

WHERE THERE IS NO LOVE PUT LOVE AND YOU WILL FIND LOVE.

St. John
of the
Cross

– art by Kristen Brunelli

DENVER CATHOLIC WORKER HOUSE

NEWSLETTER FALL 2022

THE WONDER OF GOD'S GRACE

It has been quite the journey since April 2nd, which was our first meeting to begin visioning a new Catholic Worker house in Denver. We have been so blessed with multiple graces and can't help but stand back in awe. The combination of the ever-present divine graces and the helping hands of many friends have definitely brought us to a new place.

We were not very far along in the process of finding a place when the possibility of renting the 11-bedroom house owned by the Vincentian Volunteer program arose. It is a wonderful place which would be perfect for hospitality: just off Colfax and with spacious rooms as well as a great kitchen and public spaces including a chapel. The price tag was high, and so we decided that we would rent some of the rooms on the second floor to people in need of low-income housing in order to cover some of the cost. Patrick was the first worker to move into the house, enabling us to sign the lease. He has a full-time job, which makes doing hospitality difficult, but it's been such a blessing to have him living there, managing the building and overseeing the rental situation, until we could get enough volunteer help, and especially another live-in worker, to begin to take in guests. Currently we have three fine folks renting, and that piece is going well with a lot of help from Patrick.

So what about hospitality? We now have *two* persons who want to join us as live-in workers. One, Daniel from Milwaukee, will be joining us on December 1st, and the other, Swan, intends to join us in early November. Both have previous experience living in Catholic Workers. Can you believe it?!! I remember the days when I used to say to God, "Look, if you have someone in mind to come be a live-in worker, would you let them know quick because I am the only live-in worker in this 9-bedroom house!!" And other times I would say, "We need a little help here," and the next day someone would appear at the door and say, "I would like to



be a live-in worker.” How could one live in such a situation of divine response without feeling exceedingly grateful?! I have a friend who says those kinds of happenings are God winks. Here is another one for you: We had been

pondering how to deal with food and cooks for our Thursday night gatherings, and suddenly we receive an email from Tasha saying she would like to do some food preparation for us. She was glad to do the meal preparation for a bunch of Thursday nights, and it turns out that she is an enthusiastic addition to our gatherings. If you have read any of the Catholic Worker lore, you know that such events are commonplace in CW experience.

Of course, we do not know what we will be doing at the end of the lease of this building in July, but we can be pretty sure there is a plan and that we have only to be present to the nudges of the Spirit as things unfold. We appreciate your presence to us in your thoughts and prayers.

– Anna

IT'S BETTER TO HAVE LOVED AND LOST ...

We've fallen in love with all our Congolese guests. Anna and Asenate are special buddies, who play excitedly together and walk to the playground in the park. Asenate never wants Anna to go home from a play time. Juliano shows me how to talk through the Portuguese interpreter on his telephone so we can deal with practical issues and share his family's joys and sorrows. I walk with Ana and Asenate to doctor and dentist appointments at Eastside Clinic, and will never forget the day when we came out into an unexpected winter wonderland of heavily falling snow, Asenate's first. William becomes a tender big brother to Asenate and a Portuguese/English translator for others of us. Fally and Juliano are close friends. Ana cooks for the five of them, and we hear them through the open windows laughing over many long evening dinners at our big CW table.

On September 3, after just under a year with us, Juliano breaks the news to us that their case for asylum has been denied at the first hearing, and they'll be deported by the end of the week if they don't move to another city. Oh, no! We don't want them to leave. But we certainly don't want them to be deported. We buy bus tickets for them to Portland, Maine for the day after tomorrow, and we're all suddenly bereft. Everyone is crying when we say good-

bye, except Asenate who hasn't been told they aren't coming back. For days, all sorts of little things bring tears to our eyes. I can't bear to look at their room, where they've left so many things they couldn't take with them. The house is suddenly silent, though four people are still living there, each engaged with his or her own life.

Before very long, we hear through Fally that the family changed their destination in the midst of their bus trip and has arrived safely in Montreal. ICE is probably as glad as they are that they're no longer under its jurisdiction. They're going to be okay, starting again on a new life in another new place. We're happy for them; we go on with our lives, too; and yet a broken heart takes time to mend. Our love keeps yearning after them. They've gotten woven into our hearts, will always be part of our family, and we're deeply sad that we'll probably never see them again.

