Spotlight:
by Janice Sevre-Duszynska

My call to the priesthood originated within the roots of my childhood on the south side of Milwaukee, the promised land for many Poles who left the motherland. My parents and their four children lived upstairs in Busia’s house, a few blocks from Pulaski Park and down the hill from Sts. Cyril and Methodius’ parish. Other family members lived downstairs with Busia, my mom’s mother. My father’s parents lived a mile away. Our lives were centered on our faith, parish school, and Polish customs, and I read The Milwaukee Journal every day to learn about the world. My cousin Mary Jo was gifted at playing the violin, and I’d accompany her on the piano while the family sang Christmas carols. Sister Reynold, our music teacher, taught us the Latin songs for Mass as well as religious songs in English. My mother sometimes challenged the priest’s homily and my father would, at Sunday dinner, call upon me to talk about today’s Gospel, and then ask what it meant. I loved the challenge! Every day I read my St. Joseph’s Missal, a First Holy Communion gift from my parents, along with a celebration featuring polka band, dancing, and delicious Polish food. I particularly looked forward to the Old Testament reading and then the Gospel at our daily school Mass. I wanted every word about Jesus’ life, the apostles, and the women who supported Him. Jesus cares about women, I said to myself! From Busia’s sister in Poland, my uncle who survived the Battle of the Bulge, and Grocer Mr. Banicki’s shrapnel scars on his face and legs, I learned about suffering and war. A non-violence candle was lit within me. Every Saturday morning from second grade on, I cleaned the priests’ sacristy and the church sanctuary, including the altar. I learned about priestly vestments and what was needed for Mass. Alone in this space where females were not permitted to celebrate liturgy, I held the Book of the Gospels; I would read, preach, lift up the imaginary Eucharist, give out intangible Communion, and bless the invisible People of God. It was there that I first heard the Spirit, blowing as She will, proclaiming that women were called to that space, too!


“The Cross in the Mist”
Twin Peaks, California was hit this winter with major snowstorms. This image of pine branches was captured early one morning by Photographer John Mirdo. Minutes later it disappeared forever.
From the Editor

When *Mary and Human Liberation*, our featured book review, was first published in 1997, it was on a fast track to oblivion. Only 600 copies were printed, and the author was obscure at best. All that changed, however, when the Vatican got hold of the book and created a major stink. All of a sudden, the unknown Sri Lankan Oblate of Mary Immaculate was the talk of the town! Tissa Balasuriya became the darling of the progressive Catholic lecture circuit and, while the Vatican fumed, was engaged for speaking appearances all over the world. *Mary and Human Liberation* became an international sensation and has not been out of print since.

What is so striking is not the knockout written argument between theologian and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in which Balasuriya clearly displays the upper hand. The real miracle of his book is its brilliant portrayal of Mary of Nazareth. The Mary I knew as a child was perpetually at prayer or, occasionally, focused on her little boy. If I had to characterize her in a nutshell, it would be as “utterly sublime.” There was no room for me in her life because prayer and her Son ate it all up. That she might even look at me was beyond my wildest dreams; that she would give me a hug was unthinkable. Enter Tissa Balasuriya with a radically different concept of Mary. The portrait on the front cover shows her looking the reader dead in the eye. She is not wafting off somewhere in prayer; she is proclaiming the gospel of her Son, just as she did prior to His birth. Just read the Magnificat. This is the Mary I so ached to know! And, as the captain of this newsletter’s Team Paradise, she is everything I need her to be.

What Do We Mean by the Grace of God?
by Lynn Kinlan

There is no word in Hebrew scripture for grace, but according to Diarmuid O’Murchu, a priest and noted author, there are two similar words: *chesed* which means “loving kindness” and *hanam* which translates as “the spontaneous gift of affection.” The Greek word *charis* in Christian scripture literally means “gift.” Though frail and imperfect, we’ve been invited into covenant or communion with the Holy One whose graceful love may include disappointment and forgiveness but also loyalty and permanence.

Atonement theology has led to regarding grace as “unearned favor.” In this view, grace is lost by sin, regained through sacraments, and enhanced by good works. One’s soul can be said to be in a state of grace – or not so much. Because the individual is unworthy, the Church is the arbiter of a grace that can be taken back or “lost.” The inclusion of good works as earning grace makes elusive what was once a spontaneous gift without conditions. Yet, some scholars of church history have bypassed atonement in the discussion of grace, reasoning instead that compassion for the crucified Christ raises us to become selfless lovers, able to give as Jesus did, beyond measure. Contemporary theologian Elizabeth Johnson echoes this by saying that “grace remains as God’s permanent offer of love and thereby of salvation . . . an offer that cannot be extinguished by the grossest sin.”

