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The Coming Home Network International

Membership Newsletter

March 2004

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Praying Without Ceasing (Part Three)

The Hail Mary

This is part three of a reflection on prayer, from the perspective of a convert, that began two newsletters ago. If you did not receive these, you may download the entire reflection from our web site at http://www.chnetwork.org/Praying_without_ceasing.html. I present this with no delusions of being a spiritual expert or director but rather a fellow pilgrim wondering whether you've experienced the same struggles and shared similar discoveries.

In Part One, I gave some hints that I have gleaned from holy friends, priests, and books on how to pray the Liturgy of the Hours more effectively. In Part Two, I began a reflection on praying the Rosary. I discussed how praying the Our Father as a prayer of continual conversion has helped me grow closer to Jesus every time I pray this family prayer.

Let us continue our reflection on the Rosary:

As a convert to Catholicism after forty years of an active Protestant faith walk, I struggled with my prayers to Mary and other saints, primarily because I had become centrally loyal to praying to Jesus. Other than in worship or public religious ceremonies,



I rarely prayed to the Father or the Holy Spirit. My prayers were "to the Father through Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit." But in private, it was always Jesus and me. Praying to Mary and other saints seemed disloyal—at least that's what that nagging accusatory inner voice kept harping.

I learned, that asking Mary and the saints for intercessory help is valid and extremely efficacious, but this didn't prevent me from becoming at times hopelessly distracted while repeating decades of the Hail Mary.

A similar mental focus to what I mentioned last month in praying the Our

Father helps me grow spiritually in praying the Hail Mary, even when repeated over and over during the recitation of the rosary. I think of the Hail Mary as divided into basically two Parts, one of veneration and the other of petition. First, in my mind's eye—after I've positioned myself directly before God in the Lord's Prayer, the past, present, and future surrendered into His care—I envision Mary standing beside Jesus, affectionately with Him and drawing my attention to Him. Part one has three stanzas, and it also helps to recognize as you're praying that each phrase concludes by drawing our attention to Jesus: "...Lord ...Jesus ...God."

Part One: The Veneration of Jesus' Mother and my mother by adoption:

"Hail Mary, full of grace the LORD is with thee;

Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, JESUS;

Holy Mary, Mother of GOD..."

Part Two: Our humble petition for her intercession with her Son:

"...pray for us sinners [strike breast],
now and at the hour of our death.
Amen."

continued on next page... 1

Lord Je - sus Christ son of God have

mer-cy on us sin-ners. Lord...

The Glory Be

This ties it all together, leading us to re-confess in adoration our love for God. Following the example of our traditional Latin and Eastern Rite brothers and sisters, I like to cross myself and bow slightly every time I address the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



The Jesus Prayer

This ancient prayer is the main stay of Eastern Rite Catholics, though it also has a rich heritage in our Western Latin Rite. I am particularly drawn to this prayer because of the scriptural emphasis on the name of Jesus. Consider only a sample of the hundreds of references:

“Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it.” John 14:13,14

“In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in my name. Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” John 16:23,24

“And His name, by faith in His name, has made this man strong whom you see and know...” Acts 3:16

“...always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.” Ephesians 5:20

“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Colossians 3:17

“...yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let Him glorify God.” 1 Peter 4:16

I have found this prayer especially powerful to help pray without ceasing while walking or even milking! It sets a rhythm for both work and prayer. We can each find our own rhythm in this prayer, but for me the above, seems natural.

I guarantee few of you (if any) who still milk a cow twice daily by hand will find

this prayer a lifesaver in transforming what is sometimes a drudgery into a peaceful, rhythmic, contemplative stillness with the Lord in the barn that “flies” by effortlessly!

I hope these hints from a novice are at least a little helpful. But most importantly, as brothers and sisters in Christ, let’s pray without ceasing for the Church, Her leaders, priests, deacons, religious, bishops, and especially our Holy Father, the work of the Coming Home Network, and of course each other.

