



THE VISITATION

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For when I am weak, then I am strong

by Margaret Motto

Two months ago, my sister had a baby and made me an aunt for the first time. She had a beautiful baby girl named Natalie. I absolutely love her and cherish every minute I get to spend with her. It is incredible to see the pure love and gentleness of an infant. One thing that has been amazing is seeing her relationship with my sister. She is so intimately connected to her Mom and is completely dependent and vulnerable in so many ways. For my sister, it brings her joy to be so connected and meet every need of the baby, even if it's a sacrifice for her. Her life has become more full.

That is how I would describe my life in the last couple of months, very full. Our growing community here at Nativity House has definitely reminded me of how important vulnerability is to our humanity. Walking alongside someone in their daily challenges and struggles allows us to share in their journey in a way that is humbling and brings both people out of the isolation and loneliness we often fall into. It is scary to let ourselves get deep into someone else's mess, because ...well... it gets messy! It is much easier and safer to keep our relationships at a surface level because then we are all protected from opening our hearts and from the potential of getting hurt or having our world shaken. But, it is just beyond that fear that there lies the potential for really life-changing relationships and authentic growth.

It has been such a joy getting to know the guest Mom at the house. She has become a close friend to me very quickly. It is so humbling to share in her joys and sorrows and

share mine with her as well. I truly admire her courage and resilience in keeping her baby, despite the challenges it has brought her. However, it has been hard and frustrating for me at times to see how much she is struggling, despite doing the right thing.

I have been faced with the darkness of poverty and the feeling of loneliness that single moms face. It has made me aware of the need for more support for single moms so that they can keep their babies and feel supported. I understand now why Dorothy Day was so passionate, and even angry at times, about poverty. It is unjust and unnecessary and this becomes so real when someone you love is feeling the challenges and affects of it.

In my personal life, I feel like I am back to a place of dependence on the Lord and am feeling very vulnerable. I had a plan of what I would step into next, but that unexpectedly fell through. I still know I am called to work with at-risk youth, I just don't know how that will become a reality. Like a baby, I have to wait on the Lord to meet my needs and this brings out my own weaknesses in a way that is very humbling. I can't help but think, that like my sister, the Lord delights in loving us in our vulnerability and meeting our needs. When I am stressed or frustrated about what's coming next, like a mother, He says "shhh I am right here, I have what you need."

In addition to Nativity House, I have been taking classes to work towards getting certified as a foster parent through DCFS. These classes

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The Earth and motherhood

by Claire Fyrqvist

Many people have used the phrase "Mother Earth" when talking about this planet we call home. Frankly, I always found this a little hokey, then I became a mother. Creation itself has taken on a new meaning for me because of the life that was given for me to bear in my womb. I was invited to be a co-creator with God, and as such, every single thing that God created feels closer to me somehow. Oddly enough, around the time that I became pregnant with our first child, I started a garden and I became passionately pro-life.

My husband and I now have two sons, a large garden, live down the street from a Catholic Worker community and work for a pro-life organization that works to provide alternatives to abortion, while changing the local culture to welcome each child and support each mother. I am thoroughly convinced

of the deep connection between a return to the land and an understanding of the goodness of creation with a greater valuing of human life and the bearing of life in the womb.

There is no more intimate connection than the life of an unborn child with her mother's heartbeat, her blood, her very self. There is nothing more natural than pregnancy. A woman with a life within her is the whole earth zoomed in, magnified and personalized by her unique and quiet gift to another, distinct yet dependent life of an infinitely valuable human being. Every bite of food and breath goes to growing and nourishing this life, just as the soil, the sun, the rain and the atmosphere around us provide exactly what we need to survive. The earth too, then is

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have been awesome! The goal of the classes is to teach us how to love, tend to and heal the wounds of kids who have been neglected and traumatized. As heavy and intense as the classes are, I feel very at home and comfortable with what we are learning and the people I am with. One of the facilitators was talking about her own foster kids and the pain they have experienced and she said "you have to know that by welcoming these kids into your home, you are inevitably sharing in their pain and it is jarring, I just didn't know a person could hurt so much."

