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Radiance

LIGHT SHINING IN THE DARKNESS

THE LUXURY OF
SILENCE

FREE WILL AND
FREE WON'T

THE QUIET POWER
OF PRESENCE

THE LONGING
FOR HOME

***The Saint
who Failed
Spectacularly***

VOL. 5, 2026



Editor's Note

We live fast. We optimise. We polish the surface. But the soul moves differently — through failure, attention, silence, grace.

Peter falls, and becomes the Rock. Maria Carvalho dismantles the myth of the self-made soul. Tom McGrath looks closely and begins to see. Francis Turner uncovers a life hidden in plain sight. Elinor Whitcombe finds freedom in the pause before action. Marie Moore follows stubbornness into sanctity. Fr Kevin O'Donnell turns toward silence. Gabriel Olearnik walks the city, beads in hand. Leo McGrath stays present. Christopher Vale listens to the ache for home. Each, in their way, steps beneath the surface.

Modern life skims.

The soul prefers the deep end.

— *Richard Wise*

RADIANCE

Published quarterly for searching minds and Catholic enquirers

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The Saint Who Failed Spectacularly

HOW PETER'S COLLAPSE BECAME THE ROCK

The Church's first leader was a coward before he was a martyr — and in his tears we discover how weakness becomes the raw material of holiness.

by *Richard Wise*

We all know the taste of failure. It's the dry mouth, the sinking stomach, the heat that rises to your face when you realise you have let someone down — or worse, betrayed who you thought you were. When everything was on the line, you choked. That's not a feeling we celebrate. We curate it away. We bury it under achievement. We rewrite the narrative.

The Gospels do the opposite.

They immortalise Peter's failure — not as a cautionary tale, but as the beginning of his sainthood.

And here's the first shock: this humiliation survives because Peter allowed it to. Though he left no Gospel under his own name, it is widely held that Mark the Evangelist wrote from Peter's preaching and memory. The Gospel of Mark

is pitiless in its portrayal of Peter's confusion, impulsiveness, and collapse. In a world that admired heroes carved in marble, Peter presents himself as cracked stone. He is not cultivating vulnerability as a brand. He is testifying to grace.

He wants us to know exactly who he was.

Mob Psychology and the Collapse of Courage

The scene is seared into Christian memory: Peter swears three times that he does not know Jesus. The night air is thick. A charcoal fire burns in the courtyard. Jesus is inside, under interrogation. Peter is outside, under pressure.

"Hey, weren't you with him?"

Three times he denies it. Then the rooster crows.

It is not a minor slip. It is a public disowning. And it happens after Peter had sworn that he would die before abandoning his Lord.

The French anthropologist René Girard helps us see what swept through that courtyard. Human beings, Girard argues, are intensely imitative. Desire and fear spread contagiously. A crowd can generate a current so powerful that individuality collapses. In Jerusalem during Passover, resentment against Roman occupation simmered. Expectations of a militant Messiah ran high. Jesus did not meet those expectations. Someone had to pay.

The crowd's mood turned electric: GET HIM.

Peter is not standing against abstract evil. He is standing in a social storm. He is afraid — not only of violence, but of expulsion. To be associated with a condemned man is to risk becoming one.

It is not hard to translate this into our world. We live in an age of digital courtyards. Outrage spreads at algorithmic speed. Reputations can be undone in hours. Many of us have felt the subtle calculation: What will it cost me to be publicly associated with this person, this belief, this truth?

Peter's denial is ancient. It is also painfully modern.

Then comes the rooster.

The Evangelist tells us Peter "went out and wept bitterly." In *St John Passion* by Johann Sebastian Bach, the line *und weinete bitterlich* descends in a long, aching wail. The music does not hurry past the tears. It lingers there.

Peter is not merely grieving what he has done. He is grieving who he has discovered himself to be. The brave fisherman. The first to step out onto the water. The one who declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not." That man dissolves in the courtyard. And in the ruins, another man begins to form.

The Second Fire

The story does not end in shame.

After the Resurrection, on the shore of Galilee, there is another fire. The Gospel writer notes the detail: a charcoal fire. The only other time that word appears is in the courtyard of denial.

The same smell. The same crackle of burning wood.

Jesus recreates the scene of Peter's humiliation — not to expose him again, but to heal him.

"Do you love me?"

Three times the question comes. Three times Peter answers. The symmetry is not accidental. The wound is not erased; it is revisited. Grace

does not bypass failure. It returns you to the very place where you fell and waits for you there.

This is the scandal of Catholicism: that God does not build on our strengths, but on our confessed weakness.

Peter's leadership from that moment forward is different. Gone is the bravado. Gone is the self-assured promise that he will never fall. In its place is something sturdier: humility. He knows now what he is capable of. He also knows what grace can do.

Sainthood, in the Catholic imagination, is not flawless performance. It is transformation. Weakness becomes the raw material of holiness.

The Rock and the Cracks

For Catholic-curious readers — drawn to the beauty of the faith but wary of its institutional failures — Peter matters enormously.

The Church has had its courtyards. Its denials. Its cowardices. The temptation is to imagine that Christianity rests on moral perfection, and that when leaders fail, the whole structure collapses.

But the foundation stone of the Church was a man who publicly disowned Christ.

This is not hidden. It is proclaimed. The Church canonises the story of its first leader's collapse. The Rock was not stainless steel. He was fractured stone.

That may be why the Church can survive scandal: its origin story is not triumph but forgiveness.

Peter's authority does not come from having never failed. It comes from having been forgiven.

The Final Witness

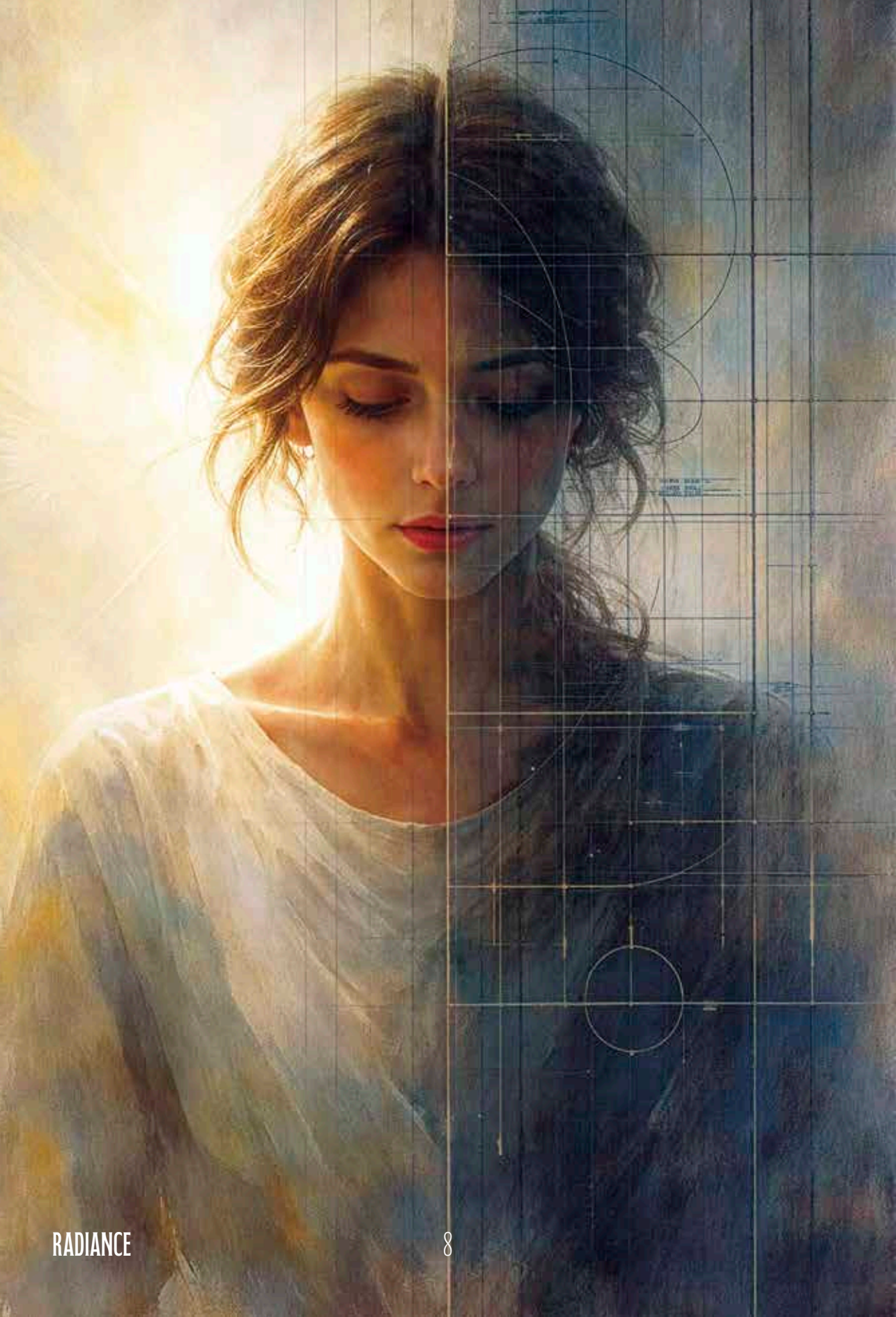
Years later, another mob gathers — this time in Rome, under the Emperor Nero. Christians are convenient scapegoats for the great fire that has ravaged the city. Fear once again fills the air.

