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## Challenging to read . . . More challenging to pray

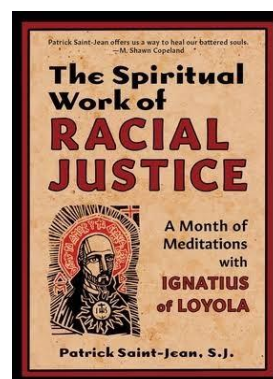
### The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice

#### A Month of Meditations with Ignatius of Loyola

by Patrick St. Jean, SJ

Over the past few years I have listened to some excellent webinars and workshops on White Privilege. These excursions into life as a white person were informative in that they made me aware of the advantages and privileges that life offered me simply by being born white. I grew up conscious of the great disparity in the living conditions between the Indigenous peoples in and around my town, and white folks. I had a small sense of how this came to be from the Canadian history I learned in school. I had very little connection with black people. Most of what I learned of black people was from the media, which did not give a very positive image. In recent years I have had the opportunity to meet and get to know many wonderful BIPOC people (Black, Indigenous, People of Color).

Patrick St. Jean's book is helping me to look at the mixture of feelings inside me when I hear stories about the injustices committed against BIPOC individuals and groups and even when I encounter a homeless person trespassing on our property. As well, it has awakened me to some difficult truths about myself. I know I'm not racist, but now I realize that's not good enough. I want to be antiracist if I am to have an effect on systemic racism but that entails continued inner work and prayer that leads to action.



As challenging as this book is, I particularly like it because it uses the Spiritual Exercises in a timely and creative way. As one of the comments on the back cover notes it "beautifully weaves together an invitation to the interior work necessary to deepen our commitment to racial justice." That is a daunting task, but each small change of heart and action towards a more loving and inclusive community brings us closer to the Reign of Heaven here on earth. We are, each one of us, the image of God.

*Elizabeth Poilievre, FCJ*





## A Child's Counsel

Our family has been struck by so much grief in the past year. Within a span of eleven months we have had three brothers die. All three lives were shorter than the average span. There is much to be said about grieving but I will stick to a lighter note and share with you a heartfelt gift from our seven-year old grand-daughter. Hearing of the latest of the deaths, she wrote up a list of things to make us feel better. We posted it prominently on the refrigerator. Perhaps it will cheer you up as it does us, or it may inspire you to make your own list.



1. There will be a rainbow.
2. Uncle Emi is going to have a birthday.
3. We can pretend to be cats having a party.
4. Movie night.
5. Bake cookies.

“Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” Luke 18 v17.

*Maria Di Castri, CIM Edmonton*







## COLORS

The yarn ministry at my church has a “little Christmas” sale every November.



Some of the women of our church meet twice a month to knit, crochet or weave yarn into items people may purchase for gifts. Lovingly with our kindred spirit we share patterns, ideas and supplies along with joys and sorrows of events that are happening in our lives. We also make prayer shawls for hospice, and baby items and blankets for infants in need. The monies that are raised are used for charity needs in our parish or diocese. We also invite our parish to the opportunity to donate socks and underwear that are sent to homeless shelters in need. I like to imagine that every stitch we make is a prayer that is

filled with love to every person who makes a purchase and to the people they are giving to. A colorful transformation.

*Jo Ann Burden cim NC USA*



### **Cultivating Hearts of Hope**

In “The Letter”, the most recent film release from Pope Francis on the topic of Laudato Si and Care for the Earth, there is a moment where he pauses during his remarks about climate change, apologizes and acknowledges that he has been speaking in Spanish without meaning to. Why? He says it’s because “I’ve spoken from the heart. My heart is in Spanish.”

Our FCJ community house in Quezon City (Metro Manila) hosts monthly Taizé prayer services. The Scriptures are read in Tagalog (the most common spoken language in the Philippines, also known as Filipino) and the Christian chants that we repeat are sung in Tagalog, Indonesian and English. However, it is when individuals share their prayers of intercession that I am moved most deeply. Voices are soft and hushed. Each person speaks for one, two, three minutes. They pour out the cares and concerns they want to bring before God. The gathered community listens without interruption, a sacred space of invitation for all who feel the need to connect to God here. With my limited knowledge of Filipino, I can



understand only the occasional word, and yet I find myself touched by these intimate and sincere supplications. They are spoken from the heart.

When we share from the heart, we talk about things that we care about. We acknowledge the difficult circumstances that are hurting us or those we love. We are vulnerable. We know our weakness and need. We communicate about the things that matter. We are profoundly aware of our helplessness before God. When we speak with our heart, we connect with others in ways that go beyond the spoken word; at some level, we can be understood by anyone with a willing and open spirit.