Whether constant or at the behest of a church tinged by clericalism, grace gives us a window on how God loves us despite human shortfalls. Gracious love is given easily, readily, without measure, and without expectation of return or credit. The love that lasts accepts and even grows to appreciate the quirks, flaws, and weak points of the beloved.

Love is an unceasing gift of the Holy One and grace is the momentum that brings us to recognize the unimaginably infinite gift of love. Think of how “by the grace of God” implies that we do our best by virtue of grace. Religious studies professor Elizabeth Dreyer explains that grace enables us to see ourselves as “peers, not only with all peoples, but with the earth itself.” When God’s grace is acknowledged, it is the fount of love that showers us, connects us to each other and to the original holy source of the grace. This is what we mean by covenant and communion.

Grace is intrinsic to the goodness of life on earth and is furthered when we act to sustain goodness. “Ethical grace” is the term used by Rita Brock and Rebecca Parker, authors of *Saving Paradise*, to describe the Christ-like call to be engaged in healing the sick; welcoming the stranger; advocating for the poor, hungry, and imprisoned; and confronting the powers of injustice that would drain the grace from all of us. Let’s plant the seeds of ethical grace and allow it to blossom in our time. *Grace* is a retired educator who enjoys writing spiritual poetry and meditations. She and her husband have raised three adult sons and are restocking their empty nest by caring for a grandchild part-time. Lynn co-presides at Upper Room liturgies in Albany NY and in additional sacramental ministry for friends and family.
Book Review: 
Mary and Human Liberation 
by Fr. Tissa Balasuriya

If you grew up with the Marian doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church and still adhere to what the Magisterium would have you believe, then Fr. Balasuriya’s book will be a shocker or, maybe, just an eye opener for you. Tissa Balasuriya was a native of Sri Lanka and ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1952 in Rome. He became the founding director of the Centre for Society and Religion and a founding member of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. In his book Mary and Human Liberation, Fr. Balasuriya deconstructs the doctrine of original sin by taking a close look at the presuppositions [Mary] is the first priest of the New Testament, along with Jesus, offering the flesh of her flesh. and sources of this belief. He finds nothing in the Hebrew scripture that would support such a belief and nothing that would put forth a doctrine of redemption, that is, a purchase back of a fallen humanity. Fr. Balasuriya traces the message that all human beings are sinners and that salvation is through Jesus Christ to the early apostolic writings, especially Paul in his Epistle to the Romans 5: 12-21. Once the doctrine of original sin is deconstructed, Fr. Balasuriya sees no need for the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception; that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was preserved from the sin of the first parents of all humans. After that doctrine is disposed of, there is no logic in espousing a doctrine of the bodily assumption of Mary into heaven. Fr. Balasuriya maintains a belief in Mary as savvy, strong, and street smart. Because she and Jesus must have discussed his ministry and mission, we can assume that she was there at crucial times in his life, including his crucifixion and death. The description of Mary during the Way of the Cross reveals strength beyond that of the male disciples. Fr. Balasuriya draws a parallel between courage shown by Mary, the women who followed Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, as Jesus was being buried, in the modern-day language of laity who stand up and speak out on contemporary issues when Church “leaders,” that is, clergy, are reluctant. It is no surprise to the reader to learn that Fr. Balasuriya’s book was thoroughly criticized and even banned by the official Roman Catholic hierarchy, namely the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Criticism included purported methodological deficiencies, doctrinal error, and non-conformity to ecclesiastical authority. In 1997, Fr. Tissa Balasuriya was excommunicated by the Roman Catholic Church when he refused to recant the alleged errors in this book. Fr. Balasuriya’s book is thought provoking because of its different perspective regarding Mary, Mother of Jesus from that which is and was taught by the institutional Church.

Ask Sophia

The Church argues against women priests on the basis of canon law, which allows only men to be ordained. It also argues that women have not been ordained in the past, despite evidence to the contrary. Finally, it asserts that Jesus did not ordain women (conveniently overlooking the fact that He did not ordain men either.)

Are there any other issues less mired in deadlock?

There is one other issue, and it is crucial. In fact, it is definitive. Is God calling women to be priests? If so, canon law is wrong in refusing ordination to women, and whatever did or did not happen in the past is irrelevant.