Tradition tells us that Peter is sentenced to crucifixion. But he makes one request: that he be crucified upside down, because he does not consider himself worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

The man who once swore, "I do not know him," now refuses to die in the same posture as him.

The failure has not disappeared. It has been transfigured. The coward has become courageous — not through willpower, but through grace that has passed through tears. ◆





YOUR SOUL IS NOT A SELF-IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

How Catholic spirituality offers freedom from the exhausting chase to optimise yourself.

by *Maria Carvalho*

On a dusky evening in 2014, my flatmate Erik asked me to take a walk along the Thames to talk through how he should spend the final years of his twenties preparing for thirty.

That year we had bonded as devoted TED Talk junkies, mining the distilled wisdom of strangers to figure out who we were, how to live with purpose, how to find love, and how to navigate uncertainty with a certain intellectual panache.

I do not remember whether our conversation actually helped him. But I still remember something he said — something that quietly unsettled me:

“You know, I keep reading these books and watching these talks, but in the end, I spend more time learning about it than implementing the advice. And yet I’m still obsessed with optimising my time and life so I can be happy.”

That observation landed harder than he realised. It exposed something in me too. I was more committed to being inspired than transformed. Worse, the very pursuit of optimisation — sleep metrics, productivity systems, emotional intelligence upgrades — was making me more anxious, not less. I was chasing peace — but becoming increasingly neurotic in the process.

Over the years that followed, almost subliminally, I shifted. Instead of consuming the next framework or biohack, I began paying attention to the integrated wisdom that had quietly accompanied me since childhood: my Catholic faith.

Looking back, I now see three fundamental differences between self-help culture and Catholic spirituality. And praying with this wisdom has given me the interior freedom I had been striving to manufacture.



The Pursuit of Happiness versus the Acceptance of Suffering

Most self-help books I read shared a single implicit goal: engineer happiness by minimising suffering. Learn from others' mistakes so you can avoid heartbreak. Optimise your habits so you can maximise fulfilment. Design your life so you can bypass regret. Wisdom, it seemed, meant insulation from disappointment.

But the more I tracked whether these strategies were “working,” the more fragile I became. Every setback felt diagnostic. A failed date, a failed interview, an unexpected conflict, loneliness — each one registered as evidence that I was misaligned with my “best life.” I treated adversity like faulty data.

If I was suffering, something must be wrong. If I was struggling, I must be behind. And so I recalibrated. Another book. Another podcast. Another system. Happiness became increasingly elusive.

The shift began when I encountered a simple but jarring insight: the Bible is essentially a library of stories about people enduring trials. Abraham waits decades for a promise. Joseph is betrayed by his brothers. Moses wanders in the desert. David falls spectacularly. Israel goes into exile.

And at the centre of the Christian story stands a crucifix.

Even Jesus, with all the divine powers of being the Son of God, does not bypass suffering. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he prays in anguish, “Yet not what I will, but what you will,” (Mark 14:36). He does not optimise his way out of the Cross.

Somehow, I had missed the power of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Growth does not happen by avoiding death, but by passing through it. “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12: 23-24)

What a relief it was to realise that struggling did not mean I was defective. “Breezing through life” was the illusion — not my setbacks.

When I stopped treating suffering as a fundamental glitch in the system, I could finally ask a different question: not “How do I eliminate this?” but “Who do I turn to within this?”

Self-Help versus God's Help

Accepting suffering as inevitable forced another shift: I needed guidance on how to endure it.

A course on the Great Adventure Bible helped me see the overarching narrative of Scripture. The pattern is painfully familiar: God invites trust. Human beings grasp control. Things unravel.

In Genesis, Adam and Eve are tempted by the serpent's insinuation that God is withholding something. If they seize the fruit, they will “be like God.” They grasp autonomy rather than receive gift.

The result? Shame. Hiding. Estrangement. It's a metaphor as much as a history: whenever we grasp at control from fear, we fracture communion with God and others.

The rest of the biblical story repeats the pattern. Abraham falters. Israel panics. Kings self-sabotage. God's chosen people

*Every setback
felt diagnostic.*

*You are
unfinished, yes
— but safely
unfinished.*

repeatedly take matters into their own hands rather than entrust themselves to God.

If this feels distant, consider what happens when we act out of panic. Rarely are we facing literal predators, yet our nervous systems ignite. We grasp, defend, retaliate. And more often than not, we exacerbate rather than solve, or escape, the problem.

Self-help culture subtly reinforces this reflex. It tells us that with enough information, discipline, grit, or visioning, we can architect the life we desire. We become both the architect and saviour of our own story.

But Catholic spirituality introduces a humbling reversal: you are not your own redeemer.

Prayer becomes the interruption of panic. It is not escapism, nor passive resignation. It is an act of radical trust: “I do not see the whole picture. I will trust my Creator Father as the One who does.”

This is precisely what Christ models. In Gethsemane, he does not deny the horror before him. He names it. And then he entrusts himself to the Father.

The Resurrection reveals that this trust was not naïve. It was victorious. Death does not have the final word.

Through Christ, reconciliation with the Father is not a self-improvement achievement unlocked after sufficient effort. It is a gift offered.

And that gift is sustained by grace.

Self-Optimisation versus Amazing Grace

For years, I treated my soul like a start-up in perpetual beta. If I improved my habits, refined my character, sharpened my intellect, expanded my emotional range — I would eventually arrive at peace. The next upgrade was always within reach. The next flaw always solvable. Grace dismantles that paradigm.

In Catholic theology, grace is not motivational energy or divine applause. It is participation in the life of God. It is unearned, undeserved, and transformative.