I learned recently from my Tagalog teacher that there is no word in Filipino for 'hopeless.' It is only possible, she tells me, to encourage someone not to be without hope. I believe, that when we speak from the heart, hope is inherently present: in ways that go beyond human understanding, both God and our community can hear and understand us.

As I listen to Pope Francis plead again for the plight of the Earth and as I hear Taizé participants offer their prayers to God, I cannot be without hope, for any time that people have the courage to speak with their hearts, hope burns brightly. Let us continue to pray that more people will dare to do the same.

*Michelle Langlois, FCJ*



Dear Sisters,

It is now three and a half months since I left you all, sisters of the American Province. I had every intention of writing to you as soon as I was in condition to sit at a computer but I had to wait for **the muse**! It hasn't come but I am writing anyway because I must not wait any longer.



Basically what I want to say to you is GOODBYE and although this is no excuse for the long delay in writing, I have been thinking quite a bit about that word and all that it means.

First, a few preliminary points:

- Some goodbyes can be really SAD; perhaps most goodbyes hold a certain sadness because every goodbye inevitably contains a certain idea of change



or loss. Any feeling of sadness in this, my goodbye to you, is greatly outweighed by **Gratitude**, and therefore **Joy**.

The word, 'Goodbye', as we know, signifies 'God be with you'!

(The first known use of the word "goodbye" was recorded in 1573 in a letter by English writer and scholar, Gabriel Harvey, which reads: "To requite your gallonde [gallon] of goodbyes, I regive you a pottle of howdyes<sup>1</sup>." "Godbwye" is a contraction of the phrase "God be with ye.")

**Howdy**<sup>1</sup> is an informal greeting, originally a shortened form of the greeting How **do** ye? (It originated in South England dialect in 1563/87.)

Thinking of the multitude of goodbyes in life, in each of our lives, there is one which is unique, the first one.

I began to think of the very many times we say "Goodbye" in our lives. None of these goodbye moments can be compared with the first unique one which is birth- that truly traumatic, or at best, dramatic experience which ended those 9 months in what could be compared to a Paradise in which every need and desire had been supplied. Between this first Goodbye and the final one which will be, hopefully, less traumatic, we clock up millions of goodbyes!

Since that day, 83 years ago I personally have lived in many locations and dwellings - flats, houses, cottages; the longest time in one dwelling place being the 21+ years in Salta, Argentina.



Reflecting on the meaning of '**Goodbye**', my thoughts were led to the essence of the idea "God be with you", which led me to think of the phrase, from Marie Madeleine's Memoirs, so familiar to us: '*Le Bon Dieu a tout conduit lui meme!*'

I realise that when I say to you all, "May God be with you", I want also to say to my God, to our Companion Jesus, to their Holy Spirit "THANK YOU" for being with me, with us! Then there came to mind a whole host of persons ...It would be impossible to name them all

There came to my mind the Leaders/Provincials ... during the time I was a member of the Province, these were: Susan Donohue, Bonnie Moser and Patricia Binchy. I would like to include as well Imelda Toomey and Marilyn Matz who had been in office when the first fcJs, Mary Cavanaugh and Shirley Majeau, had been missioned to Cordoba, Argentina. Paula Mullen was also a leader for some years,



the Area leader when S. America was seen as a separate entity from USA and Canada.

Each of them gave of their gifts, their wisdom, their energies with great creativity for the good of all, enabling the Mission of each one whether that was in active apostolate or in time of retirement or infirmity.

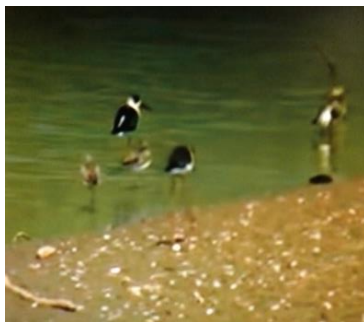
I remembered too all the fcJ sisters with whom I lived during those years: Shirley Majeau, Mary Cavanaugh, Anne Morrison, Paula Mullen, Stephanie Earl, Mary Murphy, Terry Smith, Lorenza Maganin, Justin Tukiym, Bing Delos Santos. Also Juana Rios and Elizabeth Peralta who lived as fcJs before leaving the Society and with whom we have kept in contact and several other women who were with us for a certain time in formation and eventually left us, with some of whom we have contact.

Each one is precious to me. Each one taught me much, encouraged me, at times corrected me and was above all a true companion of Jesus and of me.