In Christ,

Marcus Grodi



Help Lord, My Fleece Isn't Wet!

By: Michael A. Maturen, M.Div.

I began my journey into the Catholic faith as an infant. I was adopted as a baby by a Catholic couple. My father though, never really attended church. My childhood was similar to most cradle Catholics: Mass every weekend, Catechism, receiving the sacraments, and confirmed at the age of thirteen. After my confirmation there was no more teaching and no more faith development. Like many Catholic boys, I felt a call to the Priesthood at an early age. I remember setting up a church in my basement. I would take small potato chips and grape juice, and pretend I was the Priest saying Mass. I served as an altar boy and a lector. At the age of sixteen, I made a public commitment to become a Priest.

Shortly after that, I fell in love for the first time. This posed a problem with my future plans. Hmmmm...Priesthood...girls. Priesthood...girls. Okay. GIRLS!

Priesthood was shoved to the back of my mind. I became involved in drama, yearbook, and other activities that began to take the place of faith. Perhaps like many cradle Catholics, I really didn't understand the Catholic faith. I knew the basics and that was it. The teaching of the faith, at that point, was going through growing pains. Just a generation or so earlier, Vatican II had taken place, and nobody was really sure how to implement it. As a result, my generation did not often receive proper catechesis.

I graduated from high school and headed off to college. I was fairly active in the local Catholic Church at Central Michigan University. It was great because one of my favorite priests as a boy had been assigned to the university parish. It felt like home. However,

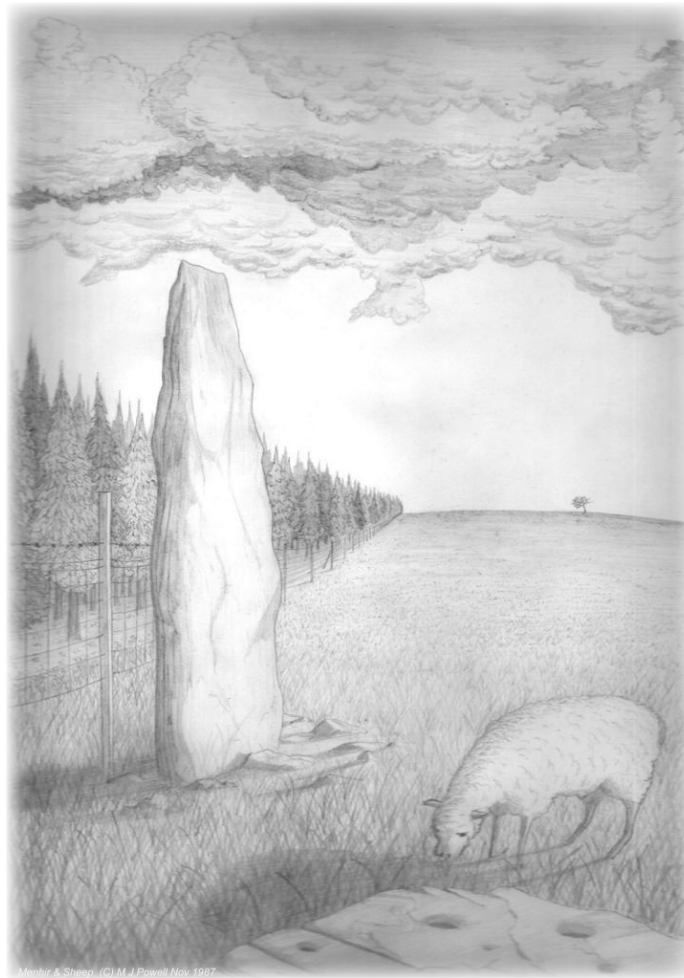
something was missing. My girlfriend and I had drifted apart and I became very lonely. I began to drink heavily. Soon, my studies gave way to parties. Life had become tedious. I considered myself a Catholic but I didn't grasp the meaning of the Catholic faith. I still

attended Mass faithfully out of a sense of duty more than any devotion to Jesus.

