



Old Catholic Church of the Americas

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In the Beginning . . .—Mother Rachael Christian, OSB



It's funny how so many times I hear, in the beginning. And I wonder, what has that to do with where I am now? Well, be-

ginnings; happen every moment of every day we rise up and breathe in the air around us. They happen whether we like it or not. But in some cases, it's a very good thing that they do, have an 'in the beginning', or the end of my story would have been when I was an infant.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the world was without form and darkness covered it. But look, here comes another new beginning! God spoke and said, "Let there be light and, 'there was light.' No ordinary light was this, but the light that would spear the darkness of man and woman's souls, and bring new life, new beginnings alive; new life to every moment. Amazing isn't it? Empowering for sure!

When I think of beginnings, I like to look at spring, or the beginnings of it. There I see a crocus blooming in otherwise wintery days; here I see

green blades that shimmer as they shimmer in the pale sun of late winter. These are all new, and their beginnings and endings, resemble a cycle I know well, and so do you, it's called, life.

The other day I was pondering all of this as I read in my Bible. A slow intentional reading of Genesis and Exodus has made the Scriptures alive. I have read it several times, been through the entire Bible itself at least 3 times, but never have I read with intent. Amazing what this new beginning is bringing alive; It is God's Voice echoing through the chaos of my mind and soul to reach my heart and echo back a deep relaying message; I love you. There is my next new beginning.

Love: What it is to me, and how God sees it to be. First as my heart knows of love, is very little, except the great love of my parents, sister, grandparents and pastor. And all of my friends have shown me various aspects of love, but never have I seen or tasted love like what I see it becoming in this beginning.

And that is? God literally bending down from the heavens and saying, "You are mine. "No one can take you from me. How do I come to that with the words in Genesis, when especially in Exodus the people beg to not

hear His Voice or 'they will die'. Well, I let go of my pride and set aside my indifference and pour my soul into the words and feel the power of God speaking to Moses on the Mountain and feeling the tension of Abraham preparing to slay Jacob. And then the forever truth comes to mind; Jesus did all of this, walked the same walk, died on the same mountain as Jacob could have done, after carrying His Cross as Jacob had carried his would have been end. This is the greatest of all the 'in the beginnings' I have experienced. It has made the Bible a journey of love, of life, of joy, sorrow, anger, angst, separation, reunion, and even with all of that, the first word in this line, remains the steadfast one for eternity: love. God loves us and does indeed have a plan for our lives; for my life.

So when I am tempted to think this world is all there is and it's a sour mash taste in my mouth bleeding down into my soul, leaving me in a dark and lonely escape route to nowhere: I turn to God. And I say, pleadingly rather: "Lord, let it be a new beginning. Show me new light." And through the clouds comes a spear of light that warms my bed, and as a child I once did, I lay down now on couch or bed, and rest and rise up, with a new beginning. You can, too.

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A Very Special Day—Deacon Mary Unger, OSB



I was recently ordained to the level of Deacon, by Bishop Bernard Sheffield, OSB, on January 3, 2015. It was not a singular event. It is a goal that I have been working on more than full-time as I have been so excited about what I have learned and continue to experience. It is a way of life that I have come to know and love, an approach with the Rules of St Benedict and their reflections in my emails, the Divine Office on my phone “app”, and the supportive connections of priests, sisters and laity by just a click of the mouse, or a phone call with many friends across the country. I am forever changed. I am on a “high” and I hope to never come down.

My calling was a surprise, as I expect many of yours were too. I just thought it happened to “others” as I certainly did not feel worthy to be “called”. I was shocked and thought I was possibly hallucinating the first time I was called by a voice that said “Follow me.” Of course, I blew it off. However, when “it” returned six months later, telling me again to “Follow me. I have been waiting for you for 37

years”, I knew it truly was not a hallucination nor an earthly message. You see, I was married for 35 years, dated my husband for 2 years before that (equaling 37 years), and prior to that had seriously considered becoming a missionary. Meeting my husband changed all that, and I never considered religious life again...until the “call came” the second time. I have since learned that God does not always call “worthy” folks, although many are. He calls the “willing” folks, of which I am now one and His patience knows no limits. Can you imagine 37 years? What a memory He has!!! What patience! Wow!

The amazing part of this ordination was that God orchestrated the whole thing, allowing me the choice. I met Bishop Bernie Sheffield, OSB, after a Sunday mass. At our first meeting, he told me that the Old Catholic Church denomination accepted women as priests. I said, “You never know; I just might be one someday!” Of course, I had no intention to do so, and sauntered out of the church. Turns out, Bishop has NEVER told another

woman that at their first meeting. Interesting huh? (I also learned Bishop Bernie Sheffield, OSB, is a big listener to the Holy Spirit). AND, it just happened that a scriptural scholar priest, Monsignor Tom Gallub, of Ascension Alliance, another Independent Catholic Church, just HAPPENED to move here and joined us. He wanted to somehow get involved in the parish. Again, interesting, with God’s perfect timing. So guess who initially started seminary online and now has an expert teacher at her fingertips! Yes!! And it just gets better!

