

Reflection for the Soul ...

Brian Doyle, poet, essayist, novelist, and longtime friend of Holy Cross, died on May 27, 2017 at the age of 60. A Notre Dame grad, he was the editor of Portland Magazine, a publication of the University of Portland, which was called “the best spirituality magazine in the country” by Annie Dillard. Here is Doyle’s final prayer from A Book of Uncommon Prayer (Ave Maria Press), “Last Prayer”:

Dear Coherent Mercy: thanks. Best life ever. Personally I never thought a cool woman would come close to understanding me, let alone understanding me but liking me anyway, but that happened! And You and I both remember that doctor in Boston saying polite but businesslike that we would not have children but then came three children fast and furious! And no man ever had better friends, and no man ever had a happier childhood and wilder brothers and a sweeter sister, and I was that rare guy who not only loved but liked his parents and loved sitting and drinking tea and listening to them! And You let me write some books that weren't half bad, and I got to have a career that actually no kidding helped some kids wake up to their best selves, and no one ever laughed more at the ocean of hilarious things in this world, or gaped more in astonishment at the wealth of miracles everywhere every moment. I could complain a little right here about the long years of back pain and the occasional awful heartbreak, but Lord, those things were infinitesimal against the slather of gifts You gave mere me, a muddle of a man, so often selfish and small. But no man was ever more grateful for Your profligate generosity, and here at the very end, here in my last lines, I close my eyes and weep with joy that I was alive, and blessed beyond measure, and might well be headed back home to the incomprehensible Love from which I came, mewling, many years ago. But hey, listen, can I ask one last favor? If I am sent back for another life, can I meet my lovely bride again? In whatever form? Could we be hawks, or otters maybe? And can we have the same kids again if possible? And if I get one friend again, can I have my buddy Pete? He was a huge guy in this life—make him the biggest otter ever, and I'll know him right away, okay? Thanks, Boss. Thanks from the bottom of my heart. See You soon. Remember—otters. Otters rule. And so: amen.

Rest in Peace, friend.

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CROSS LINKS

CONGREGATION OF HOLY CROSS, UNITED STATES PROVINCE OF PRIESTS AND BROTHERS
Holy Cross Association Post Office Box 771 Notre Dame, Indiana 46556-0771 Phone: 574.631.6022 association@holycrossusa.org GChamberland@holycrossusa.org

August 2017

Dear friends of Holy Cross,

A lot has happened since our May *Cross Links* went out to you all! We have had a busy summer all around. For five days in June, nearly 300 Holy Cross priests and brothers gathered at Notre Dame for the 2017 Province Assembly. It was a wonderful time filled with prayer and fellowship, keynote addresses, and plenty of smaller presentations, as well. The week also brought a South Bend Cubs baseball game, a casino night, and nightly socials. The week was a chance to rest, reunite with old friends, and recommit to our congregational mission.

On June 16th, the province celebrated the Jubilees of a number of our men. This year, **Br. Ed Luther, C.S.C.**, celebrated 70 years of religious profession while **Fr. Len Banas, C.S.C.**, celebrated 65 years of ordination. Br. Ed just retired from the formation team at Old College and Fr. Len still assists every week at St. Thomas Parish in Elkhart.

Br. Rodney Struble, C.S.C., was home from Bangladesh to celebrate 60 years of religious profession while **Frs. Jim Banas, Foster Burbank, Leroy Clementich, Joe Dorsey, James Madden, Bob Nogosek, and Francis Walsh** all celebrated 60 years of ordination. The fifty-year ordination class class included **Frs. John Blazek, Tony De Conciliis, Fermín Donoso, Tom Elliott, Roberto Gilbo, Ed Krause, Dick Potthast, and Dick Warner**. The youngsters of the jubilarians were ordained 25-years ago. These were **Frs. Bruce Cecil, Peter Jarret, Jim Phalan, Kevin Spicer, and Tony Szakaly**. Mass was celebrated at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart followed by a dinner with family and friends of the jubilarians.

