

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
November 1, 2020
Spiritual Ponderings
Renewing our Vision

I recently went to the DMV to renew my license and get my “real I.D”. I gathered all the papers they told me that I needed to gather and waited in line outside (because of Covid) for over an hour and half. If I had wanted to get new license plates I could have been in and out in under twenty minutes. When I finally arrived at the desk the lady informed me that she could not accept one of the papers I had because it was a copy and not the original. I counted to ten and was barely able to maintain my anger. I went ahead and renew my license even though it would not be the “Real I.D” As, I looked into the eye testing machine, filled with anger, I did not notice that my glasses had slid down on my nose to where they would not assist me in seeing what was inside the machine. My anger quickly turned to panic as I thought I had just had a stroke since I could not see any of the letters in the machine. Realizing that my glasses were not on correctly, I fixed them and tried again and I could see everything clearly. I decided then and there that I would go get my eyes checked again since it had been such a long time since I had seen an eye doctor. After some more months of procrastination, I finally went to the eye doctors and had my exam and got new glasses. Even though the adjustments they made to my glasses were slight, I can see a lot better.

In a similar way, Edward Sri’s book *Love Unveiled: The Catholic Faith Explained* has adjusted my vision of the Church for the better. I highly recommend it to everyone. Nothing in Edward Sri’s book was new to me but the words he used and the way he approached the subject I found to be very inspiring and helpful. I hope that the quotes from the book (which are in bold) and my commentary (normal font) will inspire you to both view your faith in a more positive light and grow in your faith.

“If you were to walk into a coffee shop and randomly ask people, “What does the Catholic Church stand for?” what kind of response to you think you would receive? Some people might talk about the rituals of the Catholic faith. Others might mention the pope or the Blessed Virgin Mary. A large number probably would focus on controversial moral issues of our day: “The Catholic Church is against abortion, against contraception, and against gay marriage.”

Few, however, would get to the heart of the gospel and say, “The Catholic Church stand for God who is madly in love with you, who has a plan for you and wants you to be happy—the God who even sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for you, who wants to forgive you and help you in your life, and who, most of all, wants an intimate, personal relationship with you so that you can be with him forever in heaven.”

One of the greatest hardships in my life is my relationship with my father. My father has been in a nursing home for about ten year now because of sever mental issues which we are afraid may lead him to taking his own life in a strange effort to get and monopolize our attention. Many of the things we do for him, are for his good but he constantly blames us for the things that go wrong in his life. He sees me in particular not as the “loving son” that I strive to be but as the person who keeps telling him “no” all the time. I am sure that many parents out there know how I feel and I know that I have sadly focused sometimes too much on what my parents would not allow me to do instead of seeing their reasons for why and how many other good things they have done for me. In the same way we can get to focus on God’s “no’s” and not on all of the blessings God does bestow on me.

I have also heard it said that no one ever makes up laws for the sake of making up laws. Laws are made to protect people. God therefore gives us the laws that He does so that we can live in harmony with Him and one another. Following God’s commandments like going to Mass on Sunday is not about avoiding punishment but about self-improvement.

Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Est Caritas* (God is love) explains that the Greeks had seven different words for love. The purest form of love was called Agape. Agape love I think is best described by St. John Paul II put it: “love is wanting what is best for the other person even if it requires a sacrifice on our part.” Typically, the lowest form of love is called Eros love. It is a possessive type of love. Pope Benedict explains that in God Agape (selfless love) and Eros (selfish love) meet. Our God does not only loves us but He desires to be with us. It is important to note that according to Pope Benedict God’s Agape love purifies His Eros love and this demonstrated by the fact that God never forces anyone to do anything.

As an adult who was a child who was always last to be chosen when we were forced to divide up into teams, I find it extremely fascinating and comforting to know that the God of the universe desires to be with me, to spend time

with Him. I am therefore willing to commit myself to the other things God wants me to do in a similar way to how I am more willing to do what a friend wants me to do than I would a complete stranger.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

November 8, 2020

Spiritual P

onderings

Renewing our Vision

Having my eyeglass prescription tweaked just a little has helped me see a lot better. In a similar way, I have been blessed to have my vision of the Catholic faith become clearer by reading Edward Sri's book: *Loved Unveiled: The Catholic Faith Explained*. I would like to continue to share with you insights from the book with the hope that it will help you walk away with a clearer vision of the Catholic faith. Quotes from his book will be in bold and my commentary will be in the normal font.