Being a woman, the first woman here in our diocese, the guy priests and deacon have gone out of their way to welcome me, encourage me, and share their unique gifts and talents. Each and every one has taught me something...whether it was the



delivery of my homily in a speech class, or allowing me to understand and feel the Holy Spirit more in my life, to traveling to Utah to meet my Brothers and Sisters in Christ there, to getting involved with

homebound and outreach ministries that many of Our priests participate in, and coordinating the monthly potluck, I feel very connected and included.

Since I am a woman, there are concerns about pushback from people who may want only a “male” priest. However, I feel

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and have been told that the priests in our denomination really have my back, and I know that God is leading me and has my front, so what have I to fear? I have tremendous armor surrounding me!

My goal is to become a priest of intimacy. I want to be one who connects with the sick and those that

love them, the spiritually lonely, those who need to feel Christ present in their lives. I want to provide that presence. Again, God is busy. He has placed a nurse friend as the Director of the local Hospice House. She is following my vocation and wants me to get involved with her facility. Amazing!

The Ordination to the Diaconate was only the beginning, I have so

much yet to learn...but I do know without a doubt that when God wants something to happen, IT DOES! I am excited to see what He has planned for me. My only desire is to do His will in me. As Mother Teresa said, "I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God who is sending a love letter to the world." Use me Lord. I am yours for the writing.

Thoughts—Deacon Darren Hayes



In our life on this world, a world that was created by God for us, we are told that our thoughts are an important asset of

what the world will be like around us, in fact the main confrontation with the devil doesn't rely on the things that happen around us more so they take place in our minds, especially the things that a person thinks about themselves. Those negative thoughts that over run our head we have all had them at some point of time, ***I'm too fat, I can't do this, I can't do that, I am not important enough, I am a failure. I'm not smart enough,*** the list goes on and on and for some this is a daily battle. They not only face one of these issues they face more than one or all of them. Let me take this opportunity to say that these all are lies, lies that

are created to bring you down. Things that are created in your own head to make your path difficult with your relationship with God, ***"Well these can't possibly be present when you're living a path like that?"*** Now not to be negative but just because you are living a path of righteousness doesn't mean you are not going to face tough times, in fact chances are things around you may get harder. ***Why?*** Because you are now a target in the opposite direction of the devil, you have become something that the devil hates, that the devil wants to Kill, Steal, and Destroy.

John 10:10

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

So as you can see Satan is here to do the opposite of what we are meant to have. The strongest place that this takes place is in our own head, what is capable to go on inside is stronger than the things around us because after all that is where we produce everything that is where we get our information, that is where our

thoughts come from, this is also where the things we speak come from another strong tool that can either create goodness or evil depending on how you use it.

We have chosen to believe in Jesus the Christ; we have chosen to live in the righteousness that we can only get when we live through him, when we do this it makes the devil want to come against us even stronger, so why not just give up? Well one that is exactly what the liar wants he wants you to give up he wants to steal your soul, your existence, your eternal life. He wants to destroy your relationship with God and those around you. He wants to kill you even if it is sometimes slowly.

Turn that around look at what is on the other side, look what God has brought to you, the people in your life, the things he has promised you, after all he gave us life, after all he showed us Love and unconditional love, the beauty that surrounds us and the devil wants us to forget all of that, to even hate all of that.

Our way to defend ourselves against the devil has been placed right before us, it is there in

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Word all we have to do is learn how to use it, not just temporarily we need to know how to use it every in our lives. This is the whole idea and truth behind spiritual warfare, and if you think that you don't face this issue your wrong we all do, every single day.

We have things that the devil uses against us to say ***that we are not good enough, that we are unworthy, No one loves me, I am not doing that right thing, I don't belong, it would be easier if I didn't exist.***

Sounds a lot like thoughts of those of someone who is battling depression, lack of interest, lack of love, lack of belief, self-loathing. Now this might just seem like a lot of depressing stuff that is being put together, do we take the time to realize that all of these thoughts are placed upon us by someone who wants us to completely fail, and if we fall into his trap we will begin to.

Let us start using God's Word to fight what the devil brings against us. Through God's Word we can fight against anything that Satan brings against us with God on our side nothing can stand against us. We must take the time to know the things that God wants us to know and that means opening up the Bible, admittedly in the past there has been times where it's needed to be wiped off, it was an eye opener. That means it wasn't being used properly it was being used in the wrong way. It was more of a decoration or a book on a pile that was never opened; this is where we need to reset our minds. Actually, open the Good News and read what has been

placed before us and not just that take the time to actually study it.