*Marguerite Goddard, FCJ*



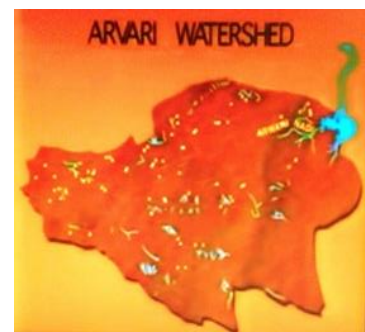
## Good News for Human Life on Earth



We only ever hear about the bad news of climate change. Enjoy these short videos of different projects around the world that offer hope for the future of human life on our planet.

### Arvari River

From 1986-1995, the people in a desertified area of India built 238 water-harvesting ponds to capture the Monsoon rains. These ponds provide water for farmers, but they also re-charged the water table and restored perennial flow to the Arvari River. Today, over 570 square kilometers of land now are dotted with over 9,000 of these ponds and four more rivers have been restored to year-round water flow.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-qlyXE8KFc>





### **Chikukwa Permaforest in Zimbabwe**

In Eastern Zimbabwe, six villages collaborated on a project to grow food for their own families on land that was severely eroded and degraded. By harvesting rainwater, planting fruit and nut trees, and a wide diversity of annual vegetable crops, the villagers now raise more than enough food for the villages and have some to sell. Their six villages now

have a shopping center and elementary schools for all the children.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svj3OW0H\\_jo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svj3OW0H_jo)

### **Zero waste family**

This video shows how one family in Montreal, Canada turned their lifestyle into a zero waste project. By making small changes in their family routines, they were able to transition from one large garbage can of waste each week to a small, number ten tin can sized garbage can once a week.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UNIUE4sOgg>

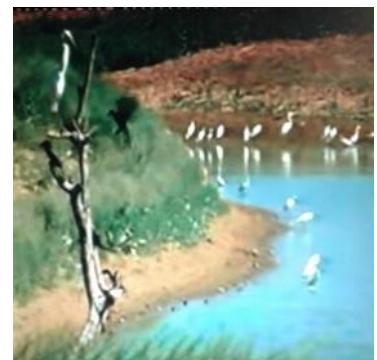
### **Food Forest Systems**

This is a longer video that takes you on a tour of public food forests in different places around the world.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aC2u4g8\\_xYQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aC2u4g8_xYQ)

### **India's Water Revolution**

This video tells the story of India's "Water Cup" sponsored by Bollywood star, Amor Khan. The water cup was a 45-day contest among villages of the state of Maharashtra to see which village could dig the most water-harvesting structures. One village won the prize of 1,000,000 rupees—but the entire state won, as the hydrology of the whole area was transformed: household wells filled with water, there was plenty of water of irrigation and rivers that had not flowed in many, many years were restored to perennial flow! Over 4 years, 145





BILLION gallons of water are harvested in structures that allow the water to slowly sink into the earth.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8nqnOcoLqE>

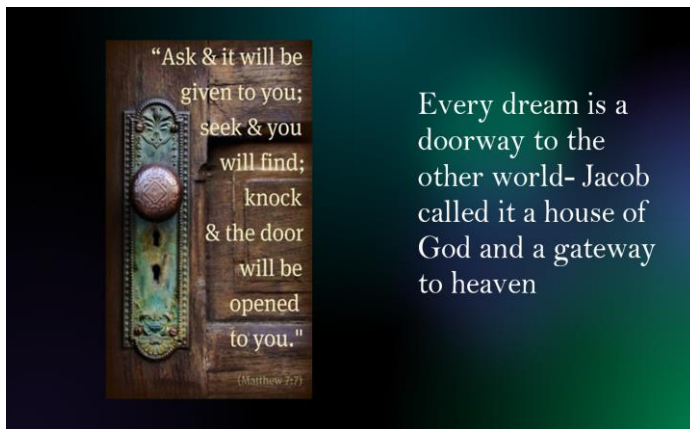
Madeleine Gregg, FCJ



## HIDDEN DOORWAY TO MY SOUL – DOING DREAMWORK

*I love to do dreamwork and this is adapted from one of my evening sessions.*

Doorways are fascinating, especially when open, providing a tempting glance of another place, maybe a garden or a landscape. From an enclosed place, a room, a house, a building, the open door provides an escape from that feeling of being closed-in which we often encounter in life.



Hidden doors are even more inviting.  
Remember the Secret Garden?

In Jacob's dream of the ladder reaching to heaven, he heard the voice of God. (Genesis 27: 10-22)  
Jacob's response was awe.

***"How awe-inspiring this place is!  
This is nothing less than a house of  
God; this is the gate of heaven."***

That is the approach we are invited to take to our dreams. God is speaking, in symbolic language. It is the language of the soul, the language of metaphor and image.