I flunked out of college, having spent too many hours having fun and too few hours studying. Soon, a bright spot appeared on my horizon. I was working as a disc jockey at an FM radio station, when I met a woman who changed my life. Susan was raised in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. We began to date. She attended Mass with me a few times, but was not interested in going again. She didn't understand all the "stuff" of the Catholic Church. I attended her local church once or twice, and decided that I couldn't attend there either. After about a year or so, it became clear that we

would likely get married. We both wanted some kind of faith life, so we began to look around.

About this time, I was introduced to an Evangelical Christian. It was my first real experience talking to a Protestant



Monika & Sherry / ©MMA Powell Nov 1997

about faith. He asked me a question that I had never really pondered before, "If you died tonight, do you know for certain that you would go to heaven?" I didn't know. From my early teaching, or lack thereof, I had no idea and was confused. He shared with me how I needed to "be saved." He offered hope that I didn't feel I had.

Then one night, while sitting in front of the TV drinking a beer, I flipped on a program called "The 700 Club" with Pat Robertson. I was hearing the same things my Evangelical friend told me. Mr. Robertson said that I could have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and I wanted that. I needed that. That night I met Jesus Christ in a very real and personal way, a way I hadn't experienced before. I gave my heart to Christ that night, and He lit a fire in my soul that still burns brightly today.

In a few short weeks, I left the Catholic Church, and began attending church with my new friend and I was excited! Full of energy for the Lord, I began to go door-to-door sharing my newfound faith with others. I began my sixteen-year journey into the world of Evangelical Christianity. Over the years, we drifted from church to church. We were Charismatic Presbyterians, Independent Fundamentalists, Brethren In Christ, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and finally, Baptist. WHEW! To sum it all up, we were "CatholiChariPresbyBreth All-itists".

Along the way, I felt a renewed call to ministry, and began preaching in 1989. I continued to serve as a part-time Youth Pastor and preacher for almost eleven years.

In late 1999, I began to develop an interest in Liturgy and the Sacraments once again. I began reading some of the early writings of the Church. I wanted

to embrace the theology, but I couldn't see myself being C-C-C-Catholic again.

Over the years, I became fairly anti-Catholic. I was convinced that the doctrines taught by the Catholic Church couldn't be found in the Bible, and that they weren't true. In my mind, Catholics were robotic people who went to church out of guilt, worshipped statues, Mary, and didn't know the Bible from a cookbook. I didn't like the Catholic Church and neither did my wife. I called the papacy the anti-Christ from the pulpit. In short, I had become an anti-Catholic

I began to search the internet...what a wonderful thing is our modern world! I was beginning to be reminded by the Holy Spirit that I had made a commitment to become a Priest.

zealot.

Even with all that, I was still attracted to the liturgy. I kind of missed all of the Catholic "trappings," the vestments, the candles, and the structure. Most of all, I had a nagging feeling that Communion was supposed to be something more than potato chips and grape juice for Jesus. It was supposed to make a difference. I was becoming dissatisfied with my evangelical life.

I began to search the internet, what a wonderful thing is our modern world! I was beginning to be reminded by the Holy Spirit that I had made a commitment to become a Priest. Sorry God! I was married now! I had kids! This just wasn't going to work. Then, I ran across a group called the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches. They sounded kind of "Catholic" and looked kind of "Catholic." They even had Bishops that wore funny looking pointed hats. I was intrigued.

I contacted the Bishop of that denomination in Michigan, and found

out they were a group of committed Christians. They were loving, worshipped with a charismatic flair in a liturgical setting, said Mass, and had the Eucharist. They emphasized the study of God's Word, as well as making the faith real by having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They were "catholic" but they were Protestant too. I was confused, but I knew that I couldn't fulfill my call to Priesthood as a Catholic because I was married and had children. I began to explore ordination with them.

In July 2000, I was ordained as a Deacon in Atlanta, Georgia. I began my study toward a Master of Divinity, and was ordained to the Priesthood in January 2002. I had finally fulfilled my boyhood dream. I was a Priest!