I grew up Catholic, believed in God, showed up at Mass on Sundays, and in general wanted to be a "good person". But as I entered my adult years, many other things captured my attention more: striving for success, making money, having friends, having fun. I still went through the motions in my faith, but God was not really the priority in my life.

I also began to have a lot of questions: Is all this Catholic stuff really true? What about the other religions in the world? Does it actually matter whether I'm Catholic? And then there were all those moral issues about life, sex, and marriage: Shouldn't each individual be able to make up his own morality? Why can't we just love people and get along?

Over time, the faith started to come together for me. Thanks to God's grace and many good friends, mentors, and books, I began to sense that there was something deeper behind the various doctrines, rituals, and hierarchies of the Church. These guides helped me to appreciate more the truth and beauty of the Catholic faith and open up for me the many treasures in my faith life that I had taken for granted or didn't even realize were there. Most of all, the faith began to make more sense to me—not just as a theory, but as a whole way of life.

This Catholic way of life attracted me—and millions of others throughout the centuries—is ultimately the way of love: a most powerful love that the world itself does not offer. But it's love for which we are made, a love that corresponds to our heart's deepest desires. In fact, all our authentic forms of love—whether it be love for one's country, one's friend, one's child, or one's spouse—are meant to be drawn up into this love that is God himself (see 1 Jn 4;8,16). It's only divine love that we will find our happiness and fullness of life.

I honestly do not think I would be Catholic today, if it were not for my time in the seminary. While I have always loved God, it was the priests in the seminary who taught me how to really pray and that God loved me. I think many people, who are active Catholics today, can say the same thing but instead of seminary they would say retreat, encounter with a spiritual mentor, etc. that helped them move beyond the pagan idea of who God is. In paganism, and in me growing up, faith meant making God happy by following His rules. There was even a chance that all my efforts could be for naught if God was going to be finicking and choose not to accept my actions and sacrifices that day. Moving away from the image of God as a boss (a task-master) and beginning to see Him as a loving Father was a major step forward in my spiritual life. I think many of the people who have fallen away from the Catholic Church have never made that leap of faith and I pray that I (and the Church) will help them find a way to come back and cross that bridge.

Though not often appreciated in this way, the Catholic Church faith actually emphasizes the centrality of love more than any other religions, spirituality, or philosophy in the world.

One of the problems in the world today is that the Catholic Church spent a lot of time teaching everyone that "God is love," but many people in the Church forgot to teach that love demands a response. Can you imagine a man getting down on one knee, holding a ring, and asking a woman to marry him but she never responds to him? Love demands a response even if it is a "no". In a vocation, one must discern God's calling – what is it that God desires me to do. This is the vocation part. We discover what is God wants us to do. We then go through a period of probation. It may be seminary or it may be dating, etc. In this time, we learn that in order to respond to God we must develop certain behaviors and habits. If we are willing to do this then, we come to the oblation part and here we commit ourselves

totally to God. Love demands a response and the Church is here to help us form our response by becoming the person God made us to be.

The goal of a philosopher is to become smart. The goal of a economics is to become wealthy. For Catholics the goal is to be love by God by removing anything from us that prevents God's love from permeate us and in return, learn how to love God back in the way that He desires us to. Loving God, Neighbor and self. It is not about fulfilling the 10 Commandments perfectly.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
November 16, 2020
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It has been a long time since I had been to the eye doctor. I try to get a physical once a year but for some reason or another, I always seem to put off going to the eye doctor. Maybe it simply because my eye sight did not seem to be getting any worse but maybe I should have looked at going to the eye doctor as a chance to see better. I am finding my recent prayer time and Edward Sri's book: *Loved Unveiled: The Catholic Faith Explained*, as a time of improving my faith Seeing my relationship with God better. I would like to continue to share with you insights from the book with the hope that it will help you walk away with a clearer vision of the Catholic faith. Quotes from his book will be in bold and my commentary will be in the normal font.

We will see how everything about the Catholic faith leads us further on a life long journey of growing in love of God. Through his Spirit dwelling in us, God draws us ever more out of ourselves—out of our fears, our limited perspectives, our selfishness, our pursuits for our own pleasure, comfort, and gain---and toward him and toward our neighbor in love. Through the Church, the communion of saints, and especially through the sacraments, we don't just receive God's love; "we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving".

In classic monster mythology a werewolf is someone who is forced to morph between beast and man depending upon the phases of the moon. In some ways, I can see something similar happen to me in my own life. I can go from being a nice, kind, and carrying person to a growling ready to bite someone's head off. The moon though is not the cause of shift or change in me though. Fear is. When I am afraid that I am unlovable, that I may have something taken away from me, or fear that people seek to harm me, I stop acting in a kind and carrying way and begin to act in an aggressive way. If, with the grace of God, I have kept my fear under control, I can face almost the same situations and be the most loving person.