I want to explore again the reality of SOUL-how soul speaks and how we can maintain a relationship with that amazing, often unconscious, disregarded aspect of our total personality. Note the words- "often unconscious" because soul is acting in our everyday life when we experience a synchronicity; are touched by beauty; are stopped short by an 'almost accident' which brings us to our senses again when we



were running about in a largely unconscious state. Note also that soul is larger than we imagine. Our conscious self - body with its sensations, mind with its thoughts, plans, hopes and dreams, spirit with its longing for union with another realm, envisaged as heaven, God or the holy - all the many facets of our total Self are enveloped and surrounded by soul.

John O'Donohue says "the body is in the soul" not the other way round. I do not have a soul. My soul has me, and God has my whole self, body, soul and spirit.

Soul is the bridge or link between the body, our outer, conscious self and the spirit, where we are at one with God.

How can we access this wondrous aspect of our personality?

**There is a hidden doorway which opens every night.**

**It is the doorway of the dream.**

*In one of Carl Jung's life-changing dreams he was in a two storey house, which was unknown to him but in the dream he knew it was "his house". He explored the upper storey with lovely furniture and fine paintings. Then he explored the ground floor and realized that everything there was much older, more medieval with floors of red brick. Then he came upon a heavy door. Opening it, he found a stone stairway leading down into a beautifully vaulted room, much older, with stone walls and a stone flagstone floor. It looked like a Roman room. At last, he came upon an iron ring in the floor. He lifted the stone slab and descending the narrow steps, found himself in a cave with scattered bones, thick dust and broken pottery, the remains of a primitive culture.*

Jung understood that this house was an image of himself, with all the layers of consciousness and the hidden unconscious soul. This dream revealed to him the hypothesis of what he called the collective unconscious- how we are all connected to the larger human family and the world of the past as well as the present. Notice the door that led Jung, the dreamer, to go deeper. This door opened inward. The total personality comprises not only all that we know of ourselves but also all that we do not know ourselves to be.

Dreams, like a hidden doorway connect the waking self to the inner Self, which Jung called the totality and the centre of the personality. The soul by means of the dream images guides and connects us to that centre, where God is holding us in being.

**How to work with dream images**



If the dream is short and only has one or two images, pick one image

**Speak to the image: What is your name? What are you doing in my dream?**

**What part of me are you?**

**What do you like? What do you do?**

**What do you dislike?**

**What do you fear most? What do you love most?  
etc.,**



*Image Unsplash*

### **Soul Images**

The images in the dream, produced by our souls are symbols, and as such, have the power to transform us. Symbols are holders and transformers of energy.

Some symbols have universal meaning and ever deepening levels of meaning. One delightful aspect of doing dreamwork is the exploration of the images and symbols that occur in the dream. Doing research by Google or other means is enriching and enlightening. We learn something new about ourselves, about the self that God sees and knows and loves.

We are called to conversion, to facing our shadow side, so much more acceptable, when it is our own soul that is speaking.

“How wonderful is my soul” sang Mechtild of Magdeburg. Do you know your wonderful soul?

Each morning, if there is a remembered dream, give thanks. Write the dream. Meditate on it.

With Jacob we can pray: ***“Truly God was in this place and I never knew it. How awe-inspiring this place is. This is nothing less than a house of God. This is the gate of heaven.”***

*Ita Connery, FCJ*



In-Between

In-between

An in-between time, an in-between place,  
How can I welcome what's not yet in place?  
How can I greet what I cannot yet see?





How can I find the new me? The new me?

What dispositions will help me to grow  
Into the newness God wants me to show?  
What virtues and graces will that life express,  
Now that I've given my yes? Given my yes.

I'm counting on prayers and the help of my friends  
The kind of support that companionship lends.  
The interest, the contact, the listening ear  
Ready to show God is here. God is here.

An in-between time, an in-between space  
But also a context that's brimming with grace.  
The time and the space for God's love to break through;  
Each moment sacred and new. Sacred and new.

*Madeleine Gregg, FCJ*



### **Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand**

*His disciples said to him, "This is a lonely place and the hour grows late so send them away to go to the villages around about and buy themselves something to eat. "But he answered, "**You give them something to eat.**" They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" Mark 6: 35-37*



Fast forward to October 2022

“Jesus, I get at least two requests seeking funding from different organizations every day asking me to help feed literally millions of people. I am a little short on loaves and fishes. Jesus, to whom do I give something to eat”?

?? The women and children in Afghanistan with whom in 1998 I shared laughter as we prepared heaping platters of meat, naan bread, yogurt, and fruit? Now the women are selling the youngest girls to pay for flour to make some bread that will last only a few days.

