

JOCELYNE'S RESOURCE-OF-THE-MONTH: December 2016

My Commentary on: "THE HOUR THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE: SEEK 2015"

YouTube → <https://youtu.be/Lwwi1krLxTM>

YouTube video: Fr. Mike Schmitz speaks to an audience about the Eucharist. This is not a talk about chastity, although in the beginning it sounds as if it may be. Keep listening. If you're open, this could truly change your life, as the title suggests.

Head Injury, Mended Heart

It is my experience that God uses our most tragic experiences, our moments of great suffering, to draw us closer to Himself. About seven years ago now, in the midst of great personal turmoil, I fell to my knees, my arms in the air, my face a mess of tears and contorted in anguish, and I questioned His will: "Why, Lord? Why?" "I need You. Help me!" I knew in my heart that He was allowing this suffering for a reason, but I didn't understand why and I knew I needed Him. I was begging for His help. This is what our suffering often does. It reminds us of our need, of our weakness.

In this moment, I felt an urging... to go to Mass. I had grown up Catholic, and gone to church every Sunday, first with my mother, and then my father as well once he converted to Catholicism. Lately, however, church had become for my husband and me a once-in-a-while event. I knew that it was God's will that I attend Mass, but I consistently found reasons not to go: I was too busy, I was tired, I had things to do, I wanted to sleep in, the list was endless. I knew God wanted me to go, I just didn't see why it was so important. "Couldn't I just watch Oprah?" I thought. After all, she always has guests on her network that can be pretty inspiring. You see, I thought the purpose of going to Mass was to receive the Word of God and be inspired by the message, but I didn't understand what that truly meant. Hence, watching something inspiring, seemed to me to be a worthy substitute for attending Mass. I was so ignorant.

So I prayed, "Ok Lord. You want me to go to church. Then make me WANT to go. I don't want to go, and I want to WANT to go," a basic prayer, but an honest one. I thought that if God gave me a reason to go to Mass, then it would be easier for me to actually attend on a regular basis. After, I said my prayer, I may have repeated it a few times on other occasions, but I soon forgot about it. I did, however, make an effort to attend Mass more regularly with my husband.

Then about two years later, shortly after returning to work from maternity leave after the birth of our daughter, I was injured. A blow to the head caused a concussion and devastating symptoms, which worsened in the hours and days following it. I struggled with chronic pain and other symptoms that didn't cease, symptoms that suddenly made my life a lot more difficult. I was told to rest my brain, so that it could heal, but those "restful" hobbies I had loved before the injury, had become extremely difficult and caused my symptoms to worsen quickly. I now found it difficult to watch TV, for example. The light from the television, the movement on the screen, and the sounds became too much for my brain to process all at once. It also became extremely challenging for me to read, another of my favourite pastimes. Incidentally, everything became more difficult, as our brains process every single solitary movement, thought, visual image, etc. that our bodies perform. Accordingly, an injured brain works much harder to accomplish basic tasks, and is fatigued much more quickly, than a non-injured brain.

My life had changed in a matter of a split second in time and, in an effort to come to terms with this and find meaning and purpose in my new life, I experienced a sort of crisis of faith. I had been watching a lot of Oprah and I was being drawn in by the New-Age thought. I had been questioning my Catholic faith and had actually begun to read literature on different religions, their founders, and their beliefs. While I had begun to question my faith before the injury, however, afterwards, I had a lot more time to ponder these questions; questions like: "Is Jesus really God, or was He just another prophet, like the Buddah?" "What if reincarnation is true?" and "Would I believe something different had I not been raised Catholic?" among others.

I initially thought, "Maybe I should just figure out what works for me and create my own spirituality." This is a New-Age ideal. While there are certain spiritual and normative beliefs among new-agers, what is most consistent is the idea that one can pick and choose the elements of spirituality that work best in his/her life and create his/her own truth; truth, according to New-Age thought, is whatever any one individual deems it to be. But I had a problem with this.

"What do I know?" I thought. "All can't be truth. That would make no sense. So, how do I know what the Truth is? What is Truth?"