But we'll never be sorry that we've loved and lost. The kind of love that has no selfishness in it, that just wants to pour itself out for the greatest good of another person, is a tremendous gift from God. It seems to spring out of nothingness within us and warm everything it touches. We're blessed by its passing through us, blessed by the preciousness of the other person whom we find ourselves cherishing so deeply and unconditionally that surely this is how God cherishes us all. We're better ourselves for having lived in this love. If our loved one has to leave, a part of our heart feels torn out to travel with them. The depth of our pain mirrors the depth of our love. And yet, miraculously, we haven't really been broken but rather stretched. The love is still there. Now it pours itself out into prayer. God's love dances in the space between us and our distant friends. And now we have new friends to fall in love with.

Before the fateful asylum hearing, we'd gotten an email from a place that receives refugees in Georgia. Would we have space for a woman from Venezuela and her four-year-old son? No, we were sorry, we had no space. Then suddenly, unexpectedly, we had space, and even in the midst of our grieving we wondered if her need and our space were meant for each other. We think maybe so. She hopes so, too. Milagros and Lucas arrived on September 27 and are already at home in our house. Michelle cooked a celebratory family dinner to welcome them. Lucas is a delightful, happy child with the special challenges of asthma and autism. Milagros is an amazing mother, energetic, hard-working, goal-oriented and ever attentive to her child. Fally, whose first four languages are Lingala, French, Portuguese and English, has enough Spanish to supplement Anna's and help us communicate. We pray their stay with us will be blessed, and we trust God for more than enough love to go around.



– Jennifer

SUFFERING AND THE INCARNATION

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes: "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church." I have found this a challenging verse in scripture for many years. How could the Passion of Christ be lacking in any way? In terms of salvation, it is perfect. Yet, in terms of the human experience, abundant examples of suffering have drawn me into the mystery of this verse.

Only in the last few years of living and working in some solidarity with the poor and vulnerable have I even come to know much of the suffering that goes on all around us in society. The Catholic Worker Movement draws me intentionally into that. While living at Casa Juan Diego en Houston, for example, I witnessed the harsh reality of the experiences of migrants in our world, through which Jesus also lived in His childhood. From the perilous conditions that force them to make the incredibly dangerous and cruel journey, to the inhumane treatment they receive at the hands of agents of the State and the detention centers where they are imprisoned along the way, the wounds they suffer are immense. Sadly, they also are often slandered and dehumanized in public discourse, rather than shown their due dignity as our fellow children of God when we "welcome the stranger."



The Old Testament prophets preach repeatedly against the disregard for those who suffer in society. Jesus himself came into the mess of human violence willingly, and as a Lamb led to slaughter, gave Himself up to conquer death by His personal suffering. He also commanded us numerous times: "Follow me." Perhaps some false piety of mine prevented me from grasping what He meant for most of my life. Many beautiful souls

have shown me what the wounded Body of Christ looks like incarnated in the world. I pray that we as Christians never fail to recognize Christ in the poor and suffering.

Today, I reflect on suffering from that broadened social perspective, as well as through the lens of personal chronic pain. Having spent more than 200 consecutive days with migraine pain after a concussion, I have had to grapple with suffering as an unavoidable daily reality. Initially, despite the pain, I recognized and even thanked God for the providential good of spending a few weeks before my wedding on a retreat of sorts in a dark room to prepare spiritually. After a few months with little improvement, though, I even grumbled that Jesus only spent 40 days in the desert, not months in agony, especially not months that many expect to be full of newlywed honeymoon bliss. I should have opened the Rule of St. Benedict sooner this year to remember how gravely that spiritual master warns against grumbling.

Jesus tried many times and in many ways to tell us about the Kingdom. His preaching includes such divine wisdom as: “the first shall be last and the last shall be first,” the Works of Mercy, the Beatitudes (and Woes), and frequent practical reminders against the evils of ever-present human conditions of greed and the selfish exploitation of power. If we have spiritual ears to hear, then we might see suffering as a sure path to God. After all, who is more “last” than those crippled in pain or other suffering? Jesus ministered to them in particular throughout His earthly ministry: the blind, lame, tax collectors, “sinners,” lepers, foreigners, outcasts. Looking to the least in society is where we will most readily find suffering and, as many saints, from Vincent de Paul to John Paul II, proclaim, also where we will most readily find Christ in disguise, ready to be shown mercy.



