

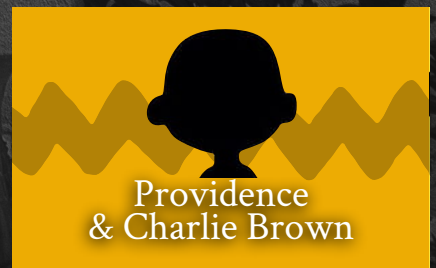
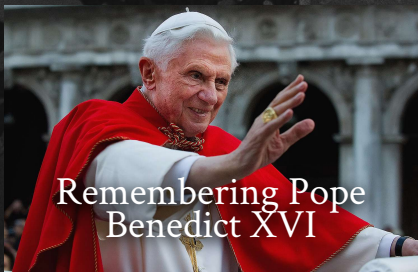
JANUARY 2023 ISSUE

EMPTY TOMB PROJECT

THE MAGAZINE

Why is the Church Unwilling to Change?

The Need for Truth



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ETP: The Magazine

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Thomas Griffin is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project. He is the chair of the religion department at a Catholic high school on Long Island where he lives with his wife and two sons.

THE MISSION *AND* A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The Mission: (A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION)

Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine is a non-profit that exists to bring the reality and power of the empty tomb to as many people as possible. We are convinced that if practicing Catholics, and fallen away Catholics alike, encounter Jesus as a real living person their lives will be radically changed.

We are a Catholic media company that desires to bring relevant cultural and spiritual topics to our readers in an honest and fresh manner. We dive into topics that truly matter to people, themes that are brought up in people's homes as well as in church circles. We desire to bring uniformity in message and an increase in inspiration to Catholics across Long Island.

Along with providing the most dynamic content we are committed to producing a product that is beautifully captivating to the eye. To do so we will always rely on the best Catholic designers (StartupCatholic) so that the content can be amplified by the aesthetics of the magazine.

In order to reach as many people as possible with the critically important message of Christ we rely on donors in order to grow the mission and impact of our magazine. This will allow us to remain free and ensure that anyone who desires to meet Jesus today will have that opportunity. If you feel called to support us, please reach out to me via email: EmptyTombProject@gmail.com and join us in the mission! Donations are tax deductible.

Editor's Note:

2022 is over, on to 2023. We saw a year of increased world health following the pandemic, but one that saw devastation in Ukraine. Many have experienced serious economic strife while so many rejoiced in being able to spend more time with family and friends in-person. *Roe v. Wade* was overturned by the Supreme Court, but so many lives are still threatened. And, most recently, we lost a pope.

With 2022 behind us and so many concerns about the future, we must consistently rely on God in order to bring us the peace that only He can give. As we embark on another year, may it be one that we live fully alive and one that we live in the light of the empty tomb.

Thomas Griffin is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine.

MAJOR HEADLINE: Why is the Church Unwilling to Change?

By Thomas Griffin

“Church is too traditional and old-fashioned,” remarks the masses on social media and major news outlets. “Why doesn’t the Church get with the times on so many issues?” asks countless Catholics who have decided to leave the Church and no longer practice their faith.

These questions are both popular and mainstream. They reflect opinions of the world concerning the fact that there are many teachings in the Church that are not popular and that defy the mainstream understanding of life, the human person, religion and God. Since so many disagree with some teachings, they ask the obvious question, “Why does the Church keep these teachings if they are so unpopular and out-of-touch with what people think?” This is actually a good question which deserves a decent answer.

First, there are different levels of teaching in the Catholic Church. Some teachings can adapt and change (like aspects of the liturgy) while some cannot change (like the teaching that God is real or that Jesus rose from the dead). This is important because the teachings that appear to be old-fashioned are all ones that cannot change. However, they cannot change because they are rooted in the truth and given to us by God Himself.

Two famous examples are the Church’s teaching on marriage and the Church’s teaching on abortion. Marriage is the lifelong commitment of a man and woman to be forever faithful, loyal and exclusive to one another in their love while being open to receiving children. Marital love is, by its definition, open to receiving new life. Two individuals can love each other in many different ways, but marital love is concerned with spousal love. The love between a man and woman is so great that it literally results in the creation of other people. In that way, their love reflects the creative power of God’s love - who loved each one of us into existence.

Therefore, the Church cannot change marriage because it is given to us by God. God created human beings as male and female. God, in His divine wisdom, made the world in a way that new life comes very specifically. In the nature of the family, we are never born alone. It always, biologically and scientifically, takes a man and a woman to make a new baby. This undeniable truth is rooted in the fact that God is love and He desires for us to know His love through our parents - who love us into existence and are called to sacrifice everything for us.