Grace means that before I optimise, before I achieve, before I prove anything — I am loved.

Not because I have mastered myself. Not because I have aligned every habit. Not because I have eliminated weakness. But because God is love, and I am his beloved child.

This does not abolish growth. It reorders it. Effort becomes response, not self-creation. Discipline becomes cooperation, not self-salvation.

In optimisation culture, you are perpetually unfinished in a threatening way. There is always another insecurity to address, another metric to improve, another habit stack to refine. You are constantly measuring yourself against the idealised version of who you could be.

Grace tells a different story. You are unfinished, yes — but safely unfinished. Your incompleteness is not a crisis. It is the space where God works.

Instead of asking, “How do I perfect myself?” you begin asking,

*Your soul was
never meant
to be scaled,
branded, or
maximised.*



“How do I receive what is already being given?”

And that shift changes everything.

You no longer need to monitor every setback as evidence of failure. You no longer interpret suffering as proof of misalignment. You no longer treat yourself as a project whose value depends on constant improvement.

You can repent without self-hatred. You can strive without anxiety. You can rest without guilt.

The saints are not spiritual biohackers. They are witnesses to dependence. Their courage

came not from relentless self-optimisation, but from surrender to grace.

Grace offers what self-help cannot: freedom from the exhausting belief that you must engineer your own worth.

Your soul was never meant to be scaled, branded, or maximised.

It was meant to be received as a gift from God — and returned in love.

In that receiving, there is, as Saint Paul aptly put it, “the peace that surpasses all understanding.” ♦



Seeing as a Spiritual Act

WHAT IF THE ARTIST IS THE ART?

When attention deepens, the world begins to look less accidental.

by *Tom W. McGrath*

She returns to the river alone this time. The old, dilapidated rowing boat is still there, half-rotted at the edge of the reeds – the same boat on which she'd once enjoyed outings with her father. Last week marked his tenth anniversary.

She sets up her easel, assessing the scene. The tree blossom puts her in mind of the blossom she watched from a hospital window, after her recent, successful operation. To her, it represents her renewed vigour. She must capture it.

She settles down, with pencil in hand, and begins to mark out the shapes, carefully checking her proportions, form, and perspective. With quick hatching she indicates the values (light, mid-tone, and dark). She returns her eyes to the scene, increasing the darkness of the shadows for drama, and adding highlights to the water.

As she paints, she disappears into her work.

She knows nothing of the latest football scores, the latest observations of influencers, or the content of tweets from heads of state. She is out of time and place. Asleep, but awake. She is living in the moment. She is paying attention.

When Attention Becomes Revelation

Looking closely, something startling emerges. The painter herself is a living work of art. The canvas on which she works becomes another. And the natural scene itself, the river, the tree's blossom – this too is intention made visible, a third work of art.

But why call the painter, or the natural world, works of art? We only call something art if someone meant it. Such descriptions, then, only make sense for one who believes in a creator, who might intend such things to take the form that they have.

At any moment, we are each of us a work of God's creative act. The painter forming her intention and creating her scene is analogous to God forming His intention and creating each of us. Ephesians tells us that 'we are God's workmanship'. But how often, if at all, does one think about this, or consider it in everyday dealings?

Paintings and sculptures, even those at the summit of human achievement (the Pietà, the Birth of Venus, the Fighting Temeraire), are priceless, kept securely behind glass or barriers, in marble temples, preserved for the people. These are the workmanship of human hands only. Yet every human is the workmanship of God. Such is the wondrous, radical, and fundamentally egalitarian message that Christianity has for the world. The person on the battlefield, in the office, sweeping the streets, and playing their music too loudly on the Tube is the literal handiwork of God – more precious than any paint, than any stone.

That the natural world is God's work of art, meanwhile, might be seen in the Book of Genesis, but also from our own eyes. The natural world is suffused with beauty, a beauty so effortless and pervasive we take it for granted. A painter toils for hours on end to merely mimic the beauty of a single flower, pinecone, or apple.

Every person is a deliberate act of creation — because the Artist is always at work.

In paying attention to the beauty of the scene by the river (the delicacy of the irises bobbing in the breeze; the ripples in the water; the cascade of shadows from the branches), the artist pays attention to God's own beauty, in which these features take their being. She loses herself in His creation. And, by paying attention to this relation, her soul takes a crucial first step towards loving God – for what is love without attention?

More Precious than Marble

More broadly, perhaps Catholics need to spiritually live in the moment more. I know that, when studying Philosophy and Theology at University, I was taken up with thoughts about this or that doctrine, or with debating the truth of Christianity. But it now seems to me that,

although important topics to discuss, these can be distractions from living in the moment, as a Catholic. This means enjoying the truths revealed – a wondrous and radical understanding of the world and of other people – now graciously granted to us.

The person on the battlefield, in the office, or playing music too loudly on the Tube is more precious than any paint, than any stone.

And, more than this, the question is whether we consciously see what 'the moment' really means. The stranger on the train, the colleague who's difficult to work with, the person who asks us to take time out of our day to help them – none of them are interruptions to our real life. They are not background characters, or noise. They are God's works, His brushstrokes being applied to the canvas. As are we all.

As the painter's attention does not falter, returning her eyes again and again to the light on the water, nor does God's. At every second he sustains us, as we think, write, mourn, struggle, age, and dream. We are the medium of His creation. To recognise this is to see the world with the reverence proper to it.

To 'live in the moment', then, is to become aware that every moment is already charged with meaning, every person a deliberate act of creation – because the Artist is always at work.

The only question left is whether we learn to see the world accordingly. ♦







As told to Matthew Brannigan. Names have been changed.

The Mystery of My Neighbour, Kacper

by Francis Turner

I remember it clearly. I'd just come back from my men's morning club and was in the middle of making lunch one Tuesday when I heard a knock at the door. I wasn't used to getting visitors, especially not on a Tuesday.

I went to the door and opened it to a man from the council with a large beard and glasses, who introduced himself to me as Angelos. He showed me his badge as if he had anticipated the immediate skepticism that comes from the years of living in this block. He'd been trying to get hold of my neighbour Kacper for some time now — several weeks he said. There was no answer when he phoned or knocked. He wondered if I'd seen him. I hadn't seen him much over the last year or so to be honest - he'd kept to himself at the best of times - but thinking it over I hadn't seen him for about a month. Sometimes he'd go travelling, so I hadn't thought much of it.

He'd given me a spare key many years ago in case he ever locked himself out, but in the twenty or something years we'd lived next to each other he never did. I dug around for a while, and eventually found it, so the two of us went round and opened his door. The flat was terribly cold — it was the week in November last year when the weather was freezing. We called out to him but heard nothing back.

We found him dead in his bedroom. I thought I'd find it more shocking to find someone dead, but I remember that I felt surprisingly calm.

His face was peaceful, a faint glossy sheen, like in the old waxworks. I expected the body to have smelt something terrible, but it didn't. I'm not convinced the coroners got it right when they said that he'd died at least a few days before we found him, but they're the experts, not me. They said he'd died from heart failure after a battle with the flu. Myocarditis.

It was a tidy room: pale blue walls, light coming in through the net curtains, a single bed, a small bookshelf, and a silver crucifix hanging on his wall. I checked his pulse and his breath for any sound, but all I could hear in the silence was the gentle, persistent ticking of his wristwatch and the muffled sounds of traffic from the main road outside. I remember that from somewhere else in the flat the news was sounding from a television.