In late May, we received word that Pope Francis has appointed **Fr. Bill Wack, C.S.C.**, as bishop of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee. He will be ordained in Pensacola on August 22nd. Fr. Wack was raised in Christ the King Parish in South Bend and had served as assistant vocation director, and director of André House of hospitality before becoming pastor of St. Ignatius Martyr Parish in Austin, TX. His brother, Fr. Neil Wack will be traveling to Florida with two busloads of family members to celebrate the big day. Pray for Bishop-elect Wack as he prepares for

this new responsibility in the Church.

Since May, two Holy Cross priests have passed on to eternity; both were jubilarians celebrating their 60th year of ordination. **Fr. James Banas, C.S.C.**, (May 25) died a few weeks before the ceremony. A Chicagoan by birth, Jim spent over 50 years teaching at Notre Dame College in Bangladesh and ministering to the poor of Dhaka. **Fr. Francis Walsh, C.S.C.**, was born in Wilkes-Barre, PA and spent his life ministering to the students of Stonehill College where he was a professor of psychology. Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them!

The mission of Holy Cross continues to flourish and we need your help to prepare young men for service to the Church just as we assist our older men in their final years. Your generosity makes it all possible.

Fr. Gary

FORGIVE ME, FATHER, FOR I HAVE SINNED

Almost every year of my life for the past fifty years has been tied to the rhythm of a school year. For most of those years, I was either going to school or teaching in one. Even as associate pastor, the ebb and flow of our lives, with over five hundred students in the school, was more greatly impacted by the school schedule than the liturgical calendar. And all of that is quite all right with me, because it makes sense to me - it is the rhythm of my life.

Each August, when I see the Back-to-School aisle in the CVS or Target, my blood starts pumping. I remember the excitement of buying fresh, unmarked notebooks with untorn covers and sharpening new pencils with intact erasers. Around the first of August, we would order one new pair of pants from the Sears and Roebuck catalog and then wait an eternity for the fulfillment center on Main Street to call and say that they were in. For the rest of our school clothes, we would go “shopping in the attic” where all of the hand-me-downs from my four older brothers were stored. There, Rock and Terry’s old clothes became “new-to-me!”

As we approached Labor Day, excitement mounted as we prepared for our latest “new beginning.” There were new clothes, a new lunchbox, new notebooks, a new pencil box, a new teacher, a new classroom, and best of all - the opportunity to start anew. Gone were last year’s setbacks and disappointments; gone were the doubts and hesitations raised by long division and diagramming sentences. All was washed clean in the lakes and rivers of summer and for even my brother Brian, no true fan of the school part of school, September brought a clean slate and boundless hope for a new year.

The sense of anticipation and the throb of possibility that accompanied the beginning of each new school year are some of the most pleasant memories of my childhood. In my experience, it is only surpassed by the feeling one gets from going to confession and (taking a phrase from our more evangelical friends) being “washed clean in the blood of the Lamb.” Though it sounds cliché, I would leave church on Saturday afternoons feeling physically lighter - as if I were almost floating -

knowing that I could be hit by a truck and I would be fine because my soul was lily white, as if it had been washed cleaned by a white tornado.

It is not as if I actually enjoyed going to confession as a kid. I truly didn’t like it at all. I always marveled at Brian’s easy and breezy approach to confession. He knew he had done “bad things” and he just knelt behind the heavy maroon velvet curtain and spit out the facts. (I know, because Brian never really mastered the confessional whisper. Everyone in the chapel knew what Brian had done.)

For me, confession was never quite so easy. And it is not as if I ever encountered an angry priest or endured a long or mean-spirited harangue. I have always known kind confessors, received helpful comments and uplifting *fervorinos*, and experienced only justice tempered with mercy. It is not that I was fearful in any way or concerned about the wrath of God. Worse than doubt or fear, my hesitation was driven by pride. I never wanted anyone to know my sins, especially the priest or God Himself (as if he didn’t already know). It was a challenge for me to speak them aloud where even I would have to hear them. But each time, I would screw up my courage and give voice to my list of venial sins which were comprised, if I recall correctly, mostly of petty larceny against my family. I had a real penchant for taking a Life Saver or a Certs from the open rolls left on my brothers’ dressers.