In the meantime, I had been introduced to the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Gaylord, Bishop Cooney. He was a nice man and we began to talk. The president of the company I worked for in New York happened to be Bishop Cooney's cousin. We arranged to meet, and little did I know how providential that meeting would be. I began to develop an interest in Catholic doctrine. I saw a billboard for Catholic radio and tuned in. I heard an old familiar voice from my days as an evangelical in the Detroit area. Al Kresta? A Catholic? Had he lost his marbles?

The more I listened, the more it began to make sense. I was hearing what I had been missing all these years, the teaching of the Catholic faith.

My wife, who still thought the Liturgy was NOT a good thing, noticed my Catholic leanings. Our good friend and physician is a devout Catholic. Susan had gone to see him one day, and she told him I was thinking about becoming Catholic. She said that she would follow me anywhere...except THERE!

Then, I made a BIG mistake. I bought a ROSARY and started to pray. First, I prayed the Our Father. I couldn't quite bring myself to say that Hail Mary prayer. I even made up stuff instead of the mysteries, too Catholic, you know! Hesitantly, I began to pray the Rosary as it was meant to be prayed. Slowly, I began to be drawn closer and closer to the Catholic Church. Mary's lasso had caught me!

My wife still wanted nothing to do with the Catholic Church. We started a small "house church" that was really going nowhere. Our kids had no youth group to attend. We had tried several other churches, but none of them seemed to really fit us. We were frustrated. The only active youth group was at the Catholic Church. I wrestled a bit with God, and He led me to the conclusion that I must return to the Catholic Church. I made a deal with Him.

In the book of Kings in the Old Testament, Gideon was given a message from God. He wanted proof. He told God that he would lay a fleece on the floor, and if the message was truly from God, the fleece would be wet and the floor would be dry. Well, I told God that I would use my wife as the fleece. When SHE said it was time to become Catholic, we would become Catholic. (I figured we were pretty safe on this one!)

Three weeks later, we were having lunch together, complaining about our spiritual state. I was a fill-in pastor at the local Presbyterian Church. They loved my preaching, and wanted us to apply for the full-time position. They had no real youth program and we were frustrated. We talked about what we should do to get our kids back on track spiritually. Then, it happened. Susan looked up at me across the table and said, "Why don't we just become Catholic?" I nearly fell over.



We began our journey home almost immediately. We contacted our local Priest. I found out from the Bishop that we had to have our marriage validated, and that I had to go to confession. Oh no! I had forgotten about that! It had been almost 20 years since my last confession. We were going to need a whole team of Priests and a keg of Holy Water!

On our 15th wedding anniversary, we were remarried at St. Anne Parish in Harrisville, Michigan. Our two physicians, one of whom Susan had told she would never become Catholic, stood up as our witnesses.

Almost nine months later, my wife and two of our three children were confirmed and received their first Holy Eucharist. I was blessed to be one of the Eucharistic ministers that night and was able to nourish my family with the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ! Our youngest child will progress through the Sacraments at the normal rate.

We are now active in the ministry of the Church. I teach an adult Bible study, and serve as a lector and an extraordinary Eucharistic minister. I also speak around the country, sharing my heart with everyone who will listen. My wife—the one who would



the Sacraments. He threw me a banquet in Heaven where ALL the angels and Saints rejoiced at my return. I ate of that marvelous banquet here on earth, and continue to each time I receive the Body and Blood of our Lord.

God has truly blessed my family. I treasure my 18 years as a Protestant, because I learned many things that will benefit my Christian walk. We as Catholics can learn much from our Protestant brethren: Bible study, fellowship, and evangelism. Likewise, our Protestant brothers and sisters have much to gain from us. We can share the majesty of the Liturgy, the power of the Eucharist, the freedom of confession, and the love of the Blessed Mother.