Paul tells us in his second letter to the Corinthians that he rejoices in his weakness as, by it, he is made strong in Christ. A challenge of many stages of human life is admitting our changing weaknesses and inabilities, particularly due to our health. If we have faith in the Word of God, though, that is where Jesus tells us, like St. Thomas, to put our hand into His side, to enter into His suffering, to “complete” His suffering by uniting ourselves to the Cross. May we echo “my Lord and my God” in that moment. Jesus wore not a crown of precious metal but the crown of thorns, and it is a fitting image to unite my own neurological sufferings to Christ’s Passion.

St. John Paul II gave many beautiful gifts to the world, and among them the apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris* offers us insight into this most universal experience:

Those who share in Christ's sufferings have before their eyes the Paschal Mystery of the Cross and Resurrection, in which Christ descends, in a first phase, to the ultimate limits of human weakness and impotence: indeed, he dies nailed to the Cross. But if at the same time in this weakness there is accomplished his lifting up, confirmed by the power of the Resurrection, then this means that the weaknesses of all human sufferings are capable of being infused with the same power of God manifested in Christ's Cross. In such a concept, **to suffer means to become particularly susceptible, particularly open to the working of the salvific powers of God, offered to humanity in Christ** [emphasis added]. In him God has confirmed his desire to act especially through suffering, which is man's weakness and emptying of self, and he wishes to make his power known precisely in this weakness and emptying of self.

May we follow the example of those like Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day who run to “the least” of our brethren in order to find Christ in the midst of suffering, and to share in it through mercy. May we rejoice like Paul in our own weakness that humbles us to allow the

Spirit to animate us when we realize that we cannot live well by our own strength alone. By dwelling in the divine mystery, our sufferings do complete what is "lacking" in the Passion. And while I still pray for healing, I pray more fervently "Thy will be done," which means for now, seeking the spiritual fruit of my suffering, by uniting it to the supreme act of love, Jesus on the Cross, and growing in loving solidarity with all who suffer.

– Sam Tomaso

ACHIEVE NOTHING TO DESIRE EVERYTHING

“The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.”

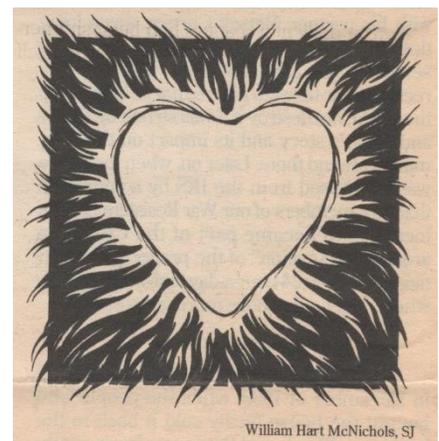
Psalm 119:72

“Thy very name spoken soothes the heart like flow of oil; draw me after thee where thou wilt; see we hasten after thee, by the very fragrance of those perfumes allured.”

Song of Songs 1:2-3

When I read these pieces of scripture, I receive deep comfort and I feel open, present, and grounded to my life and the life of the world. To me, this is a good and just state of being; being before God and being open to His action. However, for the majority of my life my purpose was to achieve and not to be. I was driven to accomplish one goal after another, with each successive goal building on the prior one. And in that manner, I would gain peace of mind for myself and earn the approval of my family, friends, and professional peers. Naturally, this way of being also translated over to my relationship with God. I had in my mind a supernatural ledger with God. If the final tally of that ledger was positive, then the transaction was successful, and I'd head towards salvation. If the final tally was negative, then my transaction with God was unsuccessful, and I'd head towards damnation. As far as I could judge, I had little hope of ending up with a positive tally on my ledger with God, and so why waste time on a losing effort? This way of thinking led me straight away from God and straight into selfishness and self-centeredness. And so, I easily turned away and began a long relationship with cynicism and pleasure.