Bishop Barron in his writings talks about moving from our "small soul" that is only focused on itself to the "big soul" – the soul that cares about everyone.

The last part of the quote above made me think of a toolbox filled with tools that God gives me to help fix my life up.

Our understanding of the faith and our ability to live it out, however, is not something that is formed in a vacuum. We live in a certain cultural setting that influences our hearts and minds.

When I was growing up, I would watch movies on television using a VCR. Now I watch the same movie using Blue Ray or streaming. Same movie different technology to access the story. In the same way, our faith does change but we gain new insights into God's revelation. In a romantic relationship the mode in which a couple shows loves hopefully changers throughout their relationship.

One of the most profound statements ever written about God is found in the biblical text known as the First Letter of John. The statement consists of just three simple words: "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

This verse gets to the heart of the distinctively Christian understanding of God. While the vast majority of people in the world believe there is a God, many do not believe really believe in a personal God—a God who loves us, who reveals himself to us, and who calls us to an intimate relationship with him. Rather, some view God as a vague higher power like "the force" in the movie Star Wars. Others believe in a God, but not one who really interacts in this world and is involved in our daily lives. Some think of God as a harsh judge. Still others make God in their own

image, assuming God supports whatever ideas, choices and lifestyles they may have and never challenges them to change.

But the Bible offers a very different picture of God: “God is love.” We will take a closer look at what this means. We will see that God himself exists as a profound communion of love, a Trinity, and that he created us out of love, and made us for his love.

We can take the statement “God is love” for granted and not truly realize how radical it really is. Most cultures have developed ideas about super human deities that need to be placated and pleased. They did what they did because they could but never out of pure love. The emperors of the Roman Empire began to think that they were gods not because they loved everyone but rather because they had more power than anyone else. God is love is a truly revolutionary idea that we would all do well to meditate on more.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

November 23, 2020

Spiritual Ponderings

Renewing our Vision

When I was at the eye doctor, he had me look through a machine with a bunch of different lenses on it. He would ask me if I could see better with option one or option 2. The eye chart that I was staring at did not change but my vision did depending upon the lens the doctor had in front of my face. I am Edward Sri’s book: *Loved Unveiled: The Catholic Faith Explained*, as a new and enhanced way of looking at my Catholic Faith. I would like to continue to share with you insights from the book with the hope that it will help you walk away with a clearer vision of the Catholic faith. Quotes from his book will be in bold and my commentary will be in the normal font.

Religion is sometimes thought of as mankind’s search for God. But Christianity is more about God’s search for us. God didn’t just create us. He didn’t leave us on our own to find him and discover the meaning of our existence. Love desires to be near the beloved, and the God who is love sought us out and entered into our world. He spoke to his people through his prophets, his law, and his Scriptures, and even by becoming one of us in Jesus Christ.

Here we see that Christians don’t just believe in God. We believe that God of the universe lovingly chose to unveil himself to us and show us his plan for our lives. And that personal self-disclosure of God is what we call “divine revelation.”

As I began my first year of grad school (Major Seminary), I realized that I had lost contact with most of the friends I had made before I entered the seminary. Mostly because of the business of life and the fact that many of them had gone to college out of state. I decided that if I was to continue my studies to be a priest, that in order to be a healthy priest, I would have to develop friendships with some people outside the seminary. At the same time, I was asked to assist with a multi-parish youth program. It was there that I met a young couple who were engaged to be married. With great fear, I approached them and asked if sometime during the week, the three of us could go out and have lunch or dinner together. They shared with me how they met and how he prosed and what they looked forward to in marriage the most and I shared with them why I thought God was calling me to be a priest. We are still good friends today. Our friendship though is based on our willingness to share ourselves with each other. In a similar way God desires to not only be a friend but a Father to each of us and thus He wishes to reveal Himself to us. In a similar way, the way I deepen my relationship with that couple is by spending time with them and much of the Catholic faith is about spending time with God. We spend time with God in prayer. We spend time with God at His family dinner table and we spend a lot of time cooperating with God in making this world a better place.