Take the time to praise God to thank him for the things in your life, even when you feel that life is not going the way that you feel it should be, change your way of thinking, and start talking about all of the blessings that have been placed before you. These things are certainly things that were brought into your life through a loving God. This is also a great time to pray and talk with God because he is there. He is always there; you can't surprise him, and he knows everything you're going to throw his direction. He just wants you to actually take the time to do and then to actually listen to him. Meaning you need to take some time and set it aside. Use praise music, music is a great source to turn around ones thoughts from a negative outlook to a positive one.

Then remember to do this daily:

¹⁰ Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power.

¹¹ Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil.

¹² For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.

¹³ Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground.

¹⁴ So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with right-

eousness as a breastplate,
¹⁵ and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace.

¹⁶ In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all [the] flaming arrows of the evil one.

¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

The Armor of God is needed in our daily lives to survive against the things that Satan throws in our path; it is part of what God gave us to fight against the things he does. Continue fighting him don't give up, and always rely and God and God's Word, through Christ anything is possible, don't keep things bottled up if you need to speak with someone then do it, it can mean all the difference in the world.

Remember the conversations in your life that bring you out of those negative feelings and hold on to them, they are something that will help you through the feeling of unbearable and unworthiness that you are feeling, talk to those that give you a positive outlook on life and have helped you become closer to God they are important and will impact your life greatly.

Remember that no one is perfect, we all have flaws, we all have thoughts that we need to work on, and we all have things that have been placed in front of us that we look at ourselves in a negative light.

Now turn that around and remember that you are a beautiful person, you are a masterpiece that was created by God, and everything came from Him for you to live a wonderful and blessed life. He loves you and you are His Beloved.

The Breath of Heaven on Valentine's Day!—Mother Rachael Christian,

Valentines' Day; a day of romance and of love; showing love, giving and receiving love and being kind when other days we forget just as quickly how to do just that, love.

Why is it that one day, whether its Thanksgiving, Christmas or now Valentines', we suddenly become aware of an emptiness that only love can replace, restore, fill, and make us whole? Why is it we forget so easily the rest of the year this same desire every life we know and those whom we do not, even yes our own hearts, suffer the same fate, to be loved or lost, on these auspicious days?

What about the homeless child begging for a coat, a morsel of bread or even a sip of water? Do they not need our love more than these days of romance and love lost and gained? What about the woman whose family has left her to languish in a home because, well, love demands we put her away and visit her where we are safe, though she is lonely, depressed and sad, all those other days too. What about the soldier coming in from the war, to a world vastly different than the one he/she left not more than 6 months prior, and the world casts a despairing, not understanding, eye, upon them and turn away, silently afraid to admit, that love, in all its grandeur, beauty, gems and food, leave us empty without joy, when we see what is really lacking in the world, Love.

I am amazed at how when I was a child, counting the number of valentines I received at a school class party, made me 'accepted'. Counting even more the ones I didn't get, made me afraid of losing that same acceptance. Why do we put so much measure on other people and not look at the Love that was given us by God? Jesus suffered and died on the cross, for us, not for one day or three, but for our eternal lives! He gave us the example that love, truly born of the spirit and the heart, does not look at the surface but looks deep within and responds to: the broken, lonely, imprisoned, hungry, thirsty, naked and sad. And love, at the point it is seen, gives back a thousand times over, what has been given to us; in a smile, a touch, a word.

Valentines' Day, like the other days of the year and those other major 'love' holidays, becomes a time when we should reflect on God. What He did for us in sending His Son to be our savior. What He gave us in our Daily Bread of the Word, and what He gives us in our receiving Communion. This is true love, that we lay down our lives for our friends, grandparents, parents, teachers, pastors, each other. We don't worry about who got what diamond, what dinner, what perfume or cologne. Or who was dateless, loveless or frightened that others might know their "shame." What we are concerned with is, giving to each other what Christ gave us: Love.

Love that is patient, kind, forgiving, compassionate, merciful, seeking to do good to one another and not sinning against one another with angry or seductive words, but celebrating each day as valentine's day, with joy in our hearts because truly, God Is Love and there is not one greater than Him who gave everything for us; for me.

In every measure of life, there are times to give and to receive gifts, and gems and sweet smelling fragrances, and even meals to feast a king or queen. But without love in the heart, given freely without cost, what good are even these.

This Valentines' day, let it be about giving to one another; if you have means, share them with those who have not. If you have clothing you do not use; give them to someone who is struggling without. If you have bounty in food and you see a man, woman or child hungry; give them the excess that you may know God's grace and blessing. If you see a cold and lonely soul, give them a blanket, a drink and a meal, but more, give them your time, for even five minutes can change the course of a life, a life which may be, an angel unaware to us.

May God bless us with His Love on this day; May we have it in our hearts every day and so forget the sorrow of no night or day of love, but rejoice in receiving each day His Love which lasts forever and so give that Love to the world through us. Let's become the Breath of heaven, coming into the world by God's divine grace, and give back to God his children hungry and thirsty for more of Him! Amen.