At this point, I once again turned to God in prayer. It was something like: “Lord, show me the truth. I need to know what the truth is beyond a shadow of a doubt. If you want me to follow a set of spiritual or religious beliefs, reveal this to me. I want to do what You want me to do.” I left it to God, because I had no idea where to begin in creating a spirituality that would conform to His wishes and to His Truth.

Meanwhile, I began to ask my burning questions to others and debate them with whoever was willing to do so. My parents, they have told me, were extremely worried about me and prayed fervently together that I would truly find what I was looking for. My father began researching the issues that I was struggling with and sent me Catholic resources that responded to my questions.

My father knew of my struggles with reading, so he sent me a lot of talks on YouTube by Catholic theologians, philosophers, priests, religious and laypeople. Listening to these became my new hobby. I would sit in my office, in a comfy chair, with a blindfold over my eyes (to reduce the stimulation to my brain) and I would just listen. In the beginning, this was very difficult for me. I found it difficult to concentrate and frequently had to rewind and re-listen to the material. I listened to these talks several times in an effort to absorb all of the content. Slowly, my focus began to improve and I had to rewind and re-listen less often than before. Now, my ability to do this varies depending on the severity of my symptoms; on a good day, I can listen an hour and, for the most part, remain attentive and absorb most of it.

Anyway, I ultimately began to seek out these resources on my own and I would share what I found and discuss these with my parents, my father especially. Through God’s grace, the Truth was gradually revealed to me and I eventually knew in my heart that Jesus truly is, “the way, the TRUTH and the life (John 14:6).” I understood that He is Lord and that He established a church, the Catholic Church, to be a channel of His grace.

Eventually, I stumbled upon a recorded CD about the Eucharist. As I listened, the Church teaching on the Eucharist suddenly clicked for me. I had been taught and I knew well the Church teaching that the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, but I was sort of neutral about it. I hadn’t really thought much about it; I had taken it for granted. After listening to this talk, my viewpoint changed drastically. This teaching went from my head, straight to my heart, piercing it with its majesty! From this moment on, I had a very good reason to attend Mass on Sunday and I didn’t want to miss it... ever! I knew now in my heart the purpose of Mass. It is to receive Jesus, “the Word made flesh (John 1:14),” and, being strengthened by the Blessed Sacrament and inspired by His Gospel, to go out and share the good news with others! God had answered my prayer from two years earlier! He is so good!

Understanding some of the other Church teachings remained a very real struggle for me, but I knew that I had to accept them, as Jesus promised, “the gates of hell shall not prevail (Matthew 16:18)” against His Church. As an aside, it really is a miracle that a Church run by imperfect, sinful individuals could have remained true to its teachings from its establishment. This tells me that God has truly been involved in its conservation. Jesus instructed us to “become as little children (Matthew 18:3),” so with the faith of a small child, I decided to trust my Heavenly Father that all the teachings of His Church are true, even though I may not fully understand them. I did, however, ask God for the grace to be able to come to a place of peace about the teachings I found most difficult to comprehend. Slowly I found this prayer answered as well, but this is a story for another time.

Unfortunately the talk that initiated my change of heart about the Eucharist is not a free resource, so we are not able to list it on this website. However, the talk that I have chosen by Father Mike Schmitz is just as inspiring! I believe that if you are struggling with the Church teaching about the Eucharist that, through His grace, God can change your heart as mine was changed. This video can be the conduit for that grace. So open your heart, say a prayer, and listen. Even if you are a practicing Catholic who believes in the Eucharist, this talk can reignite your fervour for, and your love of, the Blessed Sacrament. I would love to hear your reactions, so please contact us if you’d like to share them! Also, don’t forget to check out the other free resources on the Eucharist that we’ve shared on our website.

We celebrate Christmas this month. Alleluia! We celebrate the Christ Child who was born to save us and laid in a manger. Isn’t it interesting that this Child, Who was laid in a feeding trough, would later become our Spiritual Food, the Eucharist? Jesus loves us so much and desires an intimate relationship with us, so He sacrificed His life for us and left us the Blessed Sacrament to sustain us and strengthen us until He comes again. The Eucharist aids us in our spiritual battle, and helps us “persevere unto the end (Matthew 10:22),” so that ultimately we can enjoy full union with Our Lord in paradise. Thanks and praise be to God! Happy Birthday, my Jesus!

Yours in Christ,
Jocelyne