During that long and meaningless relationship I also had to harden my heart and deafen my ears to the eternal echo of God. I trained myself to discard the pristine and subtle desire for wholeness (or as Jesus calls it "perfection"). Yet He still pursued me. And as a result of His pursuit I kept thinking: Was His truth better than money? Could His name alone soothe my soul and draw me to Him? Indeed, despite all the effort to repress holy longing, every once in a while, I did secretly entertain God and the possibilities that He presented. Far away from my friends and my contrived distractions, He found a way to wake me in the night and spur me to look for who was knocking on the door of my heart. But again, I dreaded failing God. After all, if I were to leap into the arms of God and remain safely in His embrace – that is, to prefer

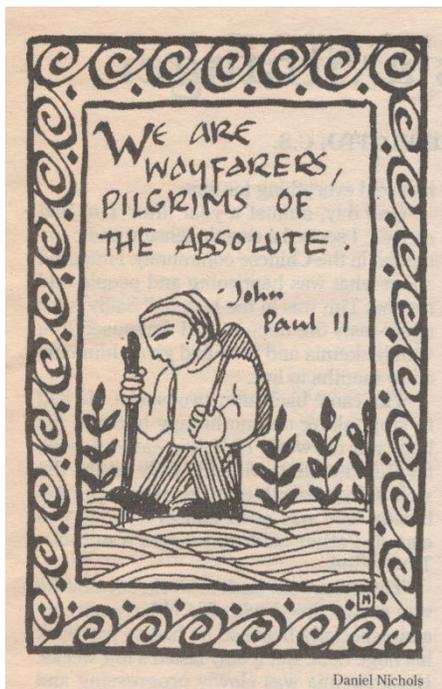


William Hart McNichols, SJ

His words to money and to have Him draw me to Himself – I had to understand and believe some core concepts really deeply. Did I love my neighbor as myself, and did I actually see the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist? I did, and still do, fail miserably at achieving or realizing both of these Truths.

I do not see a child of God when I see each person I encounter, and certainly not in those people who upset me. I do not see the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. I am usually thinking about something else when in line to receive communion. In my old understanding I would be in some very serious spiritual trouble. Firstly, I have failed to achieve the most important commandment of Jesus, and secondly, I am not deeply devout enough to truly understand the ultimate – and essential – meaning of bread and wine at Mass. All of my efforts consistently resulted in more of the same sinful ways: callous to those who hurt me and by and large indifferent to the Eucharist. Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy upon me – a sinner.

As far as I could see at that time, there were only two ways to solve this existential problem: I could beat myself up for not “getting it” and trudge drearily to the end hoping for an undeserved reprieve from God at the time of my judgment, or I could call the effort hopeless, stop trying, and get on with the party.



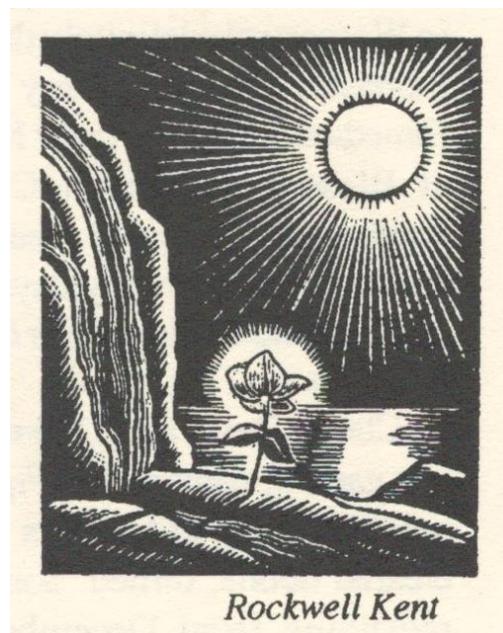
Then a few years ago I encountered a third way to respond to God. I have since come to realize that this way is truly a road to God whereon the destination is always a homecoming and is forever waiting for my arrival. In this third way we respond to God by simply reaching out to, and striving for, Him without consideration of achieving anything. In a disposition of the heart and soul I achieve all by desiring Him. By reaching just beyond the end of my fingertips to touch that which is Real, I expand my soul, open my heart, and feel my feet on the earth. By responding to God’s call I awaken from the trance of worldly life and see more clearly the world around me, all created from nothing by Him in a pouring out of infinite love. In my responding and reaching I develop my desire for Him. I desire Him who draws me to Himself. I seek and attempt to penetrate into the ultimate ground of being that wells up through Him, with Him, and in Him.

“I believe that the *desire* to please You does in fact please you.
And I hope that I have that *desire* in all that I am doing.”

