



## The Baptism of the Lord January 13, 2013 C

### *Facing Adversity with Grace* *Lessons from the Saints*

*Facing Adversity with Grace—Lesson from the Saints* is the name of a book that I recently read.

I very much enjoyed reading this book in which the author, Woodeene Koenig-Bricker, shares with us wisdom from the saints and her own life on how to deal with a variety of sufferings.

In the introductory chapter of the book, the author writes:

*Since my fundamental misconceptions about suffering began with the stories of the saints, I returned to them to consider what they actually did with their suffering. The first thing I discovered was that by and large, the saints never cried out to God, “Why me?” but rather, “What lesson would you have me learn, my God?” This was a major “Aha!” moment for me. The saints viewed their suffering as a divine teacher. They turned their pain into lessons for personal growth into holiness. (Sometimes, in their zeal to learn whatever lessons God had planned, they took on additional suffering to speed up the process, which may or may not have been what God had intended.) They understood that whatever comes into our lives arrives in order to help us learn the lessons that we were created to learn in this lifetime. They didn’t see adversity as an end but rather as a means to an end. Suffering was the medicine prescribed by the Divine Physician in order to heal the sicknesses of the soul that affect all of us who live within the confines of time and space. St. Thérèse of Lisieux put it succinctly when she said that God is actually pained when we have to suffer but knows that it is necessary for our growth.*

*Moreover, the saints didn’t view their suffering as a way to make God love them but rather as one of the methods that God had allowed to refine, shape, and guide them into wholeness and holiness. Sometimes biographers record that saints used suffering as a way to demonstrate their love of God, but the more I read, the more I understood that the saints embraced suffering, not necessarily to demonstrate love to God (although in some times and cultures that did play a*

*role), but in order to increase their ability to love and be loved so that they could bring more of God’s grace to a hurting world.*

*The difference between those two positions might be subtle but it is critical. If we suffer because we think, as I did for so many years, that it will make God love us, we suffer for nothing.*

Another excerpt from the introduction:

*So when we experience suffering and adversity, our choices are actually fairly simple: We can choose to stay stuck in the pain (rendering it meaningless), or we can choose to learn from it and move on. Sometimes if we’ve created the suffering through choices of our own, we move on by asking forgiveness for our mistake and simply letting it go. If the suffering is something that has been allowed by God, such as an illness or accident, “moving on” may mean letting go of our ego-driven need to show God how much we can take. In some instances, it may even mean releasing our lives into death, which is the ultimate “moving on.” In any event, “moving on” means not becoming stuck in the suffering itself but, instead, seeing it as part of a greater journey of the soul.*

*This is what makes saints saintly. They see the pain in their lives as something to be used rather than as something to be endured. Because their pain has purpose, they transform the straw of suffering into the gold of growth in holiness, and as they experience this process, they feel the kind of joy that comes only from knowing the real meaning of life.*

According to the author, “*The purpose of this book: to help you find a way to transform your suffering by looking not at how the saints suffered but what they did with their adversities to grow both in wholeness as human beings and in holiness as expressions of God’s creative love, by using their lives as inspiration, I hope that you, too, will find the courage, in the words of Pope Benedict to the young Japanese girl, to “know that Jesus suffered as you do, an innocent and that the true God who is revealed in Jesus is by your side.”*

Fr. James Martin, S.J., notes: “*In this beautiful new book, readers will learn lessons about dealing with almost every type of human difficulty. The saints faced*

*human problems because they were human beings. Why not let them give you some human solutions to those problems, or share with you how they found God in the midst of their human lives?"*

