

# Walking With God

## *Family Life*

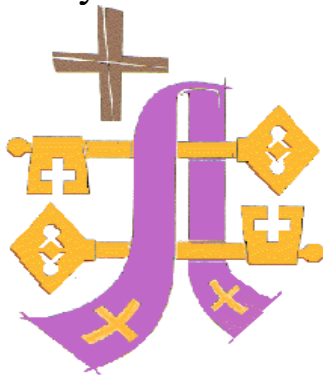


### Ch IX

When looking into my wife's eyes, I am struck with the maternal connection she has with our new daughter. It becomes obvious that we had only a small hand in her existence. It's true that our coming together, myself and

my wife, had set up the conditions for God to do His miracle of life. It is true in the absolute sense, that our love displayed the ideal of coming together as one, and the result of this love had produced another being, complete in every way and ready to take his or her place in the family of God. Now, the obligation is on us, her parents, to form and prepare her for her ultimate destination of heaven. This responsibility did not fall on deaf ears, even though we didn't completely understand it at the time.

For all of my time aboard navy destroyers, I've missed regular attendance at devotional services at church, such as, 40 Hours Devotion and the Stations Of The Cross. While at sea, Mass on Sundays had been sporadic, but anytime we entered port, taking advantage of local churches for Mass was a blessing. The time that the ship had spent in Newport always enabled me to, somewhat, renew my spiritual life.



This was a time of some upheaval in the church. Vatican II had come to a close and changes in the performance of liturgy in the Catholic Church were being presented to the people, a little at a time. Mass started to be celebrated with the priest facing the congregation coupled with, the vernacular, English, becoming the common language of The Mass in English speaking countries.

An advancement from Chief Petty Officer, to selection for a position as a Warrant Officer came to me along with a transfer to the west coast, specifically, the USS Kitty Hawk CVA-63, an aircraft carrier home ported in San Diego. My wife was very happy with these orders. It would be four

years since she was able to live closely with her family. With happy anticipation we made the move.

Her father, a casual Methodist, was curious as to why his daughter made the move to become Catholic. He never expressed outright disappointment, but was unable to understand her desire to become closer to God, as she found Him in the Catholic Church. I only mention this here because, her walk with Jesus, as my wife, becomes united with my own walk with God. As I cannot separate my life in the secular world from my walk with Jesus, I cannot separate my life in Marriage, with my wife, from Him either. It is our desire to not only become ONE with each other but in our marriage to be come ONE with Jesus as well. This is a life long endeavor, to be accomplished, hopefully, before we enter our graves.



In 1967, the downside of our San Diego assignment was that the Vietnam War was still in full swing and as a crew member of the Kitty Hawk, I would be making 2 more deployments to the conflict before my next assignment. The upside is that my wife would effectively be home with our daughter. We had purchased a house just 1½ miles from her teen age home with her parents who were still there. Our parish church, St Catherine Laboure Catholic Church was half way between our house and my in-law's.

St. Catherine's was a very loving community where we could easily make friends and feel at home. Except for the spirituality involved in liturgy, it was completely different from any church community that either of us had experienced before. The physical layout of this modern church was geometrically beautiful, but it did not lend itself to reflection on the life of Jesus or historical Christianity. There was no significant entrance to represent coming into a sacred space. The construction was semicircular with no visible main aisle representing the narrow path to Heaven. The lack of a visible separation of the sanctuary and the plain industrial look of the altar space wasn't very inviting. Votive candles representing the prayers of the people in petition or thanksgiving to God were not present, and there was an absence of statues or other reminders of the saints in heaven. A vigil light



announcing the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist was absent. The only crucifix would be the one carried in procession at the beginning of Mass. To the visitor, it was a very nice meeting hall.

There was a bright light in all this apparent dismal environment. The sisters assigned to the parish for religious education were beautiful and compassionate nuns. They also served, in parish administrative functions. Outside the parish office at the side entrance of the church building stood a statue of St. Catherine Laboure, as the focal point of a beautiful rose garden. When entering the church from this side entrance and proceeding down the hallway that greeted you inside, there was the parish office to the right and to the left, there was a beautiful Chapel that could hold about 30 worshipers. When entering the chapel from the hallway, the first thing coming into view, is a small altar of stone, framed with wood and iron work. Behind the altar is a tabernacle of gold and colored glass framed with the same iron work. Four windows of stained glass stood guard on either side of the altar. This small sanctuary was illuminated by a large vigil light announcing the presence of the Holy Eucharist and it shared a common wall with the altar in the main body of the church. The pass through behind the tabernacle, allowed for the transfer of the Holy Eucharist held in reserve following Communion on Sunday, from the altar in the main body of the church at the end Sunday Mass., to the Sanctuary Chapel. It all seemed very utilitarian except for the atmosphere within the Chapel itself. During Liturgical celebrations, the Holy Mass stands out as the anchor of our faith in Jesus Christ.