This month, on January 20th, the March for Life will take place for the 49th straight year in Washington, D.C. This past June, we received word that the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. The Church teaches that abortion is immoral in every single case. That the act, by its very nature, is evil. In order to understand this we must know what the act actually is.

Abortion, according to the National Library of Medicine, is the suctioning out of a human fetus from the woman’s womb. The human tissue is then placed in the trash or medical waste

containers. It is strictly a medical procedure whose sole purpose is to kill the unborn child in the mother's womb.

Science tells us that what is in the womb is a human life. From the moment of conception (sperm fertilizes an egg) we have a unique set of human DNA. Scientific study has also revealed that a baby has a heartbeat at 18 days. Brain waves at 42 days. All body systems present at 8 weeks. Fingernails at 11 weeks. Has vocal chords and can cry at 12 weeks. Can feel pain at 20 weeks. Can survive outside of the womb at 22-23 weeks.

Every human life has value. No matter the mental or physical health of the child and no matter how that child was conceived. So the Church is not old-fashioned and bigoted against women. The Church, in the name of God, defends the most vulnerable members of society - an infant in the womb. The Church stands for the infinite worth of every single human life no matter his or her location, development or age.

This is why the March for Life continues each January. Because every life is worth protecting and because we are called upon, by God, to stand for the value of each life. Being pro-life means that a person is willing to take a position on this volatile issue knowing that some people will be offended. We do this, not to be arrogant, but for the child in the womb. So we must never hold to the position that we are personally against abortion, but are alright with others utilizing it.

Bishop Robert Barron helps clarify this: "We must never say 'I am personally opposed to abortion, but publicly I support it.' However, since opposition to abortion, as we have just shown, is not a conviction born of 'dogma' but rather of moral reasoning, it is utterly incoherent to claim that one can hold to the position privately but not defend it publicly. It would be precisely analogous to someone in the nineteenth century saying that though he personally finds slavery abhorrent, he will do nothing to eliminate it or even to stop its spread."

The Church is not out of touch with reality, but deeply entrenched in the fight for the good because she is willing to say, even against mass criticism, life is worth protecting at all stages. Life is beautiful and has meaning no matter what. Human dignity does not change, so we cannot make compromises for the worth of individuals when it is convenient or easy.

In these two difficult topics, we know that real people are impacted in real ways. So these words are not meant to gloss over real experiences people have. However, we are called upon to live in the light of the truth. If that makes us sound old-fashioned, so be it.

Thomas Griffin is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine

Living the Faith The Bible in a Year

By Amanda Bonagura

The Bible in a Year Podcast: Man-Oh-Man, What a Gift!

“Murders! Affairs! Betrayal!” My eighth grade CCD teacher tried his best Hollywood sales pitch to hook our class on the Bible. I was all set to open my pink Bible embossed with a cute little lamb and dive into a salacious read until I remembered that my last attempt reading the Bible ended in failure.

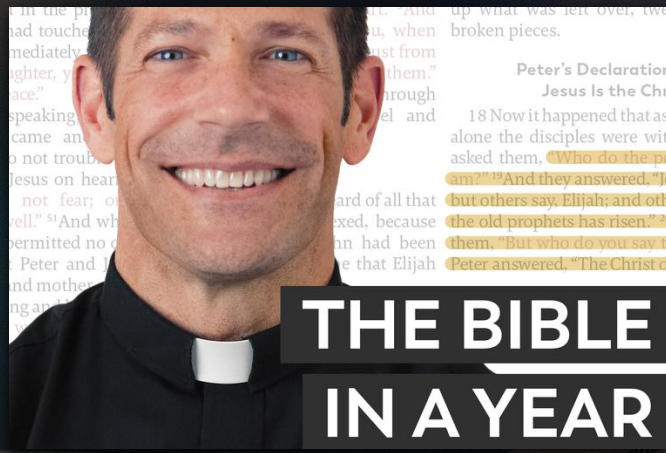
My best friend and I had a Bible-reading competition in sixth grade, which got us both to Numbers-Deuteronomy territory before we gave up. Besides being bored by the seeming endless enumeration of names, numbers, and rules, I could not understand how the “Good Book” could contain so many heroes who acted like complete zeroes (check out Gen. 9:20-29). Without a teacher to contextualize the unseemly behavior of figures like Noah, Abraham, and Jacob (aka Israel), or explain the significance of the names and numbers, my Bible went back to being a dust-collector.