Angelos called an ambulance and took my details. He asked if Kacper had any next of kin — I had never been aware of any family, at least none that he'd mentioned in all the years we'd lived together in the block.

The following day, Angelos phoned me. Kacper had a daughter registered as his next of kin on his file. She had told Angelos that she didn't want to go through her father's flat, so Angelos had wanted to ask if I'd be happy to sort it all before the council cleaned the place out. I agreed — I'd retired a few years earlier, so I had enough free time to do it. He was a good neighbour to me, after all.

A couple of days later, she phoned me, his daughter — Natasha was her name. She told me that she hadn't seen her father for years. She said that Kacper had walked out on her and her mum when she was three, about twenty years ago. Just around the time he moved here, I guess. She had hardly spoken to him since. Never forgiven him, it seems. Her mum died seven years ago and that was the last time they spoke. She wanted nothing to do with the flat, but thanked me for the help, and gave me the details in case I came across anything that the team at the council might need. Apparently, he'd had another family before, back in Poland, but she had no contact with them or any contact details.

With a sorting system — black bags for the dump, green bags for the charity shop — I began: clothes, shoes, blankets, crockery and Tupperware, countless

browned paperback books (military history, Soviet history, political history, Catholic history, British history, crime fiction, classic fiction, political biographies including seven books on Margaret Thatcher), bottles of spirits, framed posters and prints, old electronics, tinned food, old videos, stationery, notebooks, lottery tickets, little statues of Mary, big statues of Mary. He clearly loved his faith. He loved John Paul II, who was to be found everywhere throughout the place: fridge magnets, books, posters, even jigsaw puzzles. On his mantelpiece Kacper had a framed photo of him and the Pope together. He looked young then — they both did.

Under his bed were two big, charcoal-coloured archive boxes. The first box was filled with old letters and paperwork. It turns out that he had been struggling with debt for many years. His debit card statements showed that he would go through periods of significant gambling and significant loss. There was no evidence of any savings of worth.

In the second box were photo albums, letters and mementoes. There were school reports: he hadn't been the best performing kid at school, to put it politely; his teachers seemed to have felt that he had a lot of potential but wasted it misbehaving and truanting. There were various photo albums. First, photos of him as a boy, dressed for his first holy communion and then older, dressed as an altar server. Further on in that album, a photo showed him around fifteen or sixteen, receiving medals at sporting events. He was a good-looking guy, athletic and lean. In another book I found photos of what must have been his first marriage. She was beautiful, his first wife. It looked like they had a small wedding back in Poland, and three young children shortly after. The photos of his wife and his children only went up until the kids were about eight or ten. I also found pamphlets, speeches and some photos of him and his friends at popular rallies and protests from back in the 80s. I looked it up later that night — Solidarity was an independent trade union that played a significant role in the fall of Communist rule in Poland.

In an elastic band were some photos in a different format. The first was of another woman, with darker skin, and a young baby. There were various more photos of the same infant girl. This must have been Natasha. Beneath this came another set of photos. Photos of Kacper and another woman, tall, slightly younger, in Thailand, or Bali. The clothes dated the photo to the early years of

the millennium. There were more, some in the countryside, many taken around London — from the haircuts I could see the dates of these spanned several years; they were clearly more than just friends. Her name, as I found from letters in the same box, was Lena. She clearly loved Kacper.

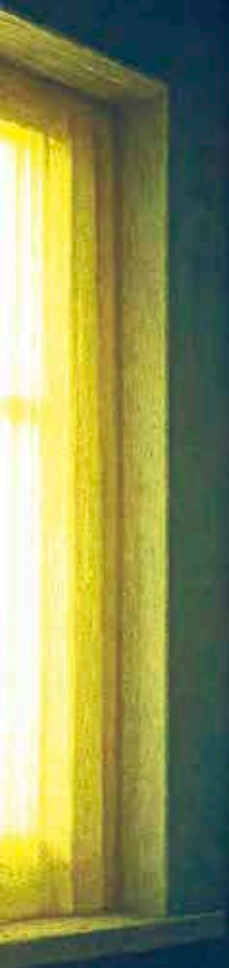
There were other letters, still in their envelopes adorned with many stamps, from a young boy from Sierra Leone that he had been sponsoring since 2007. He had last written to Kacper in 2022, thanking him for everything and sharing his plans for his trip to England to visit Kacper later that year.

There were also things I found around his flat that made me laugh. In his crowded bookshelf I found a DVD titled “Mysteries of the Bible”, but when I opened it up to check its condition for the charity shop, I found a pornographic DVD hidden inside. I found hundreds of pristine Warner Brothers figurines hoarded inside his enormous mahogany TV cabinet. He owned not one, but two Carol Vorderman diet books.

His funeral was a quiet affair. A handful of guests: his daughter, myself, another neighbour and a few parishioners. His priest from the church said he would come to Mass every Sunday without fail but would always sit at the back; he’d never come forward for communion. There was no wake. His daughter didn’t stick around after the cremation.

It’s a strange experience, going through the home of someone exactly as they left it on the day they died. You can’t plan for these things; you can’t tidy up. It’s so intimately personal — the small insights you get into who they really were, but even more the questions you’ll now never get an answer to.

A few days after his funeral, I stood in his flat, surrounded by all the bags. A lifetime’s worth of memories and accumulated possessions. Not only the belongings, but those photos, those letters, nearly all of them destined for the waste bin. The last thing left was the big silver cross hanging opposite his bed. I was struck by the face of Jesus. His gaze was looking down towards the place where Kacper had slept, with an expression of agony and acceptance of his own broken body. I couldn’t bring myself to give it away, so I kept it. I’m not really practising myself anymore, but I got to thinking that it was the last thing he’d have probably seen before he left this world, and so I figured that this Jesus on the cross was the last person to have seen him too. ♦





FREE WILL & FREE WON'T

The half-second that reveals the soul.

by *Elinor Marie Whitcombe*

You are about to send the text. You have already written it. It is sharp. Precise. Just cruel enough to wound. Your finger hovers over “send.”

And then — something interrupts.

A tightening in the chest. A flicker of conscience. A pause.

You don't send it.

What just happened?

If we are nothing more than neurons firing in wet machinery, there should be no interruption. The anger arose. The words formed. The motor impulse prepared to act. Cause should follow effect. But it didn't.

Between the urge and the action, something intervened. That space — that almost invisible hesitation — may be the most important evidence we have that the human person is more than biology.

The Experiment That Tried to Kill Free Will

In the 1980s, neuroscientist Benjamin Libet conducted a series of experiments that were supposed to settle the question of free will once and for all.

Participants were asked to flex their wrists whenever they felt like it while their brain activity was monitored. Libet discovered something unsettling: a measurable “readiness potential” appeared in the brain milliseconds before subjects reported the conscious decision to move.

The brain, it seemed, was preparing the action before the person knew they had chosen it.

Many philosophers and scientists seized on this finding as proof that free will is an illusion — that our sense of agency is simply a story told after the fact by neurons that have already acted.

But Libet himself was not so sure. He noticed something else. While the brain might initiate



impulses unconsciously, subjects retained the ability to veto the action in the final fraction of a second. They could stop the movement even after the readiness potential had begun.

Libet called this capacity “free won’t.” We may not initiate every urge. But we can refuse it.

The Mystery of the Veto

The urge to speak in anger rises quickly. The craving for sugar appears unbidden. The impulse to click, to scroll, to indulge, to defend, to retaliate — all of it begins beneath conscious awareness.