## Table of Contents

1. Adversity and God's Love
2. Physical Pain: St. Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio)
3. Mental Suffering: Blessed Teresa of Kolkata
4. Physical Disabilities: St. Alphonsus Liguori
5. Addictions: Venerable Matthew Talbot
6. Divorce: St. Helena
7. Life Choices: St. Margaret of Cortona and St. Damien de Veuster
8. Marital Discord: St. Rita of Cascia and St. Catherine of Genoa
9. Family Matters: St. Jane de Chantal
10. Weighty Concerns: St. Francis Borgia
11. Prejudice: Venerable Pierre Toussaint and St. Josephine Bakhita
12. Temptation to Vice: Sts. Francis, Camillus, Romuald, and others
13. Financial Stress: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
14. Grief: St. Elizabeth of Hungary
15. Old Age: Blessed John Paul II
16. Life Lessons on Suffering

Lisa Hendey, founder and editor of *www.Catholicmom.com* writes: "*Woodeene Koenig-Bricker moves beyond platitudes and holy card images to give us a true, in-depth look at the spiritual wisdom of the saints. Whether you face struggles in your own life or seek to support a loved one who is suffering, Woodeene points you to the perfect spiritual companions to deal with a variety of challenges. I highly recommend this book for any spiritual seeker.*"

One way to support someone going through a tough time might be to give him/her a copy of this book—but only if he/she will read it.

We sold this book on Christmas Eve and Day. But since many of you were away and some of our winter parishioners have only just arrived, the book will again be on sale next weekend after all the Masses or at the parish office. Price: \$10.

## Eleven myths and facts about domestic violence

The following article by Victor Parachin appeared in the January 2013 issue of *Priest* magazine.

*"If anything is truly equal opportunity, it is battering. Domestic violence crosses all socioeconomic, ethnic, racial, educational, age and religious lines."*

- K. J. Wilson, When Violence Begins At Home

Sadly, a U.S. Department of Justice study indicates that approximately one million violent crimes are committed by former spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends each year, with 85 percent of the victims being women. For domestic violence to be defeated, it must begin with information. Here are 11 myths and facts about domestic violence to guide priests, religious and other spiritual leaders.

**Myth 1:** Domestic violence is only physical.

**Fact:** Abusive actions against another person can be verbal, emotional, sexual, and physical.

There are four basic types of domestic violence:

- Physical (shoving, slapping, punching, pushing, hitting, kicking and restraining)
- Sexual (when one partner forces unwanted, unwelcome, uninvited sexual acts upon another)
- Psychological (verbal and emotional abuse, threats, intimidations, stalking, swearing, insulting, isolation from family and friends, forced financial dependence)
- Attacks against property and pets (breaking household objects, hitting walls, abusing or killing beloved pets)

**Myth 2:** Domestic violence is not common.

**Fact:** While precise statistics are difficult to determine, all signs indicate that domestic violence is more common than most people believe or want to believe. Here's one example: due to lack of space, shelters for battered women are able to admit only 10 to 40 percent of women who request admission. Another example is from divorced women. Though they make up less than 8 percent of the U.S. population, they account for 75 percent of all battered women and report being assaulted 14 times more often than women still living with a partner. Whatever statistics are available are believed to be low because domestic violence is often not reported.

**Myth 3:** Domestic violence affects only women.

**Fact:** Abuse can happen to anyone! It can be directed at women, men, children, the elderly. It takes place among all social classes and all ethnic groups. However, women are the most targeted victims of domestic violence. Here are some statistics:

- One in four American women report being physically assaulted and/or raped by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, or date at some time in their life.
- According to the FBI, a woman is beaten every 15 seconds.
- In 1996, 30 percent of all female murder victims in the U.S. were slain by their husbands or boyfriends.
- Around the world, at least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime.
- While men are victims of domestic abuse, 92 percent of those subjected to violence are women.

**Myth 4:** Domestic violence occurs only among lower class or minority or rural communities.

**Fact:** Domestic violence crosses all race and class lines. Similar rates of abuse are reported in cities, suburbs and rural areas, according to the Bureau of Justice. Abusers can be found living in mansions as well as in mobile homes. Susan Weitzman, Ph.D., is author of the book *Not to People Like Us: Hidden Abuse in Upscale Marriages*. In her book, Dr. Weitzman presents case-by-case studies of domestic violence in families with higher than average incomes and levels of education.