And yet, despite trembling hesitation and halting delivery, I was always reminded of God’s love for me and of the complete forgiveness of my sins. Each time I knew God’s merciful forgiveness, left walking as if on clouds, and mused on my readiness for death at the bumper of a truck. Each time I went to confession, I left renewed with the assurances of the Almighty and felt ready to take up Father’s parting charge to “Go and sin no more.” Each time, I left so clean I squeaked and was ready to live a new life in Christ!



Truth be told, I still don’t like to go to confession because I still don’t like to admit my sinfulness or speak of it aloud to anyone, even God (as if

he doesn’t already know). My hesitation is still motivated by pride. Having heard thousands of confessions in my life, I am regularly struck (and sometimes amused) by the faith and confidence exhibited by the blurters, those who come in and just start with “the biggies.” I will never forget the red headed, gap-toothed, third grader who came in with a grin, plopped down in the chair, and simply said, “Forgive me Father, for I-HAVE-SINNED.” And we were off to the races. He was truly honest, truly sorry, and truly forgiven.

I find that I am not alone in my hesitation to confess, but most people get through it and, finally “to it,” whatever “it” might be. For if someone is not a blurter, they are often a sandwicher, placing their “biggie” in the midst of otherwise unremarkable offenses. Partial to this technique myself, I am amused when I encounter it and wonder if the person confessing is hoping to catch me asleep at the switch or is just struggling to get “it” out. In any case, it doesn’t really matter because the sins were articulated and the assurance of forgiveness given.

Early in my priesthood, I met a woman who had participated in a parish program for over a year and was excited about joining the faith of her husband and children. Baptized in another denomination, all she had left to do was go to confession, make her act of faith, and receive Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. As excited as she had been for months, she came into the confessional with tears in her eyes. She sat quietly for a moment and then haltingly explained that she couldn’t become Catholic. While she longed to be a member of the Church, she had come to realize that it was not to happen. Shocked and confused, I asked what had happened and she stated that her life was too long and complex, and her sins too great for her to ever be able to express them out loud. Her pain and her fear were palpable. While I guessed that she hadn’t spent years as a hired assassin, I couldn’t imagine what in her past could have brought us to this point.

At a loss myself, I gently asked her what kind of things she couldn’t admit to God (as if he didn’t already know). She looked at me a little wild eyed

and said, “I could never talk to you about” “And it would be impossible for me to mention” And she began to speak freely about the sins and failings one finds in the long life of a good woman, the hurts she had caused at times, and the regrets she carried in her soul. After a few tears, not a few chuckles, and a little spiritual advice along the way, she paused at the end of her telling of those things she could never confess aloud thus preventing her from ever being Catholic. I was smiling at her when she looked up, and she gasped when she realized what had just happened. “I just did it, didn’t I?” she said in amazement. I nodded slowly and said that she had. I gave her penance and absolution, and she made her first communion that night.



In our tradition, the sacrament of Confession renews us; it cleanses us and gives us grace to move forward in the hopes of sinning no more. Confession is an opportunity to deepen our relationship with our heavenly Father, to articulate our failings, and ask for his healing and strength. It is the conversation of lovers who deepen their love for each other through small, regular acts of honesty and forgiveness. It is our return of love for love.

When Catholics confess sins, we tell God he matters and open our hearts to his grace so that we can become ever more fully the persons he is calling us to be.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we are washed clean in the blood of the lamb - we are truly and completely renewed. Even better than the first day of a new school year, it is a new beginning and the promise and possibility for our lives is boundless. The slate is washed clean and the love and mercy we have received now bubbles through us to be shared with family and friends. Hope now springs eternal once again.

If you haven’t been to confession in a while, or if you just went last week, go - blurt or sandwich - just go. Renew your soul and revivify your spirit. Be like a kid again on the first day of a new school year. Then share that joy to others.