In evolutionary terms, this makes sense. Instinct is fast. It kept our ancestors alive. But something in us is not fast. Something in us waits. Between impulse and execution lies a narrow corridor — perhaps two hundred milliseconds — in which we can withhold consent.

This withholding is not itself another instinct. It does not feel like hunger or fear or lust. It feels like judgment. Like discernment. Like the quiet assertion: *No*.

Neuroscience can measure the electrical build-up before a movement. It can map reward pathways and fear circuits. It can even correlate decisions with patterns of activation.

But no scan has ever located a “free will center.” No neuron lights up and says, “Here. This is the soul.” And yet the veto remains.

You Are Not Your Urges

For centuries, Christian thought has insisted on something unfashionable: that we are not identical with our impulses.

The apostle Paul, in the Letter to the Romans, writes with almost clinical honesty: “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.” The human person is experienced as divided.

Likewise, St. Augustine of Hippo described his will as fractured — desiring purity while clinging to appetite, praying for change while postponing it: “Lord, make me chaste — but not yet.”

Christianity never denied the power of instinct. It never pretended that desire is weak. Instead, it proposed something more radical: desire is not destiny. Temptation assumes distance. It assumes that the urge and the self are not identical.

When an impulse arises, it is presented to us — not imposed upon us. And that presentation implies a chooser.

The Cultural Lie of Inevitable Desire

Our cultural script tells a different story. “Follow your desire.” “Be true to yourself.” “You are your feelings.”

But if we are nothing more than chemistry, then resistance is meaningless. Morality collapses into conditioning. Responsibility becomes a convenient fiction.

Yet our lived experience contradicts this reduction.

We know what it is to want something and to deny it. We know what it is to feel rage and to remain silent. We know what it is to feel lust and to turn away. We know what it is to want revenge and to forgive instead.

These moments do not feel like repression. They feel like strength. They feel like alignment. They feel, strangely, like freedom.

If there were no soul — no interior authority capable of standing apart from instinct — then the veto would be unintelligible. We would simply execute whatever the strongest impulse demanded. But we do not. Something in us answers to a higher order than appetite.

The Soul in the Pause

Christian language names this interior authority the soul. Not a ghost floating inside the skull. Not a poetic metaphor.

But the organizing principle of the person — the seat of conscience, the capacity for truth, the faculty that can say no to what is merely animal in us in order to say yes to what is eternal.

Grace does not erase instinct. It reorders it.

When we refuse an impulse that betrays our deeper good, we are not shrinking. We are becoming integrated. Instinct bends toward love. Appetite bows to meaning. Biology is lifted into freedom.

In that half-second of refusal, something astonishing happens: matter does not have the final word.

The ancient Christian practice of resisting temptation — fasting, restraint, confession, self-denial — suddenly looks less like repression and more like training in freedom.

Each veto strengthens the capacity to choose the good. Each refusal widens the space of the soul.

The Most Human Thing About You

Return to the text message. The finger hovering. The pulse quickening. The brain preparing to fire. And then the pause. It is small. Invisible. Unmeasurable in any MRI. But it may be the most human thing about you.

In that narrow corridor between urge and action, you discover that you are not merely matter in motion. You are not just the sum of evolutionary reflexes. You are not a machine narrating its own inevitability.

You are a being capable of refusal. And because you can say no, you can also say yes — yes to love, yes to mercy, yes to truth, yes to God.

Free will may not roar. It may whisper. It may appear not as dramatic choice but as quiet restraint — as free won't. And in that whisper, the soul reveals itself. ♦

*If we were
nothing more
than chemistry,
resistance
would be
meaningless.*

*Because you
can say no,
you can say yes
to something
greater.*



Conscience Under Pressure

HOLY DISOBEDIENCE

When obedience to God collides with obedience to power, stubbornness can become a form of sanctity.

by *Marie Moore*

The soldiers are making themselves felt. Boots scraping stone. Caps still on. Lingered just inside the church doors — not technically interfering, not quite breaking their promise, but making their presence unmistakable.

In a village in newly occupied Poland, a priest is doing his best to continue parish life as normal. The Soviets have already carted away the seminary library to be pulped, torn down the Sacred Heart statue, and evicted the priests from their residence. They had said they would not interfere with Mass. And yet here they are — loitering, watching, daring him to react.

He cannot order them out. He cannot stop the liturgy. So he loses his temper in the only way he can. He begins to preach.

Improvising on the Psalm — *“The fool hath said in his heart there is no God.”* — he directs every

word toward the vestibule. The soldiers remain, visibly embarrassed yet too proud to leave. The congregation watches. The humiliation is mutual.

For a few days, the tactic works. The soldiers stay away. But the priest knows there will be a price to pay. He is right. Within days the church is ransacked. The attic has been used as a latrine. With another church nearby still functioning, the time has come to close this one.

And yet, reading the account, one does not get the impression that he regrets what he did.

Born Stubborn

It takes an exceptional amount of bravery — and perhaps stubbornness — to defy any invading army. Even more so when that army is known for tormenting religious authorities.

Fr. Walter Cizek had both traits in abundance. Born in the early twentieth century to Polish

Prayer of Surrender by Fr. Walter Ciszek

Lord, Jesus Christ, I ask the grace
to accept the sadness in my heart,
as your will for me, in this moment.

I offer it up, in union with your
sufferings, for those who are
in deepest need of your
redeeming grace.

I surrender myself to your Father's
will and I ask you to help me to
move on to the next task that
you have set for me.

Spirit of Christ, help me to enter
into a deeper union with you. Lead
me away from dwelling on the hurt
I feel: to thoughts of charity for
those who need my love, to
thoughts of compassion for those
who need my care, and to thoughts
of giving to those who need my help.

As I give myself to you, help me to
provide for the salvation of those
who come to me in need.

May I find my healing in this giving.
May I always accept God's will.
May I find my true self by living for
others in a spirit of sacrifice and
suffering. May I die more fully to
myself and live more fully in you.

As I seek to surrender to the
Father's will, may I come to trust
that he will do everything for me.

Amen.

immigrants in the United States, Ciszek describes himself in his memoir *With God in Russia* as “born stubborn.” As a boy he was a bully and a street fighter who enjoyed starting conflict. In desperation, his father once took him to the police hoping they would send him to reform school.

This was not the obvious origin story of a future saint.

And yet his mother was a devout woman who prayed faithfully for her children. It was she whom he credited for his sudden decision, in his early teens, to become a priest.

What did not change was his guiding principle: he ought to do things that were hard, if only to prove that he could. He rose at 4:30 to run five miles. He lived on bread and water for forty days. He chose farm labour over summer leisure.

Obedience was hard, too. That was perversely part of what drew him to the Jesuits, whose members promise “perfect obedience.” Ciszek's novitiate did not begin smoothly. But in 1929, when Pope Pius XI's letter describing the Soviet persecution of clergy was read aloud, Ciszek recognised his vocation instantly. All the Catholic bishops in Russia had been arrested. Seminaries had been closed. The faithful needed priests.

He volunteered.

His training — including years at the Russicum in Rome — took seven more years. His conviction did not fade. When war broke out, he entered Russia by way of Poland, working first as a logger while secretly ministering to Catholics.

Within a year, he was arrested.

He would spend the next fourteen years in prison and gulags.

Perfect Obedience

The cold was relentless. The labour was brutal. Interrogations were designed to break both body and will. Ciszek endured exhaustion, deprivation, and torture.

And yet something unexpected happened.

The iron will that had once defined him — the stubborn resolve to do hard things because they were hard — began to give way. In his memoir he admits that he had believed this strength would carry him through. It did not. What sustained him was not defiance but surrender — a daily act of placing himself in God's hands when he could no longer control anything else.