– Thomas Merton

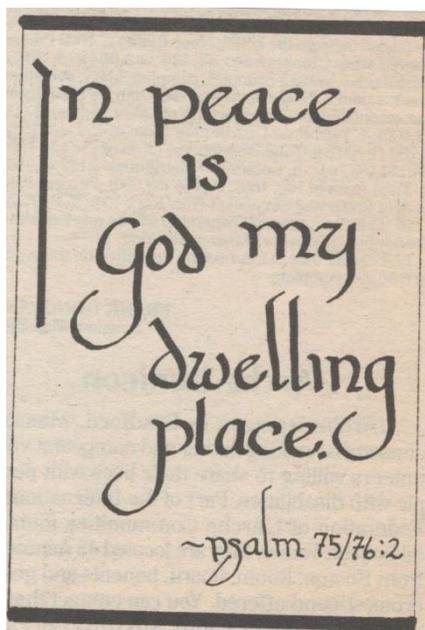
In so doing, it is all about *being* rather than *achieving*. Being responsive to the echoes of God in my heart produces – in a roundabout sort of way – small fruits of charity or humility

in daily life. I desire to grow my faith, and I do that by listening for Him and being meek to His sounds and signs. In so responding I find myself willing to change so to better respond – to develop my discernment of His Will, and in so doing my desire to respond grows more and more. Achievements, in and of themselves, to please God become hollow. If not the fruit of holy desire and manifested from the sensitivity to the motions of our hearts, achievements undertaken solely to please God soon disintegrate in the hurricane winds of worldly and fleshly affairs. To that point, Father Richard Rohr has said that the quality of one’s journey will dictate where one ends up. By meditating on my desire for God and listening to the interior motions of my heart I am firmly planted in my journey to God. By walking this great highway with my desire I inadvertently (or in divine sublimity) manifest the fruit of His Truth in my being.



“Whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.”
 Psalm 1:2-3

I find deep consolation when I wake up at three o’clock in the morning thinking about God. I know that I did not wake up because I wanted to think about God. I woke up because of my very real problems and anxieties – as a husband, as a father, as a person. However, knowing that God was soon on my mind soothed me. I have better oriented myself, through responding and reaching for God, to that which is True and Real. In the silent hour of 3am even though I am asleep, my desire for God is awake. And when I awake, my desire is sitting quietly by my bed to greet me.



Knowing that my desire for God never sleeps, even though I do, comforts me. When a desire for God replaces the requirement to achieve His approval, then spaciousness grows within my heart and waits patiently for His perfect and infinite love to arrive at its own time, unexpectedly, and secretly. And in waiting patiently for His arrival my desire for communion with Him energizes, and I go seeking Him more. Sometimes, when I seek Him more “I see crosses everywhere” – in the faces of my brothers and sisters and in the body and blood of Christ on the altar.

– Patrick Smith

THE CHAIR OF ROSES

The Poem

One rose is not enough.
Two roses are not enough.
Three roses are not enough.

One box is found
but is still not enough.

Walking arm in arm does not always work.

One thorn or thorns of many keep
working together with the shrubs and the chair
of roses.

The rose shrub and chair found a way to
work together
creating a new way of life,
living and working together
for protection to one and something different.

They live on to save the thorns, to overcome the human waste left behind.

The Story of the Chair of Roses

The chair of roses has been raised, a form of mankind, as in many large forms of change. The normalities of life live on.

The rose and chair did not give birth and death to humans.

Their life together has been raised to a new, larger, great change of the physical life that humans left behind.

The life of a rose is the journey of the thorns, sitting in the chair, as two different lives become new works together of their own beauties that become untouchable and become some kind of normal and natural scent, talking to the humans of a new growth of working together.

When it becomes forced, it becomes nothing but war.

This is what gave life to the roses and chair, to fight the sour stomachaches of human ways.

The chair and rose joined together, giving to one another, creating and giving to each other. The humans keep dying to get rid of it, because they do not want to understand or watch to see them grow together. The rose and the chair are ordered by the human words, that it's a dying cause, to leave to face another war of the human race of life. It becomes a new fight for life to live within, that someone else has done wrong.

Why do humans keep causing these wars of problems?



The demands of threats take over from naturals, to become nothing but compost in some human way, instead of trying to live and work together for all of this earth.

When will they learn there is a right to live and change?

There will be a bully wall of roses one day for humans to see and watch the rose and the chair build this change together in their love's finding.

This is the story of the chair of roses, that found a tempered way to work and live together on the upholstery left on the chair.

The birds are carrying minnows, fish and worms for the rose to feed on, because there were no arms on the chair to bring food to it, just a strong back and legs to stay strong with the rose shrub.

The chair of service and the shrub of roses want to live together to birth the budding of a rose wall.

The story grows on into the
dusk and morning light
of something in the past within
the presence of life's
changes.

– Michelle

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