The most vulnerable populations in the world are ones who really are faced with their vulnerability every day, they don't have a choice. Think of those who are in poverty, the elderly, prisoners, those with special needs, the homeless... by no fault of their own they are vulnerable and dependent on others. As Jean Vanier writes, it is in being with them in their vulnerability that we become aware of our own weakness.

I honestly think vulnerability is the key to heal friendships, marriages, families, communities and the world. When we are vulnerable and honest with our feelings and who we really are and are received in our brokenness, we counter the loneliness and fear which compels people to fall into sin and darkness. It is only through authentic relationship, centered on honesty and vulnerability, that we can flourish and find true happiness.



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Earth and Motherhood

a womb which protects us and encourages life year after year, sustaining each living thing in its season and in its time.

Industrialism in the centuries leading up to our current century brought about massive changes to the earth and to motherhood, which have profoundly affected our modern society and how we experience our own existence and the cultivation of human life. With the rise of manufacturing and mass production, families moved away from farms and into the cities, eating food became distanced from growing food and life itself became expensive and extremely specialized in scope. One's life and existence was no longer directly connected with the earth and its rhythms. Having children became something of a luxury or even an inconvenience rather than a blessing and necessity. One had to leave behind the home in the city to find nature, to go out into a park or the woods, rather than being inherently bound up with nature and the seasons in the growing rituals of agriculture. Perhaps it is not too much to say that the earth, the life cycle and motherhood as the basic realities of human life were somewhat drowned out in the din of the industrial machine, the organizing of life into buildings and systems and timecards

and commercialism.

There has been a movement back to the land in recent years that has begun to question these changes. Many are rejecting the factory model of life, returning to essentials, joining Community Supported Agriculture, getting to know their local farmers and trying to be more conscious of where their food comes from. In turn, there has been a revival of home births, midwifery and a natural understanding of pregnancy. Breastfeeding, co sleeping and baby wearing are all signs of this reawakening to the basic realities of life as human beings, of how our bodies are made and where life comes from. The more we embrace the way things happen naturally according to the rhythms of the earth, the more we celebrate the body, the miracle of human existence and the wonders of motherhood.

I would argue that this will return us, the incessantly busy and plugged in millennials, back to ourselves and will give us another shot at existence as it truly is, not as it is marketed on billboards or televisions. When we get away from the land, the earth and its cycles and seasons, we lose ourselves; we forget that we are part of creation, that we are connected far more deeply than through our smartphones and the internet.

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The crisis of "unwanted pregnancies," along with the quick and dirty solution of abortion in our society today, reminds me that we are a long way from truly embracing our human existence, often a messy and burdened one, and the gift of each life. I also see that hope abounds in communities where people in difficult circumstances are celebrated not shunned as in the work of places like Nativity House, which extends hospitality to women in crisis pregnancies and gives them a chance to work and experience God's creation at its most basic and beautiful. Let us not romanticize this mission, but instead see the direct and necessary relationship between growing food and caring for our children in the womb. If we cannot conceive of where it is our own sustenance comes from, how can we possibly understand the deep connection we have with our bodies and the life given to a mother to sustain in her womb?

The earth truly is a mother and we are her children. There is a simplicity in this that must not be forgotten. God has placed us in this beautiful womb for the brief time of our human lifespan to grow, to be, to give, to work and to die, or rather be birthed into the next life. This is existence; this is the wonder of creation. We are not simply part of a machine that pushes forward a massive, insatiable economy of growth—always bigger, more specialized and more profitable.

Stepping out into the garden, I forget all this and remember to breathe and to tend.



Claire lives in a Catholic Worker neighborhood in South Bend with her family. She and her husband John job share at the Right to Life office where they make it their business to love women and children relentlessly.

people want a ~~Jesus~~ who makes things right for the world;
but Jesus wants ~~us~~ to make things right for the world.