As Mass begins, I see the processional crucifix, held high by an altar boy, headed the procession, followed by two lighted candles held by two more altar boys, and then the priest enters. They all process across the back of the church and down the center isle of the semicircular congregation towards the altar. This the only Crucifix visible in the church was leading the procession and it is placed on a stand next to the altar facing the people for all to see. That very act identified this assembly as devoted to the Passion Death and Resurrection of Jesus, and I now knew that I was home in spite of the simple barrenness of the church. The Mass proceeded, this time, completely in English.

Even though My Sunday Missal had English translations along with the Latin, there was a difference when the priest actually recited the prayers

in English facing the people. There was a feeling of greater participation. The transition from one part of the Mass to another came more smoothly and therefore provided more continuity throughout the Liturgy. There was an electric organ on the left side of the altar with a few chairs for music leaders located by the organ.

In '67 the staffing of churches by the clergy, was significantly better than it is today. We had 3 priests assigned to St. Catherine Laboure Church, the pastor and two assistants. The Sunday 10:00am Mass was always said by the pastor while the younger assistant led the music. All of his hymn selections were unfamiliar to me and he constantly jumped around as if he were giving a private performance. The congregation didn't seem to mind and joined joyfully in singing with him during Mass, but to me, he was a constant distraction, that required considerable prayer, in an attempt to keep my mind on the Sacrifice of The Mass. I survived, however, with the help of this friendly congregation. I found the parish to be an excellent support community for my wife and daughter while I would be deployed by the Navy aboard USS Kitty Hawk.



While aboard the Kitty Hawk, to which I was an assigned crew member, we had a Catholic Chaplain permanently assigned to the crew. He was a young priest and very much attuned to the reforms proposed by Vatican II. I still had kept my Daily Readings from The New Testament that I received in boot camp. That and my

Rosary helped me through many lonely times while deployed. Fortunately we were able to have Mass every Sunday even when at sea along with periodic confessions. The reforms that were promulgated from The Vatican Counsel, tended to lessen the significance of the spiritual life that I had tried to develop in my earlier years. The priest became more of a friend, rather than, the '*Persona Christi*' that I had seen prior to the Counsel. Our

Chaplain, aboard the Kitty Hawk remarked that the new music, that was becoming popular at Mass, was all Scripturally based. I could see that to be true, in the words of the new music. I, however, felt very uneasy with the performance atmosphere that accompanied this new music. To me, the



music must accompany and enhanced the spiritual atmosphere of the liturgy and support our meditation,. Contemporary jazz or blue grass, did neither, but only drew on our desire for entertainment.



When writing to my wife at home I was able to gain some sense of her spiritual growth. She had given me a Rosary and continually told me of her prayers on my behalf. I I longed to be at home with her and watch our daughter grow and experience God's good life. It was not like being at sea today, with instant communications and video on the internet. I was able to speak with her by phone whenever we entered port, in this case that would be in Subic Bay, in the Philippines.

After three years aboard the Kitty Hawk, in the fall of 1970, I received orders to the Fleet Anti Air Warfare Training Center, on Point Loma, in San Diego, as an instructor. Shore duty at last. We would finally have a more conventional home life without lengthy deployments.

My wife had volunteered to organize a religious education program for kindergarten children at the church, so we both went to the San Diego University for training. This training, generally showed to me, the need for advanced religious education for adults in the church community. The program became very successful at St. Catherine Laboure Church where we tried to implant the knowledge of Jesus, and why He is, the Son of God, the children's friend, and companion throughout their life. This along with basic prayers was to support their familiarization with God in their families and along with some basic common prayers, prepare them for 1<sup>st</sup> grade and an introduction to the Catechism.

There were two nuns in residence at the church whose job was Parish Administrator and CCD Director. After the success in the launching of the Kindergarten Program, the Sisters asked me to teach 7<sup>th</sup> grade boys in preparation for Confirmation. I was quite unsure about this because no one else wanted 7th grade boys. My neighbor, from across the street had the girls class and encouraged me to consider it. After the sisters showed me the materials for the class, I became even more concerned. The materials were all in the form of a post Vatican II contemporary approach to the faith. I voiced my concern and they said I could modify the material to more closely conform to my style. I had only to conform to a specific list of topics, that were separately prepared by the sisters, and I found that acceptable and took the class.