It is my prayer that we will come together as one body, to carry forward until the end. It is truly a blessing to be Home in the Catholic Church, under the authority of the successor of Peter. This Communion of Saints that we enjoy is a rich storehouse of blessing. I rejoice with each of you as you make your own journey into the truth.

never become Catholic—is the new Kindergarten catechism teacher at St. Anne Parish.

As I look back on the journey, I see many parallels with the parable of the prodigal son, found in the Gospel of Luke. A wealthy man had two sons. One of the sons decided to take his inheritance early and leave. Before long, he had squandered his money on fast living. He was broke and desperate. He decided to get a job feeding the pigs. This was the ultimate low for a Jewish person. Soon, he recognized that he would be far better to go back to his father as a servant than living with the pigs. When he returned home his father

saw him and ran out to receive him. The young man repented and received from his father a fine robe, a ring, and all the finery of his former life. His father threw a huge banquet in his honor.

Like many of you, I was raised in the majesty and richness of the Catholic faith, but I took that wealth and squandered it. For nearly 18 years, I lived without the wealth that was mine for the asking. When I recognized what I had given up, I came back. I came back to be a servant but my Heavenly Father ran out to receive me. He gave me a fine robe that had been washed clean in the Blood of the Lamb. He gave me all the finery I had given away,



INTERCESSORY PRAYER

CHAPTER AND VERSE: Defending The Catholic Faith From Scripture

Catholics And Intercessory Prayer:
Why Not Go Straight To God?

By Gregory Oatis



THE CHALLENGE: The whole notion of praying to saints is an unnecessary, unbiblical innovation. We should take our petitions straight to God. There's no evidence in the Bible that the dead can even hear the prayers of those on earth. Praying to dead saints is a carry-over from pagan ancestor worship. It certainly isn't Christian.

This question contains two separate issues. First is the practice of intercessory prayer—asking another believer to lift up our intentions to the Lord on our behalf.

The second is whether the holy ones

in heaven are accessible to us through prayer—whether they are aware of what is happening on earth, and whether they care.

Concerning the first question—joining together the faithful in prayer on behalf of a specific intention—there is little debate. In scripture, we see people of faith asking others to support them in prayer again and again. St. Paul writes to entire communities of believers asking that they pray for one another: “...I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be offered for everyone...” (1 Tim. 2:1-3)

We also see St. Paul offering prayers for his follower, Timothy: “...I remember

you constantly in my prayers, night and day.” (2 Tim. 1:2) If all this is needed is for Timothy to pray for himself—directly to God, without Paul’s intercession—then why would Paul bother to initiate such an ambitious prayer schedule on Timothy’s behalf?

Jesus likewise instructs his followers to pray for one another, even their enemies: “...Pray for those who persecute you.” (Mt. 5:44)

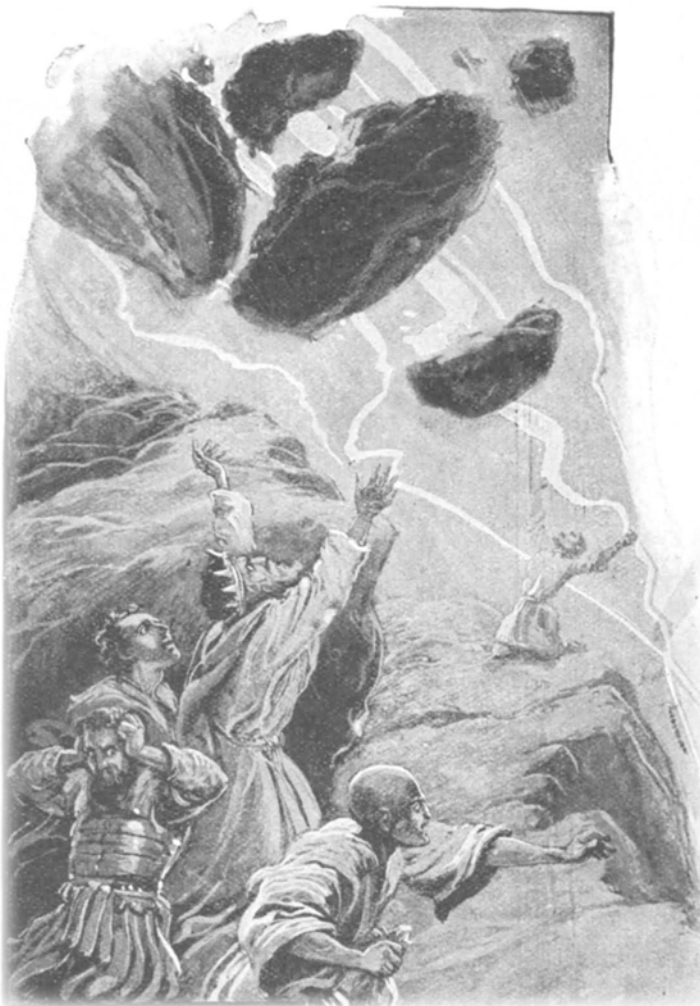
In the Old Testament, we see God himself ordering petitioners to seek another’s intercession on their behalf. After Job perseveres in his trials, his three self-righteous friends: Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, express dismay