It is somewhat understandable that many people in our culture don’t believe God communicates to us. Many people today are influenced by a popular notion of God known as deism—the belief in a spectator God, a God who created the universe, gave it order, but then just sit backs and watches us from a distance. According to the deistic perspective, God exists, but he is not involved in this world. God does not perform miracles. He does not know our thoughts. He does not hear our prayers. He does not help us in our need and certainly doesn’t desire a personal relationship with us. So, if someone is not convinced there is a God who really interacts with us in the world, he is not going to be very open to the possibility that God reveals himself to us through Jesus, the Bible, or the Church.

Toward the end of my grandmother's life, she suffered from dementia pretty bad. My mother asked me on a few occasions to come over and babysit my grandmother so that she could go out and do something. I had a million reasons why I did not want to. Most of them were fueled by fear that I could one day end up like her and I did not want to have to think about that reality. I loved my grandmother so therefore I went. I don't regret a moment of my time with my grandma. If I had chosen not to go, then I would be like a deistic god who cared only from a distance but my love for her caused me to get involved in her life. In the same way God loves us each too much to simply stay away.

If there is a God who created the universe, surely, he would at least have the ability to enter into the work of his creation. It would be foolish to say that a builder, for example, would be incapable of entering into the building he himself constructed. Similarly, it is unreasonable to say that God, the divine architect of the cosmos, could not enter into his own creation and interact with the people therein.

From time to time, we all have to step back and trust that God knows what He is doing.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

November 30, 2020

Spiritual Ponderings

Renewing our Vision

There is the old joke/story of the optimist who sees the glass as half full and the pessimist sees the glass half empty. In a similar way we can see the Catholic faith as a list of rules and obligations or we can see it as an opportunity to enter into a relationship with our Divine Creator who in His very essence is LOVE. Here are some more thoughts inspired by Edward Sri's book: *Loved Unveiled: The Catholic Faith Explained*. I hope these quotes will enhance the way of looking at your Catholic Faith. Quotes from his book will be in bold and my commentary will be in the normal font.

In the words of Catholic write Peter Kreeft, "there is no human way up the mountain, only a divine way down." After all, if there is a God who loves us, doesn't it seem likely that he would come to us and show us the best path to him? Kreeft goes on to challenge the modern "all roads are the same" mentality; If God made the road, we must find out whether he made many or one. If he made only one, then the shoe is on the other foot: it is humility, not arrogance, to accept this one road from God; and it is arrogance not humility to insist that our man-made roads are as good as God's God made one."

When I was in high school, I worked for a national pizza chain. It was a good job and I took pride in my work. From time to time though a customer would take his or her pizzas and put them under their arm as if they were carrying a book instead of carrying the pizzas out flat. I knew at that moment, all my hard work was ruined, because as the person tucked the pizza under his or her arm all the cheese, sauce, and toppings had slid off the pizza. Surprisingly, a few of these customers would call back to the store and complain about the quality of the pizza that they had received. In those moments, I found myself trying to explain that "yes indeed" there was a correct way to carry a pizza. I am a big believer that the Catholic Church is the best way to get to heaven for many reasons that I will not go into here.

God is not interested in merely downloading important information to us about the Christian life. He lovingly unveils his very self to us, so that we can love him back.

God is not interested in whether or not we will be able to pass a test when our life on earth has ended. He is more interested in our heart. God reveals himself to us in many ways: through creation, Sacred Scripture, Tradition, the Church, etc.

What do we do with a movie that's going nowhere? What do we do with a book that has no plot? We put it down.

We turn off the movie. When we sense there's not meaning, no purpose, to the story, it seems pointless to go on.

The same is true with life.

Our modern world has, in many ways, lost its story. We no longer know where we came from. We don't know where we're going. And we don't know why we're here.

But God has a wonderful plan for our lives one in which we discover the true, lasting happiness for which we are made. And the Creed which Christians have been reciting since the time of the early Church, it is a short retelling of that saving plan. This ancient summary statement of Christian faith provides a framework for our lives. It reminds

us from where we came: “I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.” It points to where we’re going: “I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” And it shows why we’re here: for a relationship with the God who loves us so much that “for us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven.”

The Creed reinforces how our individual lives are part of a much larger story—a story that has been going on since the dawn of creation. Like most good stories, it involves a struggle between good and evil, love and loss, life and death... indeed the entirety of the Catholic faith, is all about this story and the important role you and I are called to play in it.

I could never be an actor. I would be too afraid of forgetting my lines and I would have nightmares where I would not even know what play it was that I was supposed to be in. Screwing up my lines would surely prevent the others in the play from putting on the best play they could. This is why we should make sure we know what our role is in the cosmic drama that we call Salvation History. There are no small parts in salvation history.