I had remembered my instructions from the Baltimore Catechism but that was out of print, so with my recalled lessons and a copy of the Bible, I began to prepare for my students. The boys back grounds ranged from no memory of their First Communion preparation to one boy who could have taught the class except for his lack of maturity. That wasn't unusual, for who had ever heard of a mature 7<sup>th</sup> grade boy? How does anyone prepare another to encounter the Holy Spirit? I considered this a major part of their preparation for Confirmation. Much to my surprise, and with God's help, my first class went very well. What an energetic bunch I had. I found that teaching had more to do with my own learning than I had imagined. It was a rewarding and enjoyable experience that allowed me to gain a more closely felt relationship with God than was apparent before.

The materials for this class, provided by the parish, never had mentioned the importance of The Blessed Virgin Mary in our lives. It was as if she was forgotten after the Vatican Counsel. What had happened to her?

Soon I would be asked to become a reader at Mass, when lay men or women would be asked to read the Epistle, a selection from the Old Testament and the Psalms. Was I becoming closer to God? I didn't know. The more activities that I became involved in, the more questions I had regarding my place in His world. How did this make me a better husband and father? My daughter has been going to Mass with us on Sundays and she was taking part in the Kindergarten program that My wife had set up. You might say that she was our test subject in the preparation of all of our classes. We had prayed for more children, but that was not to be for us. This knowledge came with the feeling of great distress and I questioned God, "Why is this path for us"? No answer came.



My father had been sick for some time in the final stages of throat cancer. It was a very cruel disease that had stricken him. My mother and the family knew that there was no earthly fix that would cure him from his cancer and had been praying for his acceptance and comfort for some time. Even in his illness, he had been a regular attendee at Mass in Hightstown. In the last few months, when he could no longer get to Mass, the local priest would come to

Roosevelt with Holy Communion for him following the last Mass on Sundays. He had been cared for at home until his last couple of weeks when he needed continuing pain control. Entering a nursing home was extremely unpleasant for both him and my mother. We received word of his death and I took a flight to New Jersey for his funeral. His funeral Mass was at St. Anthony's in Hightstown, and was attended by his whole family, including his mother from Worcester, who was in her 80's at the time. It was painful for her to loose her oldest son while she had spent so many years clinging to life, herself. My mother took it better because she knew how difficult his life had been for him during the past 23 years. Even in her loneliness she took comfort in his passing from this life to the next.

My flight home was in sadness and relief, of a sort, as I held my father's rosary in my hands.

This was the time of the hippies, and the Jesus Movement in contemporary christian society. I continued to seek a closer relationship to God at this time, not so much from the influence of society but because of the suggestion of one friend at work. He introduced me to a book by Taylor Caldwell, "*Dear And Glorious Physician*". I relished reading that book and the travels of St. Luke with St. Paul, as he encountered Jesus Christ. I wanted that encounter too. A friend at church must have seen that I suffered, as many people do, with guilt and gave me another book that I found very helpful. "*That Man Is You*" by Louis Evely. Reading that book gave me comfort in Jesus and in His love and desire for the Salvation of all mankind. I would need to continue with my small attempt in comforting my wife as we both would continue to search. For God in our lives. After My wife Glenna's miscarriage, we applied for adoption of a child through the California Dept. of Social Services. The counselor, in our interview, listed us as un-adoptable parents, primarily because, as she said, I had not had a vasectomy, therefore we might yet have more children of our own. I guess, if we were exercising birth control, we would have been eligible.

## NOTES

### *from the future*

*If an alien came to earth today and was inquiring about our knowledge about the beginning of the Universe, there would be no common response to the alien's question. In this hypothetical scenario I would assume that alien possesses a knowledge of the same universe that we all live in. Would he be looking for a commonality of belief that we all possess. After all, the universe he sees is the same as the one that we see. If he acknowledged that we were all made by the same Creator, regardless of what we might call Him, he might wonder why there is such a difference of opinion about this subject within humanity. God has provided us the ability to be aware of the reality that He created. It is the sin of pride and arrogance that we humans reject this reality and try to create one of our own. In our self created reality we cannot achieve the utopic lifestyle that so many people say that they are looking for. When will we admit that we are not God and look to Him for our Salvation.*