**Myth 5:** Battered women can just leave.

**Fact:** A combination of factors makes it very difficult for the abused to leave. These include: family and social pressure, shame, financial barriers, children, religious beliefs. Up to 50 percent of women with children fleeing domestic violence become homeless because they leave the abuser. Also, many who are abused face psychological ambivalence about leaving. One woman recalls: "My body still ached from being beaten by my husband a day earlier. But he kept pleading through the door. 'I'm sorry. I'll never do that to you again. I know I need help.' I had a 2-week-old baby. I wanted to believe him. I opened the door." Her abuse continued for two more years before she gained the courage to leave.

**Myth 6:** Abuse takes place because of alcohol or drugs.

**Fact:** Substance abuse does not cause domestic violence. However, drugs and alcohol do lower inhibitions while increasing the level of violence, often to more dangerous levels. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that one-quarter to one-half of abusers have substance abuse issues.

**Myth 7:** They can just fight back or walk away.

**Fact:** Dealing with domestic violence is never as simple as fighting back or walking out the door. "Most domestic abusers are men who are physically stronger than the women they abuse," notes Joyce Zoldak in her book *When Danger Hits Home: Survivors of Domestic Violence*. "In the case of elder abuse, the victims' frail condition may limit their being able to defend themselves. When a child is being abused, the adult guardian is far more imposing—both physically and psychologically—than the victim."

**Myth 8:** The victim provoked the violence.

**Fact:** The abuser is completely responsible for the abuse. No one can say or do anything which warrants being beaten and battered. Abusers often try to deflect their responsibility by blaming the victim via comments such as: "You made me angry." "You made me jealous." "This would never have happened if you hadn't done that." "I didn't mean to do that, but you were out of control." Victims need to be assured that the abuse is not their fault.

**Myth 9:** Domestic abuse is a private matter and it's none of my business.

**Fact:** We all have a responsibility to care for one another. Officials at the National Domestic Violence Hotline offer this advice to people who see or suspect domestic violence: "Yes, it is your business. Maybe he's your friend, your brother-in-law, your cousin, co-worker, gym partner or fishing buddy. You've noticed that he interrupts her, criticizes her family, yells at her or scares her. You hope that when they're alone, it isn't worse. The way he treats her makes you uncomfortable, but you don't want to make him mad or lose his friendship. You surely don't want to see him wreck his marriage or have to call the police. What can you do? Say something. If you don't, your silence is the same as saying abuse is OK. He could hurt someone, or end up in jail. Because you care, you need to do something—before it is too late."

**Myth 10:** Partners need couples counseling.

**Fact:** It is the abuser alone who needs counseling in order to change behavior. Social Worker Susan Schechter says couples counseling is "an inappropriate intervention that further endangers the woman." Schechter explains her position: "It encourages the abuser to blame the victim by examining her 'role' in his problem. By seeing the couple together, the therapist erroneously suggests that the partner, too, is responsible for the abuser's behavior. Many women have been brutally beaten following couples counseling sessions in which they disclosed violence or coercion. The abuser alone must take responsibility for assaults and understand that family reunification is not his treatment goal; the goal is to stop the violence."

**Myth 11:** Abusers are evil people.

**Fact:** "Anyone can find himself or herself in an abusive situation, and most of us could also find ourselves tempted to be abusive to others, no matter how wrong we know it to be," notes Joyce Zoldak. Abusers are people who may be strong and stable in some areas of their lives but weak, unreasonable and out of control in other ways. This does not excuse their behavior because abuse is always wrong. Abusers need to be held accountable for their actions and encouraged to seek help promptly by meeting with a psychologist, psychiatrist, therapist or spiritual leader. Abusers can also receive help from the National Domestic Violence hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or via their website: <http://www.thehotline.org>.

With an informed community, and with the help of family and friends, the cycle of abuse can be broken.

Have a blessed week,

*Le Sarah*