?? The destitute grandmothers caring for eight grandchildren in Northern Kenya. I have seen these parentless children with swollen bellies and copper coloured hair who are barely clinging to life. The young children are eating leaves and dirt.

?? The families in Pakistan; half of their country submerged under water, a flood that has taken their bamboo huts, gardens and fields, and rickshaws. Their cheap tin pots in which they cooked their parboiled rice and lentils are empty.

And it's not just those in far-off lands, Jesus, it's people in my own country and city that are hungry.

?? Those in the Maritimes who lost everything to Hurricane Fiona-homes, livelihoods-boats and nets, vehicles, freezers full of fish meant to feed them through the winter months.

?? Edmonton inner city families who can no longer provide even two meals a day for their children. Nutritional food like fruit and veg are no longer an option anymore.

**And WHO will help me feed them Lord? Who will actually be putting the fish and loaves into their hands?**

International Red Cross?

Canadian Food Grains Bank?

Doctors Without Borders?

Mennonite Central Committee?

The Edmonton Food Bank?

*God of compassion feed the millions facing food scarcity with your hope and bless us with generosity to draw deeply from our bank accounts. Give us the persistence to keep praying and trusting in you.*

*Laura Krefting, CIM Edmonton*



### **Living Liminality with Courage and Joy**

Recently I was speaking with Dolores D'Amour, Companion in Mission and a dear friend. For the last six weeks or so she has been in a beautiful spot south of Calgary that provides wonderful views of the country. In fact her location is called Country Hospice. ([www.countryhospice.org](http://www.countryhospice.org) )

Dolores fully expected to be face-to-face with God five years ago when she learned that her cancer was increasing rapidly. Different times of remission have given her opportunities to continue her role as sister, aunt, great aunt and wise woman. Even in times of pain and no energy, she has not lost her sense of humour.

In early November she described her situation as being in an “in between time.” When I suggested that that is a definition of liminality, she replied, “Trust the FCJs to come up with the correct vocabulary!”

Dolores has great devotion to Marie Madeleine and is always grateful for being a Companion in Mission.

*Theresa Smith, FCJ*



### **PROJECT `APOYAR`**

( ‘apoyar’ a Spanish word meaning ‘to help out, or support’)

Our first contact with APOYAR was through Loly Rico, Executive director of the FCJ Refugee Centre in Toronto. In one of her visits to her home country, El Salvador, she met Sra. Morena Herrera who was heading the APOYAR project, and who explained to Loly the need for economic support in order to improve and expand the service rendered.

The FCJ Society, Area of the Americas, subsequently gave a substantial donation towards this valuable work.



### The APOYAR project:

The project is being carried out by a small group of four dedicated women. Its specific role is to provide the practical support and the accompaniment needed by young women and girls who have been raped and become pregnant as a result.

The objective of the project is to provide accompaniment to the victims of rape as they recover from the trauma of sexual violence, often perpetrated by family members or street gangs.

The support consists of: +Providing legal and psychological aid

+Keeping close contact with each victim by weekly or bi-weekly visits to their homes where, for the most part, the victims live with their parents or a close relative.

+Enabling the continuance of each one's education, coordinating with the school, providing study materials, etc., and providing for the care of the infant while the mom is studying.

+Providing medical aid when necessary to both the victim and her infant son/daughter.

+Supplementing the family's food budget

During our visit, the APOYAR team transported us to four different and quite widely separated locations where the project is helping victims of sexual violence.

#### VICTIMS WHOM WE MET:

**1<sup>st</sup> Visit:** The first young girl we visited had been victimized over a period of time by a 60 yr. old uncle when she was 12 years old. The continual abuse resulted in pregnancy and she gave birth to a beautiful baby, Veronica – who is now three years old. They live with the young mom's parents, brothers and sisters, and niece. The project helps pay for food, some clothing, school supplies and texts, plus school trips.



This young teen is very gifted at sports, and her physical education teacher wants to take her with the team to a competition in Honduras (neighbouring country). The project also pays a small stipend to the girl's mother who looks after the child when her mom is at school, or away on this trip.

The uncle, guilty of rape, is now in jail, thanks to the work of the project lawyer. The victim is receiving psychological help, although she was very reticent at first and didn't want to talk with anyone about the abusive situation she had experienced... nor let anyone touch or get close to her. She is now much more open and seems to be gradually healing from the trauma.





**2<sup>nd</sup> Visit:** This case is totally different in that the victim was a young mother of four who was gang-raped. The trauma caused a serious depression in the victim and she began to drink. Eventually she became alcoholic and ended up on the streets. One day she was discovered dead in an alleyway, with marks of a severe beating. Her four children are now in the care of their grandmother.... A very thin and sickly elderly woman. The home is very

precarious, built with flimsy materials. When we arrived, the children were doing a homework exercise at a table in the patio.