Even in prison he performed the duties priests have performed for centuries: saying Mass secretly, hearing confessions in whispers, praying under constant threat.

After his release in 1955, he established a Catholic parish in Norilsk. The KGB moved him to Krasnoyarsk; he did the same there. Eventually he was exchanged in a prisoner swap and returned to the United States, where he spent the rest of his life as a lecturer and spiritual counsellor.

Ciszek's stubbornness had not disappeared. It had been purified. It had become obedience.

Most of us are not born with Fr. Ciszek's pugnacious streak. We would also prefer to avoid the circumstances he faced. Yet we are all called to follow the Lord, and sometimes that call will place us at odds with the expectations of the age.

The world will demand compliance. Institutions may demand silence. Ego will demand self-assertion.

The difficult task is discerning which voice is truly God's.

Holy disobedience is not rebellion for its own sake. It is obedience to a higher authority — sometimes expressed in quiet endurance, sometimes in public defiance, always in fidelity.

The priest in the Polish village did not regret his sermon. Not because he enjoyed humiliating soldiers, but because, in that moment, he believed silence would have been a deeper betrayal.

The question is not whether we will ever be called to defy something.

The question is this: When obedience to power collides with obedience to God — which will we choose? ♦



DIGITAL OVERLOAD AS SPIRITUAL POVERTY

~~~~~  
*In an age engineered for noise, silence becomes not an escape but the rare interior homeland where God can still be heard.*  
~~~~~

by *Fr Kevin O'Donnell*

Rush hour again: the escalators humming their metallic hymn, the neon signs flickering their flirtations. Bodies rising and descending, earbuds glowing, screens pulsing like artificial fireflies.

We move through it half-awake — clicking, replying, refreshing — as though our attention were a currency we are obliged to spend until we are spiritually bankrupt.

In a world engineered for stimulation, our spiritual receptors grow exhausted.

We fill the day with movement: the gym, the inbox, the scroll, the endless carousel of shows

that never truly satisfy. Even our leisure is choreographed by algorithms. Noise has become the atmosphere we breathe.

And yet, beneath the urgency, a faint question stirs: When do we rest? When do our eyes close to the glow? When do we listen — really listen — to the life within us?

The Vanishing Interior

Modern life offers no natural silence. To be still, to listen, to do nothing — these feel almost illicit, like luxuries reserved for someone else. And yet they are the very conditions for interior life.

Step outside. Walk in the woods. Notice the way sunlight drips through leaves. Sit on an old tree stump. Let your breathing soften. These simple, wasted moments are not self-indulgent; they are invitations back to the self we keep misplacing.

The world tells us to scroll; our hearts long to stroll. The world demands movement; God waits in stillness.

The Church's Ancient Technologies of Stillness

The Catholic faith, often imagined as crowded and ceremonial, is in fact built upon profound interior quiet. Beneath the hymns and incense, at the heart of Mass itself, lies a presence that does not shout.

*Silence is not the absence
of sound — it is the
presence of the soul.*

Bread and wine become the Body and Blood — an encounter not with nostalgia but with *now*. Grace moves silently, like water seeping through stone. Over time, gestures once confusing become harbours of deep delight.

But the tradition also offers practices made for the desert places of the heart — gentle routines that create interior spaciousness.

The Rosary: A Slow Unfolding

The Rosary is not a race of words but a rhythm of presence. Let the beads slip slowly through your fingers. Let the scenes from Christ's life pass before the imagination like frescoes in a dim chapel.

Even if all you can do is breathe with the prayer, allowing the Hail Mary to move in you like warm light — that is enough. The soul needs not speed but repetition, not novelty but nourishment.

The Jesus Prayer: The Name that Holds Us

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.”

This simple appeal, repeated gently, becomes a heartbeat of surrender. Or say only His name — Jesus — and let it resonate. There is power in that name, power not to overwhelm but to gather the scattered self.

Adoration: A Stillness That Radiates

To sit or kneel before the Blessed Sacrament is to step out of the digital storm into a place that feels almost impossibly calm. It is the opposite

of productivity; nothing “happens,” and that is precisely the grace.

Adoration is spiritual radiation therapy — silent, steady, unseen. You do not need to conjure emotion. The point is simply to be there, in the presence of the One who already sees you, already loves you.

Lectio Divina: Reading with the Heart

Lectio is not Bible study. It is hospitality. Choose a short passage. Read it slowly. Let one phrase shimmer. Stay there.

Do not move on as though the spiritual life were a step counter or a reading plan. Let the Word dwell in you, not as information but as communion.

The Liturgy of the Hours: Keeping Time with God

Morning and Evening Prayer — Lauds and Vespers — are rhythms older than empires. They anchor the day, not by demanding performance but by offering cadence. Even a simplified version, a single psalm or brief reading, becomes a doorway back into balance.

These prayers are communal in origin, but you may make them your own. The goal is not perfection; it is resonance.

The Luxury That Is Not a Luxury

We speak of silence as though it were an indulgence, something only the lucky can afford. But spiritually, silence is not optional. It is the inner architecture of faith.

*One verse read with the
heart is worth a thousand
scrolled with impatient eyes.*

In a world that treats distraction as destiny, silence becomes resistance. In a culture that monetises our attention, attention becomes a sacrament. Be where there is no algorithm, no soundtrack, no productivity metric. Let the heart rediscover hospitality. The kingdom of God is not elsewhere — it is *within you*.

“Be still and know that I am God.” This is not advice. It is a description of where God chooses to be found. ♦





These Small Rituals

by *Gabriel Olearnik*

“I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night, and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye. I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter into their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove... At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others – poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner – young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life.”

- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

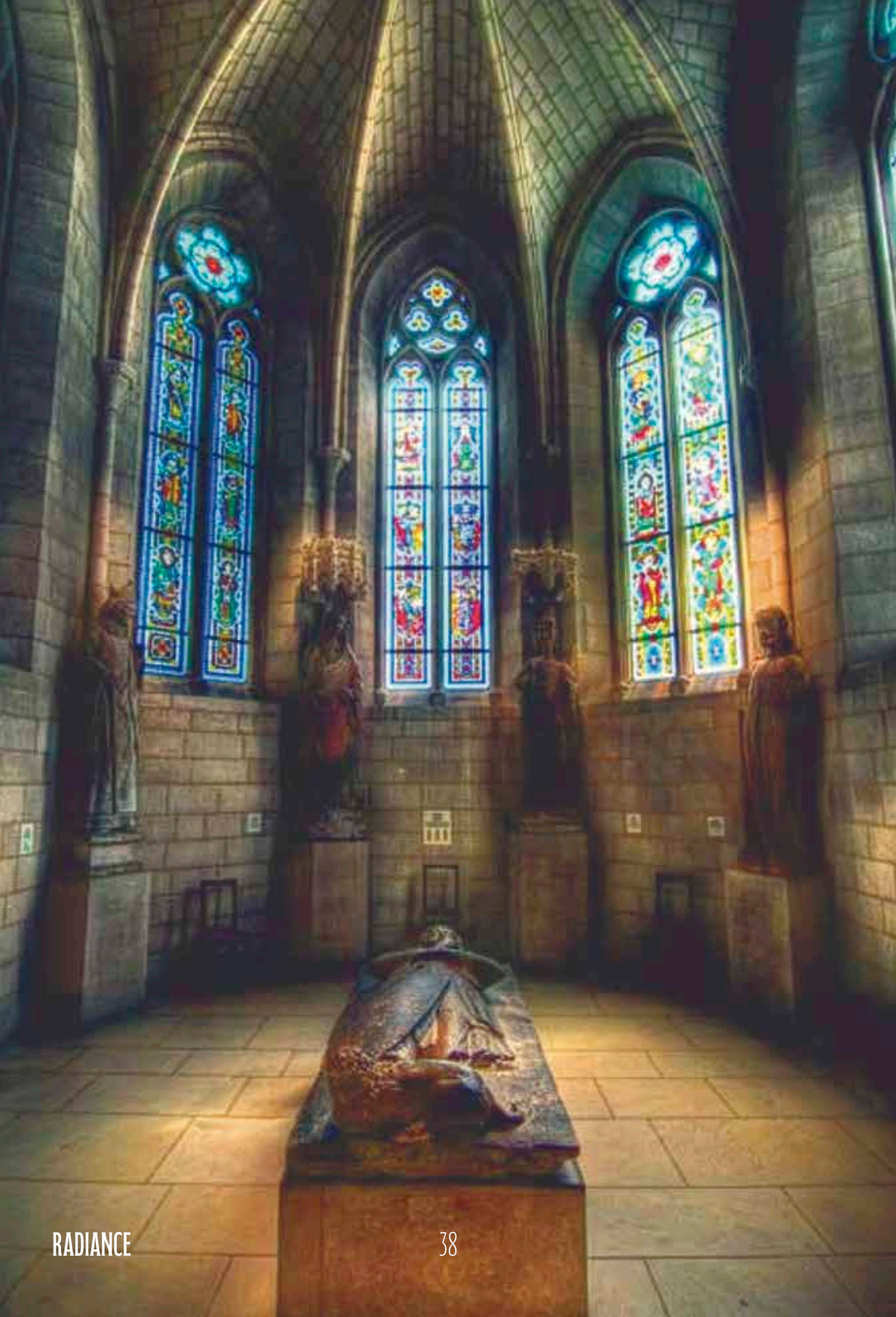


If I lie still too long, the old hungers start their arithmetic.

Because sleep is useless in New York, I pad the pavement from Brooklyn to Museum Mile, prayer beads in hand, passing humanity in puffs of vent-smoke and weed, the city's heat melting clothes away; snacking on guacamole and pizza slices, sipping coffee the colour of river silt.

I would rest; but the endless hum sustains me, even as I wear myself away on the bridges: for this is life, a warfare, a dolour, a privation of the road.

The soundtrack bleeds into my ears: 80s romance, Gregorian chant, tribal undulations - love in three modes - and I see the thousand thousand faces, the near-sacraments of people: their loss and aching, their joy; the speed of interactions, the dizzy iterations; the thrum of phones everywhere; the inevitability that all communications resolve to commerce or romance, or both.



Heading north, past the gold-filled hole of the Trade Center; the shoe shops heady with wax and turpentine; the French restaurants with their elegant brass and emerald fittings; the strip shows, and the graffiti underground; the hustlers, the street hawkers; the jazz shows sounding with metallic longing.

Further and further in: the tarot stalls, the authors, the romance bookshops in floral pink; the brownstones moist in the summer sun; the copper-bottomed cocktails; the Ukrainian shops pungent with beef and beetroot; the vitality and the dying; the hospice signs in red; the bedraggled poor and the perfumed rich: the indifference in faces, the callous eyes, and the tang of rotting fruit.

Now to Museum Mile, heading up to the spit of Manhattan; past Central Park cradled by the glass mansions of the gods. Resting in patches, scrubbing my feet and soles like a soldier, like a pilgrim; covering the new skin in hot water and lime oil. Boots on; the day wearing away; mumbling my Latin, aves, paternosters, salutations, graces, in this realm of psychic healers; this graffiti covered with Christ's face; the sidewalks tattooed with tag and scrawl.

Upward, straining, towards the Cloisters: that takeaway monastery, it feels like the oldest building in New York, all that shaped French stone, which sailed the centuries before it crossed the Atlantic. Outremer, over-the-sea, but in a way no one imagined.

I climb, a song of ascents, leaving behind the sirens and the horns and the algebra of desire, until the air thins into something almost merciful. The gardens: stubborn rosewood, lavender, river weeds; the medicinal and delightful herbs again; the music of many scents calming my overflow, the nerve-bright runways of my mind. The fever of my mind fades, my thoughts slow. The beads slip through my hands, but they don't fall, green tanzanite and bronze. They are not solutions, only tethers to the real: only small rituals.

And when I reach the chapel, I conjure the ghost of candles; set a taper to the unburnt wax. The fire wavers, uncertain, and then it steadies: one small star in a vast room. I set it among the others, the constellation of petitions, oh, that magic, that incandescence: against incomprehension, against the great brute weight of everything in the world which cannot be named. ◆



THE QUIET POWER OF PRESENCE

Why attention, not achievement, is where grace appears.

by *Leo McGrath*

There is a moment, usually brief, when we realise we are not really there. The person in front of us is speaking, perhaps sharing a pain and waiting for a response, but some part of us has already sought the exit. Not out of cruelty, but habit. Escaping human connection is often the easier path.

The Addiction to the Exit

Our material world is designed to prevent us from being present anywhere, furnished as we are with glowing screens that promise relief. We have become masters of being everywhere and nowhere all at once. As our attention is monetised, our capacity to sit with what is hard is also weakened. In the face of this, how might we take a different path, where grace can be found not in escape but in staying, in sitting with people without an exit plan?

I dwelt on this question as my wise and kind-hearted grandmother passed away last year. She died at the grand age of 99 at home after several years of illness and gradual decline, surrounded by love.

This love was witnessed by the personal treasures and flowers perched around her bedroom, the photographs providing an easy view of smiling family gatherings and gap-toothed grandchildren. The love present in that room was carried back through news delivered to faraway relatives by those who had been at her bedside.

Most of all, the love that surrounded her at the end manifested itself in the physical presence of several special people. Rather than placing her in a home, for some years and without interruption, my aunts, uncles and cousins dedicated their time, physical labour and attention to her care as her life slowly waned.

Love is Inconvenient

By the end they were looking after her round the clock with intense physical effort. The going was often tough, some travelling hundreds of miles every fortnight for their shift.

Every aided movement, every meal prepared and cut up for her, every snatched conversation in lucid moments, was an act of care and witness. And through that care, the dignity of the person was preserved and tended even as the body faded.

It occurs to me that along with all the food, care and time, something of God's grace itself was given to my grandmother through them. Grace, Christians believe, is the manifestation of God's goodness made visible and tangible in the world. It can be present in the greatest or most insignificant of acts yet participates in that infinite goodness that is God's gift to his creation.

*We are all so well-trained
in the art of escape.*

It is a joyous reality of the human condition that God asked us to help in the ongoing creation of His Kingdom on earth. In this sense there is no such thing as a wasted kindness or too small a gesture. By forging and keeping human connections, by serving others, we act as bearers of God's grace in our daily lives.

There is a saying attributed to St Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel at all times and use words only if necessary." He is describing how the things we do for each other carry profound meaning and substance in what they represent. The gesture of being present carries real substance. We can make a difference in people's lives through what we do as much, if not more, than what we say.

When we show up for another person, by giving them our time and our presence, keeping our eyes on them as they speak, we are providing the means for grace to work. For those stuck in front of a screen, insisting on physical presence is a form of spiritual resistance. We can reclaim that attention. We can give it freely by sitting in a hospital room with a friend, calling someone just to say hello, or offering to make tea for a coworker after a difficult meeting. In a world starved of true connection, your attention carries sacramental power.