that God intends to punish them for their pride and their glibness.

God's response is quite telling. He says to them, "...let my servant Job pray for you, for his prayer I will accept, not to punish you severely." (Job 42:8) Not only does God refuse to accept their pleas for forgiveness, he directs them to ask Job to intercede on their behalf. Only after Job prays for them does God relent and forgive.

Why is this roundabout prayer practice necessary? St. James gives us a hint when he instructs the community to summon a priest to pray for the sick: "The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful." (James 5:13-16) Clearly, the prayers of a holy person are more likely to be heard and answered than are the prayers of an impenitent reprobate.

As for the second question—whether the saints in heaven can hear our requests for their intercession—we need only refer to St. John's vision of heaven recounted in the Book of Revelation for the answer: "Each of the elders held a harp and gold bowls filled with incense, which are the

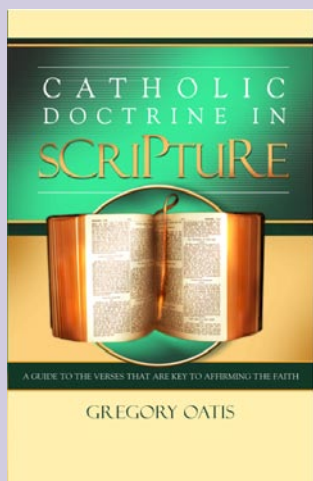


prayers of the holy ones." (Rev. 5:8) The saints who have gone before us in faith intercede on our behalf, presenting our prayers before the throne of the living God. Note also that the prayers being offered are said to be from those on earth who are "holy." And in Rev. 6:9-17, we see the martyrs in heaven passionately interested in events

on earth, if only to avenge their unjust deaths: "They cried out in a loud voice, 'How long will it be, holy and true master, before you sit in judgment and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?'... Then the sky was divided like a torn scroll curling up, and every mountain and island was moved from its place."

There is no doubt that the prayers of the faithful—in heaven and on earth—have a direct and significant effect on God's plan for individuals and for the world. Which is the very definition of intercessory prayer.

Mr. Oatis is author of the book, **Catholic Doctrine in Scripture: A Guide To The Verses That Are Key To Affirming The Faith** published by CHResources. It is available at your local Catholic bookseller, or by calling toll-free: 877-455-3208.



Want to read more? Try reading Gregory Oatis' book on *Catholic Doctrine in Scripture*.