The project offers food aid, clothing and school materials, plus the weekly visits of a social worker and someone who helps the children with their homework. The oldest child is a 13 year old girl, who expressed the desire to 'get away from here'. These children are VERY vulnerable... among the many who are susceptible to the seductions of human traffickers.

We have no information regarding the fate of the guilty gang members.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Visit:** The victim in this case is a very beautiful young woman who suffers from some degree of mental retardation. She was raped by a Municipal worker and became pregnant. Her daughter is now 5 years old. They live with Teresa's mother in a one-room wooden structure on short stilts. Part of the floor, also wooden, has rotted and fallen through. They are living on Municipal land, and since the Municipal plan is to widen the road which passes in front of their precarious dwelling it is likely that they will be evicted. Someone recently stole the gas tank which fueled the table-top stove that they used for cooking. The project will buy a gas tank replacement. There is absolutely no government aid or any kind of disability pension.

The project workers are trying to find another place for them to live, and to get the Municipality to take some responsibility. Some of the project money is for legal aid. The little girl attends Kindergarten.



**4<sup>th</sup> Visit:** The victim is a 15 year old blind girl who previously lived with her grandmother and her father. The mother left them to migrate north and they have not heard from her since. One day a grand-uncle arrived and gave instructions to the grandmother to fetch something (which was some distance away). According to the girl, he took advantage of the grandmother's absence and raped her. She became pregnant and gave birth to a boy, who is now 1 ½ years old. Subsequent blood tests indicate that the father of the child was NOT the grand-uncle. However there is evidence that he was involved in the abuse. The courts gave him a 15 year prison sentence. There is presently an investigation going on to determine

whether or not the father of the child was the victim's own father. She did not denounce him, has said nothing about him – possibly to protect him, or because of threats (presuming he is guilty). The other explanation is that not being able to see, she possibly did not know that a second person was involved. The victim and her little boy now live with an aunt, uncle and their fairly large family.

The psychologist who visits the family on a regular basis had bought chicken and chips in the nearby town to share with everyone, and after eating, we spent time getting to know their situation. The aunt is a very good woman, and a good housekeeper... keeping everything as clean as possible given that the floors are dirt. When we arrived, the baby was asleep in a hammock, and one of the daughters was making tortillas. The psychologist explained to us later that the situation is very complex. The young mom misses her grandmother, and vice versa, but cannot return there until the investigation is concluded (to see whether her father is guilty or not). Her blindness limits her movements and makes it impossible for her to assist at the nearby school. The most affected in the future will be the child.

In summary: Both Loly and Paula were impressed by the work being done by the APOYAR team. They are responding to a need to which the government is totally inattentive. The abuse victims and their families would each be in an extremely desperate situation if it were not for the generous and attentive service rendered by APOYAR.

(note: In El Salvador abortion is a crime, even for girls/women who have been raped. The prison sentence could be as much as thirty years. There seems to be little effort made to accompany through pregnancy and beyond, those pregnant women/girls whose situation of poverty or extreme stress is such that abortion seems to them to be the only option.)

**Donation money is used for the food, medical, clothing, and school needs of these and other victims of sexual violence.**

*Loly Rico CiM and Paula Mullen FCJ*





### **The Last Breath**

The gradually lengthening pauses between breaths  
Are preparing me  
For that moment when the next breath never comes.

The moment when Helen's precious, unique  
personality, gifts, generosity and humble service  
step into a new life  
beyond my present reach.

With each death of one I love  
Another piece of my heart  
Crosses into eternity  
And I am carried ever closer  
To the moment when my own last breath never comes.

The moment when all the miracles and blessings  
Of my life  
Pass into the life beyond,  
Carrying pieces of the hearts  
That loved me into life, yet linger in grief,  
Waiting their turn to take their own last breath.

*Madeleine Gregg, FCJ*



### **THE LIGHT IS SWEET**

*The Bible*

Truly the light is sweet  
And pleasant thing it is  
For the eyes to behold the sun

*Jo Ann Burden, CiM, USA*

*There Is Only Christ*

*There is only Christ  
He is the essence of God  
Who is love  
Forgiveness  
Healing and peace.*

*May we open ourselves to  
God's love, beauty, mercy,  
Truth and forgiveness.  
There is only Christ.*

*Our world gets turned upside down  
Inside out  
But our loving Conductor  
Has it all in control.*

*Grateful for your loving support  
Pat Mac Donald, FCJ from  
Rockyview Hospital, October 2022*





## Truth Stranger than Fiction

As we approach a new liturgical year and enter the grace-filled Season of Advent, I reflect on the Incarnation – an amazing mystery beyond our human imagination.