It is up to us, with the ~~Strength~~ of the ~~Spirit of~~
~~Jesus,~~

to give food to the hungry
to struggle for justice & peace
to be with those who are lonely, oppressed,
and in pain,

to reveal to them the ~~good news~~ of our friendship
the ~~Good news~~ that they are loved by God.

from DRAWN INTO THE MYSTERY OF JESUS
by Jean Vanier

About The Visitation

This newspaper, *The Visitation*, is a publication on topics of social justice, spirituality and theology. It is published four times a year by the Nativity House. Submissions are accepted from readers everywhere.

To contact us, email us at:

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Past issues are online at:

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

About Nativity House

Nativity House serves as a shelter for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. As of 2014, the program operates an on-site community supported farm (CSA) that provides nourishment for the Nativity House and the greater community. Overall, we envision a healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work and stewardship of the earth.

Nativity House is administered by a board of directors and an advisory committee of individuals with a broad range of experience. Nativity House has formed positive relationships with relevant local organizations that are extremely helpful in carrying out the mission of the house. Nativity House was recognized as a public charity in August, 2011.

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venusad@nativity-house.org

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Lockport, IL 60441

We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

Easy Essay

What the Catholic Worker Believes

by Peter Maurin (1877-1949)



1. The Catholic Worker believes in the gentle personalism of traditional Catholicism.
2. The Catholic Worker believes in the personal obligation of looking after the needs of our brother.
3. The Catholic Worker believes in the daily practice of the Works of Mercy.
4. The Catholic Worker believes in Houses of Hospitality for the immediate relief of those who are in need.
5. The Catholic Worker believes in the establishment of Farming Communes where each one works according to his ability and gets according to his need.
6. The Catholic Worker believes in creating a new society within the shell of the old with the philosophy of the new, which is not a new philosophy but a very old philosophy, a philosophy so old that it looks like new.



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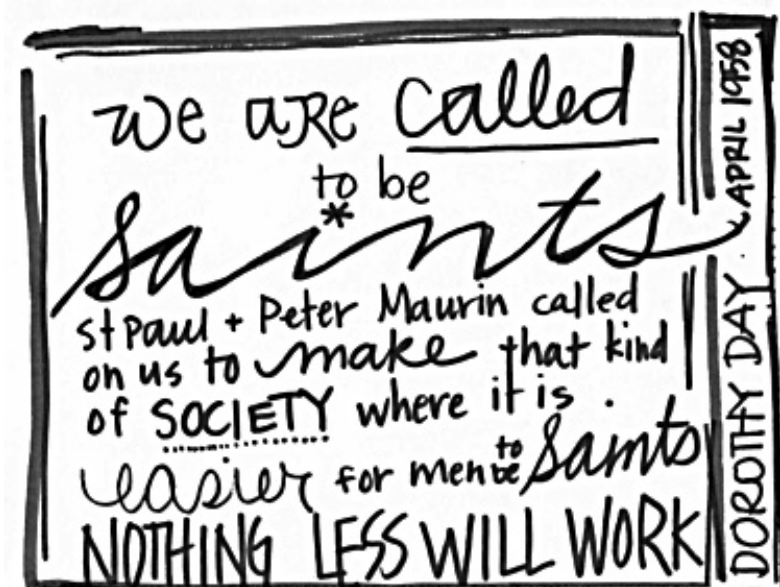
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Blessed Oscar Romero

Martyr and voice for social justice

by Michael-John Myette

On March 24, 1980, Monsignor Oscar Romero Archbishop of San Salvador was murdered while saying mass in a small chapel at the Divine Providence Hospital where he lived. In the context of the early stages of the Salvadoran Civil War, he was not just murdered, but rather assassinated and martyred. A strong voice for social justice, Archbishop Romero's martyrdom embodied much of the turmoil that gripped Central America into a singular image of a priest being gunned down at the altar.