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Denomination	Convert	Journey	TOTAL
Episcopal	115	42	157
Baptist	60	45	105
Methodist	49	50	99
Lutheran	43	53	96
Presbyterian	41	27	68
Pentecostal-Charismatic	32	15	47
Non-Denominational	19	21	40
Churches of Christ	9	16	25
Evangelical-Fundamentalist	19	6	25
Anglican (outside USA)	16	7	23
Charismatic Episcopal Church	12	11	23
Church of the Nazarene	5	12	17
United Church of Christ	8	6	14
Mennonite	7	5	12
Reformed Episcopal	6	5	11
Eastern Orthodox	4	6	10
Reformed	5	5	10
New Age	5	4	9
Congregational	6	2	8
Conservative Anglicans (in USA)	2	6	8
Church of God	2	5	7
Disciples of Christ	3	4	7
Mormon (LDS)	5	1	6
Christian & Missionary Alliance	1	4	5
Brethren in Christ		4	4
Salvation Army	1	2	3
United Church of Canada	2	1	3
Unitarian-Universalist	1	2	3
Evangelical Friends (Quaker)	2		2
Grace Brethren	1	1	2
Jewish	1	1	2
Old Catholic	1	1	2
Seventh-Day Adventist	2		2
Worldwide Church of God	2		2
Christadelphian	1		1
Christian Covenant Fellowship	1		1
Christian Renewal Church	1		1
Church of the Brethren	1		1
Jehovah's Witness	1		1
Moravian Church in America		1	1
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*March 1
Noah Lett*

*March 8
Jeffery W. Bail*

*March 15
Kim St-Maurice*

*March 22
Fr. Jay Scott*

*March 29
Deacon Michael Ross*

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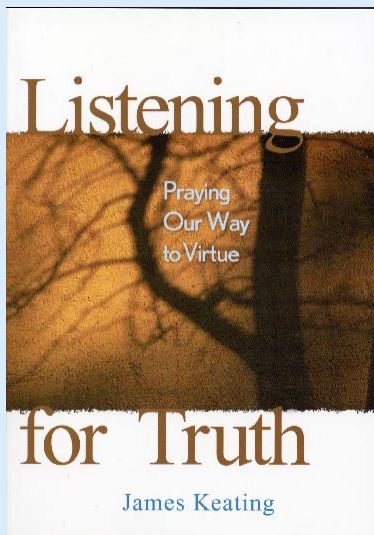
Tuesdays 10 A.M.

Saturdays 11 P.M.

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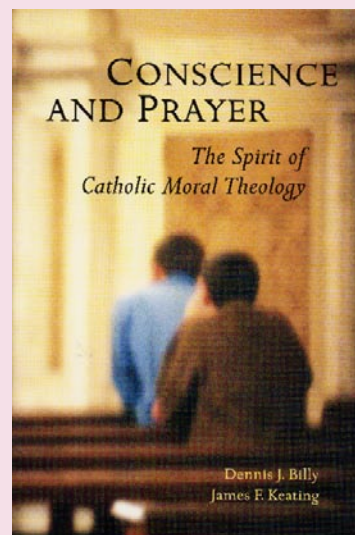
Wednesday 1 P.M.

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Listening for Truth
Praying Our Way to Virtue
 By James Keating

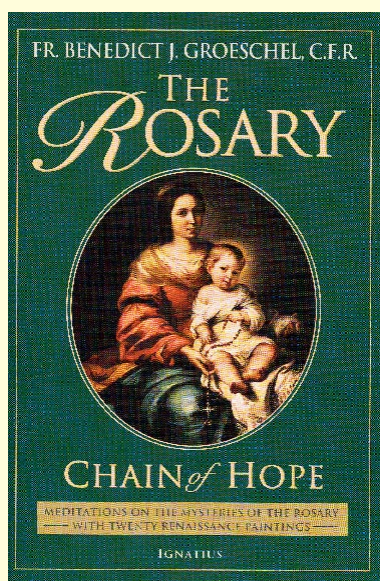
Listening for Truth leads men and women in the search for a fuller experience of God that begins with prayer, grows in the rediscovery of our spiritual being, and grounds itself in the truth of Jesus Christ.



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 By James Keating & Dennis J. Billy

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 By Fr. Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R.

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Looking for ideas about prayer?
Check out the articles inside this
month!