I am a history buff and I am especially interested in the ancient world. As archaeologists excavate and study historic and pre-historic (i.e. before written language) sites they gain much information from the religious and burial sites. Often, ancient graves contain artifacts from daily living: evidence that the ancient people believed in an afterlife. This indicates to me that our ancestors knew that we humans have a spiritual component that lives on after our material body dies. Only by God's touch could the human mind come to such knowledge.

But what impresses me even more is the instinct that moved ancient peoples to worship deities. This is a fact of cultures completely separated from each other by time and geography. They came to an awareness of powers beyond the material. They built temples and offered sacrifices to honour and appease their imagined deities. Their gods were usually authoritarian and self-serving in character. It was beyond human reasoning or instinct to visualize a god such as our God, who loves each of us infinitely and unconditionally; who loves us so much he became human to teach us, heal us and finally suffer torture and death to redeem us. It is through the Incarnation that God makes this amazing mystery known to us. His truth is Beyond anything we could imagine. To me, this is a proof of the existence of God!

*Mary Balasch, CIM Calgary*



### **Saying Good-bye to Sr. Frances J. B. McKenna FCJ**

*(Eulogy given by Lois Anne Bordowitz FCJ at the funeral of Frances)*

Frances was born during World War II to Peter and Bridget McKenna, and was evacuated as a young child for safety away from London. This experience of being a 'war baby' had a profound effect on her. Many of the things we do now to care for our environment, Frances has done all her life because of her experience of the rationing and deprivations of post-war London.

Luckily for us, Frances was educated by the Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus in Somerstown, London, and heard the call of God to become a Faithful Companion of Jesus. This meant that in 1959, Frances said good-bye to family and friends, and took the train to Broadstairs, Kent, to enter the novitiate. In those days before Vatican II, this meant a real sacrifice of saying good-bye to parents, and her two siblings, Margaret and Patricia, knowing that her contact in the future with them would be an occasional visit in the parlour.

Frances and I first met in Dublin, Ireland in 1965, when I was sent there to do my degree in Science. She was already studying for an Arts degree, and left there after teacher training for



her first posting in Middlesbrough, in northeast England. From there, she moved to many schools throughout her teaching career—England, Jersey, Washington state, Rhode Island and finally Toronto (in St. Mary's and St. Michael's College School until her retirement in 2004.)

Frances has been described as a passionate teacher of English literature, making all of her classes come alive with her enthusiasm for Shakespeare, Keats, etc. Many past students attribute much of their success to Frances' love of her subject, but also her rigorous standards in her classes. For example, Stephen Tardif wrote this dedication in his doctoral thesis: "One fateful morning in high school, my English teacher, Sr. Frances McKenna FCJ, recommended to me a favourite poet of hers, Gerard Manley Hopkins. This dissertation—as much a result of her serendipitous suggestion as it is of her example as a gifted teacher, faithful religious, and gracious friend—is humbly dedicated to her."

But least you think Frances found this an easy vocation, let me quote a reflection she wrote:

"Teaching is Tough...often it's feeling more like the dough for pizza crust, than the leaven or the yeast...slapped on the board, kneaded, pummelled, rolled out flat: too thin in some places, too dense in other, disintegrating at the edges...until an encouraging word, a life-giving sense of humour, an understanding glance, a helping hand in gathering up the fragments, a sense of companionship begin gently to fold the edges toward the middle and rework the dough into a rounded, centred whole once again, smoothing a bump here, contouring an indentation, there...only to be ready for another re-shaping into a firm base to receive the myriad ingredients with all their unique spices and flavours—prepared for the next stage of the process.."

Besides teaching, Frances found time to do some volunteering, such as helping newcomers with ESL, and also bringing comfort to those suffering from AIDS at Casey House.

Frances cultivated the very beautiful gift she possessed of making the 'other' feel important—especially if the other person was one of the many who tend to be overlooked, e.g a cleaner, a receptionist, a care-giver. She did her best to establish bonds, and asking and remembering their names was how she did this.

Her friends were a very important part of her life, as both of her sisters died, and they had no family. She had the gift of making friends and keeping them! Your presence here today attests to this. I know that many of her friends and FCJ Sisters from around the world are present with us through the gift of technology.

Frances was so looking forward to her retirement years, but unfortunately her sight began to fail her, as well as her health. She suffered from a rare hereditary bone disease all her life, and very generously donated her body to science in the hopes of helping future generations, which is why you do not see her here today.