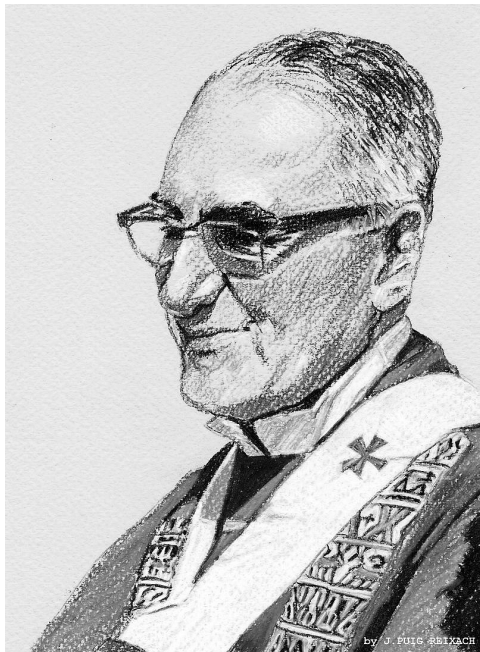


photo courtesy of commons.wikimedia.org

Let no one be offended because we use the divine words read at our mass to shed light on the social, political and economic situation of our people. Not to do so would be unchristian. Christ desires to unite himself with humanity, so that the light he brings from God might become life for nations and individuals.

-Blessed Oscar Romero during his last sermon

A seminarian friend serving in Belize e-mailed a few months ago with an enticing offer - let's meet up in San Salvador on May 23 for the beatification of Archbishop Romero. I hesitated at first because I didn't

have a particularly deep connection to Monsignor, but as I thought about it more I came to realize how he has been an important and ever present part of the development of my moral imagination from college, through two years serving as a volunteer in Honduras and on through today. Plus, a trip to San Salvador with an old friend who was about to be ordained a priest seemed like the perfect antidote for the malaise of the stereotypical suburban lifestyle I had been feeling. One last piece to the decision making process came when I decided to bring my son Michael

along with me and then our traveling party was set - me, the twelve-year old and the Deacon.

Three moments really crystallize my experience at the beatification. The first came on Friday night, the vigil of beatification. We had walked to the chapel where Monsignor was martyred and were excited to find a small crowd filling this intimate space and a group of priests and bishops preparing to say mass. Before Mass, Deacon Beau took the rosary that he carries with him, approached the altar, placed the rosary on the altar where Monsignor was slain and knelt before it in prayer. In this moment of prayer, I recalled the conversations I had with Beau about his vocation and the gift of Monsignor's example as a priest and bishop. It was so wonderful to be with him in the days before his ordination - what I kept calling his priestly bachelor party.

The second moment came one evening as I was sitting with my son Michael and talking about what he was learning during the trip. "Dad, sometimes it's hard to know who the good guys are and who the bad guys are." It was great to be with him in that moment, to practically see the growth of his moral imagination as he heard the stories of Monsignor's life, met former guerillas from the civil war and learned about the injustice that persists today.

The third moment came toward the end of our week as we climbed down

from the Santa Ana Volcano. I had this moment where I could see Michael's future. A moment when I knew my son would do something remarkable. A moment when I knew that whatever remarkable thing he did would terrify me as a parent. Believe it or not, it was a comforting moment, because while I knew that it would be scary I also knew that it would be okay and more importantly that it would be good.

These moments for me were powerful evidence of the witness of Archbishop Romero in my life and the lives of so many others. Returning from the trip I understand more deeply how we need the saints and the powerful impact that their intercession can have on our lives. The life of Oscar Romero is one from which we can gain inspiration, learn lessons of hope and ultimately emulate in our daily lives. And as we strive to do so, we can turn to God in prayer and ask the intercession of his servant and martyr.

Blessed Oscar Romero, pray for us.



Michael-John is a husband, father of three, parishioner of St. Jude parish in New Lenox and works for the Ounce of Prevention - an organization that seeks to ensure that all children have quality early childhood experiences in the first five years of life.



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