Holiness Has a Pulse

What does this mean? The Church believes there are seven Sacraments, defined as "signs of grace by which the divine life is dispensed to us." I find this description moving because it tells us that God has instituted the means for us to live well by participating in His own life. He wants this for all of us. Through His son Jesus, He gave us the tools to make a real, material, positive impact on the world, and through them make the world more in His image.

The sacraments are met by physical and intimate signs: the laying on of hands, the pouring of water, the receiving of the physical Body of Christ in Communion. Grace is therefore dispensed not at distance, but through encounter. Likewise, showing up by offering our time and our physical selves to others, allows the light of the Creator to flow through our hands and voices.

We realise that the most profound way to honour the purpose of our humanity is to simply be where we are needed, for those who need us.

What Will Be Said of You

At my grandmother's funeral, someone remarked to my aunt, who had spent two years with her round the clock, that it must have been difficult to carry out such demanding duties. In a startling response, she replied simply "it was a beautiful thing that I could do with my mother". "With" - not "for".

*In a world starved of true
connection, your attention
carries more sacramental
power than you might think.*

For her this was not an abstract duty or transaction, but the drawing of a deep human connection, forged over decades, to its beautiful conclusion. My Grandmother enjoyed the dignity of true human connection to the last, and her cup of grace was overflowing at her passing.

Perhaps this is what remains when all our distractions fall away. At the end, it is not what we achieve that matters, but who we were present to. ♦





On Nostalgia and the Soul

THE LONGING FOR HOME

How our homesickness for childhood becomes a map to God.

by *Christopher Vale*

You can walk through the boyhood home of the novelist Thomas Wolfe in Asheville, North Carolina. The banister is polished by hands long gone. The narrow bed sits beneath a slanted ceiling. The air seems to hold its breath. Visitors move quietly, as though afraid to disturb something fragile.

But what are we reverencing? The wood? The wallpaper? Or the ache?

Wolfe titled his later novel *You Can't Go Home Again*, a response to the uproar that followed *Look Homeward, Angel*. The phrase has entered our bloodstream. You indeed cannot go home again. Even if the house still stands, the world has shifted. So have you. The streets are narrower. The faces are older. The self who once lived there has dissolved.

And yet the longing persists.

We tell ourselves it is nostalgia. But nostalgia is

too small a word. This is not merely a sentimental wish to revisit simpler times. It is an ache that feels metaphysical. A sense that we were once at ease in the world, and that something — time, success, adulthood — has displaced us. What we miss is not the house. We miss being at home.

The Taste of Lost Time

Through *In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel Proust gives us the most famous moment in literary nostalgia: the madeleine dipped in tea. A taste releases a flood. The past is not reconstructed; it erupts. Childhood returns with such intensity that time seems briefly undone.

Proust's insight is revolutionary: what we long for is not gone. It lives within us. Memory becomes a hidden chapel where lost rooms still glow. And yet even Proust cannot stay there. The experience is luminous but fleeting.

The madeleine dissolves. The ache remains.

If Wolfe shows us that we cannot go home geographically, Proust suggests we can go home psychologically. But neither fully answers the longing. Because the longing is deeper than memory.

The Child Who Wanted His Mother

Consider the haunting film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, developed by Stanley Kubrick and completed by Steven Spielberg. A robotic child named David is programmed to love. Abandoned by his adoptive mother, he spends centuries seeking one thing: to be loved by her again.

He does not long for power. Nor immortality. Nor transcendence. He longs for home.

*Restlessness is not immaturity.
It is homesickness.*

In the end, fulfilment comes not through conquest but surrender — a brief, tender moment granted in the midst of loss. The film dares to suggest that what makes us human is not intelligence but longing. The childlike need to be held. The ache is not childish. It is essential. And then there is *Big*, directed by Penny Marshall. A boy wishes himself into adulthood, only to discover that grown-up life — with its competence and autonomy — lacks something incandescent. His innocence, once shed, becomes the most precious thing he possessed.

We grow up. We gain skills. We master complexity. But somewhere along the way, we trade wonder for control. And control is a cold substitute for home.

Augustine's Diagnosis

At the beginning of the *Confessions*, Saint Augustine writes:

“You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You.”

The sentence lands like a key in a lock. Restlessness is not failure. It is not immaturity. It is not nostalgia misfiring. It is homesickness.

Augustine does not say we long for childhood. He says we long for God. The peace we remember — or imagine — was never simply a phase of life. It was a participation in trust. A

season when we lived less guardedly, less defensively, less convinced that everything depended on our vigilance.

The ego tells us: You must hold it all together. The child trusts: I am held. This is why Jesus says, “Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

He is not recommending regression. He is not asking us to abandon adult competence or critical thought. He is asking us to relinquish the illusion of self-sufficiency. To become like children is not to shrink. It is to trust.

All Shall Be Well

The medieval mystic Julian of Norwich heard Christ say to her in the midst of plague and social collapse: “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”

This is not naïveté. It is radical confidence in divine providence. The longing for home is the longing to believe that again. Not sentimentally. Not magically. But existentially.

When we were small, we inhabited the present. We did not curate identities. We did not build personal brands. We did not wake at 3 a.m. rehearsing contingencies. We trusted the structure around us.

Adulthood teaches vigilance. The Gospel invites trust without stupidity — confidence without denial of reality. The childlike heart does not ignore suffering. It refuses to enthrone fear.

You Can't Go Back — But You Can Go Through

Wolfe was right. You cannot go home again — not in the literal sense. The house will not restore you. The town cannot reverse time. But perhaps you were never meant to go back.

*We do not return to childhood.
We return to trust.*

Perhaps you were meant to go through. Through ambition. Through disappointment. Through loss. Through the humbling recognition that control is finite and youth evaporates.

The Catholic tradition calls this pilgrimage. Home is not behind us. It is ahead. And yet — paradoxically — it is also within us, because it is not a place but a Presence.



The sacraments enact this truth. In self-dedication to God — in prayer, confession, Eucharist — we rehearse dependence. We relinquish the ego’s clenched fist. We place our life back into larger hands. This is not escapism. It is alignment. To give oneself to God is not to shrink one’s world. It is to come home to the source of it.

The Quiet Homecoming

As we age, something curious happens. The future narrows. The past lengthens. The illusions of endless possibility soften. What once felt like loss begins to feel like integration.

We discover that the childhood we mourn was not perfect. It was fragile. It was incomplete. It contained its own shadows. And yet the trust we tasted then was real. Augustine helps us see why.

The longing was always pointing beyond the house, beyond the street, beyond the season of innocence. It was pointing to the One in whom every innocence finds its fulfillment.

We do not return to childhood. We return to trust. We do not reclaim the old house. We discover that we were never homeless in the first place.

The restlessness that drove us — through literature, through memory, through films about robots and boys who grew up too soon — was grace in disguise. “You have made us for Yourself.” The longing for home is the proof.

And when, at last, we loosen our grip and allow ourselves to be held — when we dare to live as though “all manner of thing shall be well” — something astonishing happens. We are at home. Wherever the journey leads. ♦

THE CUP

Gabriel Olearnik

Moonlit in this olive grove
sparse grass, this ground, is where I lay
You may call me your dearest heart
or else, depart.

Straining for what you'll say
the sweat on your skin will play,
while starlit thoughts drift and stray.

But I shall stay
for Peace, or, loss
I'll know your love,
and what it costs.