She spent 9 years at the Hazelton Place retirement home where she endeared herself to the residents and staff, by her warm and welcoming interactions with everyone.

Now we can rejoice that Frances is free of all her pain, and can see clearly to read all the books she wants!!



I leave you with this poem by Alfred Tennyson:

### **Crossing the Bar.**

Sunset and Evening star  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the  
bar  
When I put out to sea

For though from out our bourne of  
time and place  
The flood may bear me far  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crost the bar.

Twilight and evening bell  
And after that the dark  
And may there be no sadness of  
farewell  
When I embark



### **An Awareness Examen on the Theme of Peace**

As I began preparing this, I looked at Ignatian Spirituality sites and some of what I share comes from there. As I prepared to share this with you, I thought, really we all do desire peace don't we! So, I went on thinking—God puts this desire for peace in our hearts and thus God will provide what we need to

attain this desired peace! So, what helps us to come to the deep peace we desire? I recalled that as Jesus shared with his disciples he promised them the gift of the Holy Spirit, our great Advocate, and Jesus said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

Jesus said "I give you my peace". What gave Jesus peace, I feel, was His unwavering commitment to doing the Will of the Father. So, I think that is what will also give us peace –doing our best to be open to hearing God and striving to do God's will each and every day. This means living with a discerning heart – really 'sifting out' what is going on in our life and in our heart and choosing the greater good.

What we will find is that the very process of discerning, of noticing what's happening, of opening to God, will deepen our awareness of God's love and presence. For God is there, all the time, just waiting to be noticed, and always as a God who is love. It's a matter of beginning to pay attention to what's happening in our lives. All we really need is to say, from wherever we are in our journey at this point, with whatever ambivalences we might find within ourselves, is 'Okay, God, let's give it a go'.



Sometimes we think that choosing what we feel is God's will means everything will be easy –will be without pain and so on. But this is not so all the time. We have Jesus' example –sometimes doing God's will is NOT easy – others will not be happy with us, we will face difficult things in life, and so on. BUT inside, deep down, we do feel at peace- This is where the logic of our human brains cannot always articulate what our heart understands—that peace does come from doing God's will—from keeping close to God. Peace really does come from God and in doing what God asks of us. And in moments when I doubt this, when anxiety or doubt creep into my mind, I have to notice the inner, deep feelings, the quiet resolve within, and the inner peace – these things that are present as I take one step forward and then another in saying "Yes" to God's will. It doesn't always make sense to me, but I know I am so thankful for all the times I've heard myself say, "This makes no sense that I have peace right now." It is then that I know very clearly that God is offering me a grace: the gift of peace that the world cannot give. You can probably think of a time in your life when you just knew that something was right to choose to do – you knew deep down even though you might still have felt a bit sad, afraid, worried BUT these feelings were outweighed by the deep peaceful feeling in your heart that what you were choosing to do WAS the greater good, was what God wanted now and you moved forward!



There are many ways we can consider how to live into this peace that Jesus offered. For this reflection, as we seek ways to see how we can live into this peace that Jesus promised, I thought we could look at a prayer very familiar to us –St. Francis Prayer for Peace. As you pray this prayer, see if any word, phrase or section speaks to your heart. You might want to use this prayer as your Examen some evening.

### **Prayer of St. Francis :**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
Where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master,  
Grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved as to love.





For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

The following guide might assist you if you do choose to use this prayer for an Examen.

1. We take a moment of silence recalling the great gift we have in God present with us – maybe become more aware of your breathing or use a mantra –do whatever will help you to centre in as you begin to pray.

2. Ask the Spirit of God, the Spirit of peace to enlighten you as you enter into this Examen – to open your mind and heart to be ready to receive the gifts—the insights –the understanding --that God wants to give you.

3. Think of your day today. Reread the Prayer for Peace -- How were you an instrument of peace today --- Was there someone else or something else that brought peace into your life today? Did you bring joy, hope, did you console someone? and so on.... Give thanks for these moments. Praise God for enabling these moments of peace in your day.

4. As you reread the prayer, is there any one of the lines that reminded you of sometime today when you did not bring peace – where you brought sadness or doubt to another OR nurtured dislike, doubt or sadness within yourself? Be with those moments and express sorrow and ask for strength to change your behavior or your thoughts.

5. Ask God to help you to go forth as a person committed to being a 'peacemaker' with God's guidance and support. Think of tomorrow and maybe come up with one particular way in which you know that you can be a peacemaker in the coming day.

And to close your Examen, pray the Prayer of St. Francis.

Let's pray for each other as we go into our own daily living in various places in our world spreading God's peace by our words and actions and making our world a more peaceful place for all. God bless us all!

*Ann Marie Walsh, FCJ*

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