall us when we open ourselves up for ridicule and punishment. We fear we may not be forgiven because we cannot forgive ourselves. We are afraid to admit our failures, even to ourselves.

And here, we must turn to Yoda for wisdom: *"Fear is the path to the dark side.... Fear leads to anger.... Anger leads to hate.... Hate leads to suffering."* What we hide, even from ourselves, out of fear is indeed the path to the dark side. What we refuse to acknowledge as sinful, what we will not disclose to the light of day, will only propel us deeper into the darkness. We will find reason in the irrational; the irrational will lead to fear of disclosure which will lead to self-anger, which will lead to self-hatred, and all the while we will suffer from our inability to overcome our failures and to accept forgiveness.

Confession of sins frees us and allows us to reconcile with others. *"Through such an admission man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible."*⁸

There is fault in taking our sins directly to God and asking for forgiveness; the fault lies with our will, as evidenced by our first parents, who disobeyed God and when *"they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'I heard the sound of thee in the garden and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself'"* (Gen 3:8-10). They were afraid and they hid themselves from God.

As reluctant as we might be to confess our sins to a priest, it is our fear which will hinder, even prevent us from admitting our failures to ourselves, let alone to God. Our natural *"human"* inclination is toward the irrational, to deny, corrupt, sanctify, justify, rationalize what we objectively know to be wrong. Above all else, we should remember this: Confession is not meant to make our sins known to God, but to make our sins known to ourselves.

1. Frank Sheed, *Society and Sanity*, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1960), 50-51.
2. Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), §355.
3. CCC §1131.
4. CCC §1127.
5. CCC §1443, §1444, §1445.
6. CCC §1446.
7. CCC §1448.
8. CCC §1455.

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

For those restless minds that hunger and thirst for more. Each week this space will offer a menu of interesting and provocative titles, written by Catholic authors, in addition to those referenced in the articles, for you to feed your restless mind.

BOOKS

On Conscience

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

Ignatius Press

2007, 82 pages.

Society and Sanity

Frank Sheed

Sheed & Ward, New York

1953, 270 pages.

Strangers in a Strange Land

Charles J. Chaput

Henry Holt and Co.

February 21, 2017, 288 pages.

PERIODICALS

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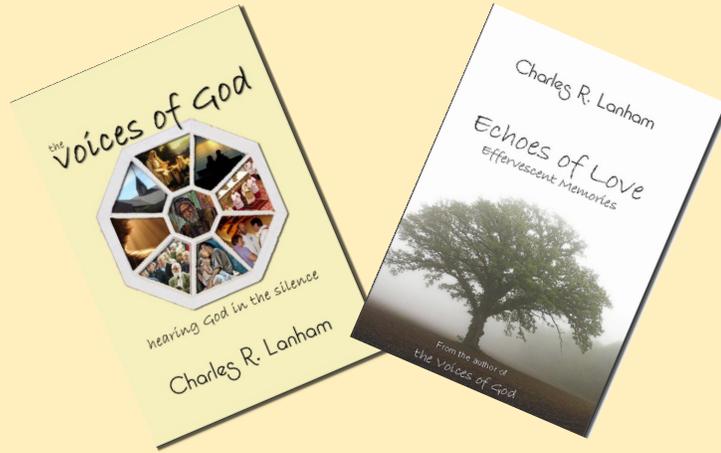
Catholic Answers Magazine

Share the Faith, Defend the Faith

Editor: Tim Ryland

Bi-Monthly.

www.catholic.com



Books are available on **Amazon.com** or from the author's web site at:

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Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

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