Consider:

• The Church is desperate for priests.
• The sensus fidelium – the sense of the faithful, made up of those voices outside the hierarchy – is calling for women priests. Numerous independent surveys indicate that more than 2/3 of the laity are in favor of ordaining women.
• Without exception, women priests maintain that their ordinations were prompted by the Holy Spirit.

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“In Christ, there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28

In 2002, on the Danube River, seven women were validly ordained Roman Catholic priests. The principal consecrating Roman Catholic male bishop who ordained our first women bishops is one with apostolic succession in communion with the Pope within the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, all qualified candidates who are presented to our bishops for ordination are ordained in apostolic succession by the laying on of hands. According to man-made canon law, the Church may consider us illicit, but our ordinations are valid.
Edith Stein was born October 12, 1891 in Breslau, now Wroclaw, Poland. She was the youngest of eleven children, and her birth fell on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The Steins were a devout Jewish family and the importance of her birthday was not lost on her mother. Precocious from the beginning, Edith arrived home from kindergarten and announced she was not returning; she needed more challenge. At the age of fifteen, she proclaimed she was an atheist, but that did not stop her search for Truth. She was later quoted as saying “God is Truth.” As a young woman, Edith was attracted by the work of Dr. Edmond Husserl. He developed the study of phenomenology, a philosophy that attempted to connect the world we see with the world’s ideas and values. Edith earned her doctorate under Dr. Husserl. Her thesis: Empathy. Although qualified, Edith was denied professorships as a woman of the Jewish faith. The Nazis were on the rise. She began teaching in an all-girls’ Dominican college and enjoyed the community. It was during this assignment that her desire to convert to Catholicism blossomed. While visiting the widow of a friend, she perused her books and pulled the autobiography of Teresa of Avila. Edith stayed up all night reading, and in the morning announced, “This is Truth.” In 1922, she was baptized into the Catholic Church and one year later became a Carmelite nun, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, in Cologne.

Edith Stein was canonized by Pope John Paul II on October 11, 1998. A philosopher himself, he was deeply influenced by her myriad books and writings that contributed, not just to the Church, but also to our modern thinking in western civilization. Her works and heart touched him deeply; she has surely touched mine. 

Shelley Gilchrist is a mother and a grammy. She has worked as an educator in speech, theatre, and English and is also a singer/actress/director. Expressing her love for the beatitudes has led her to serve with interfaith social justice organizations like F.A.I.T.H. in Volusia County Florida. She is also a member of the Federation of Christian Ministries and on an ordination path with ARCWP.

**New News:**

**Crisis Contemplation**

by Ann Harrington

On Saturday, February 2, 2019, six women gathered at my house to watch a talk on Crisis Contemplation. Barbara Holmes, the speaker, is a spiritual teacher and writer focused on African-American spirituality, mysticism, cosmology, and culture. She proclaimed, “My life is committed to the struggle for justice, the healing of the human spirit, and the art of relevant and radical creativity.”

Barbara helped us see the call to community transformation during times of deep and tragic injustice. She stated that, when crisis is communal, there is only one cause – social injustice. Teachers arise to address the question of “Where is God amidst all this suffering?” Barbara explained that the luxury of responding as an individual does not exist. It must be done in community for safety, comfort, and survival. The story that touched us the most was how Barbara described the “middle passage.”

She reminded us that Africa is a continent, and the captured people would have been from differing tribes, cultures, and religions. There was no common language. On that trip between continents, the Africans died to what was and what could have been. In the womb of the cargo ship, they were turned into slaves, and this enabled them to survive their new reality. If they had arrived like they were before captivity, Barbara theorized, they would have been unable to adjust.

We pondered Barbara’s idea of the feminine spirit as dark mother and how necessary darkness is to life. We found ourselves with more insight into 1 Thess. 5: 16-18, “Rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks for everything.”

The voice of the Spirit still speaks today to those with the courage to listen. Therefore, the institutional Church needs to gather its finest spiritual directors, ones totally open to the movement of the Spirit, to meet with women priests and to examine their processes of discernment. Is the Church ready for what those discussions will reveal? Will new voices be welcome to sit at the table? Will the gridlock be dispelled? The Church won’t find out if it doesn’t seek the answer. Sophia speaks for women priests everywhere: we stand ready to discuss with the Church as a whole the discernment of our calls to the priesthood.

**Ask Sophia, continued from page 3**

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Ann Harrington, wife, mother, grandmother, and ARCWP-ordained priest, is pastor of Free Spirit Inclusive Catholic Community. Her ministries include spiritual direction, interfaith dialogue, centering prayer, retreat leader, frequent letter-to-the-editor writer, and coordinator for the Greenville Advocacy Team.