Freshman year of college brought with it a New Testament course that should burn in fiery Gehenna for all eternity, and which should have been more accurately named “Lose Your Faith 101.” My fuzzy sixth-grade tour of the Bible gave me a house built on quicksand instead of rock, and I finished the year a complete skeptic. “Enlightened,” I decided to sign up for another course that would further prove that my childhood faith was plain old childish. But God’s sheer paternal goodness rescued me from the fowler’s snare. During the summer, I traveled to Europe to participate in a Catholic fellowship. At the height of my doubt, God placed in my path intelligent people who could articulate, defend, and live out the faith authentically.

Providentially, the Bible course I took out of spite turned out to be a totally unexpected gift: the professor had us read the Bible as a literary masterwork instead of a tool of the Patriarchy. I finally felt like Tobit (Tobit 11:7-15) and St. Paul (Acts 9:17-19) when the scales fell from their eyes.

After college, I engaged Scripture through daily Mass and the Magnificat. My pesky pride led me to believe that I was getting smarter. The Holy Spirit graciously showed me that my Biblical knowledge still deserved improvement, not a pat on the back, when my sons got The Action Bible as a gift. In a matter of weeks, my kids’ knowledge put me to shame!

Then the Holy Spirit came to the rescue when my friend invited me to listen to the Bible in a Year podcast (BIYP). Though I had been deleting the Ascension Press emails, I decided to join my friend in listening to the podcast. What a gift! Episodes run about 25 minutes, conveniently removing all reasons why a busy person cannot listen. Fr. Mike does all the work: reading up to



three different Bible passages, saying a prayer, and offering an explanation—part interpretive key, part reflection.

He has an uncanny knack for revealing the deeper meaning in the most tedious verses (try tackling Numbers 1 without coffee); giving compassionate counsel when reflecting on the most challenging passages (I am thinking of you, King David); and inviting the listener to see the Bible not as unrelatable and arcane, but rather as a mirror that shows our own ugliness (yikes, Judges). Even Fr. Mike simply explaining that the people in the Bible are trainwrecks helped me reconcile Noah the Hero with Noah the Zero. The only disclaimer is that my eighth grade CCD teacher was right about the Bible being chock-full of scandal: a lot of episodes are not suitable for younger ears!

Listening to BIYP completely transformed my worldview, unlocked the tricky passages, and left me in awe of how much the Bible is a complete masterpiece. I have fallen in love with Joseph from Genesis, Tobit, Judith, Esther, and the faithful Jews in 2 Maccabees (even though 2 Maccabees makes me squeamish). I cannot get enough of Proverbs, Wisdom, and Sirach. Without BIYP, I would never have found a gem like, “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid” (Proverbs 12:1). Though I had heard the Gospels my whole life, hearing Fr. Mike interpret them has made “all things new” (Rev. 21:5).

BIYP has been an incomparable blessing, but most importantly, it continues to confirm for me that the Bible’s “words are trustworthy and true” (Rev. 22:6). As Fr. Mike says, “Man-oh-man, what a gift!” Subscribe, press play, and be eternally grateful.

Amanda Bonagura is a stay-at-home mother of six kids ranging in age from teenagers to a toddler.



Current Events: Remembering Pope Benedict XVI

By Thomas Griffin

Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) passed away on the last day of 2022. Much ink and talk has been spilled recapping the life of this man of God. His wisdom, influence, and humility have been highlighted by many who knew him well and by countless Catholics who owe their faith to him in many ways.

Remembering the pope will mean that we honor the breadth and depth of his knowledge of and intimacy with Jesus Christ. To see both of these qualities we can highlight two of the most famous quotes of the late-pontiff along with highlighting his last words.

First: “The world offers your comfort, but you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness.” Benedict knew that nothing worthwhile in life comes without sacrifice and some challenge. Comfort has been made into a god for our culture and that is why so many are unhappy and unfulfilled. The path of following Christ is filled with crosses, but they are ones that we never carry alone. We are invited to choose greatness and be sacrificial. That is what will set us free.

Second, from the first paragraph of his encyclical letter named *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love):

“*We have come to believe in God's love:* in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”

Here, the pope stresses the importance of clarifying what following Jesus is all about. Christian faith is not about following rules or being told what to do. Being a Catholic is not about doing whatever the Church tells you to do. A Christian follows Jesus because they have met him as a real person who has changed the trajectory of their life. So, Catholics go to Mass every Sunday, follow the 10 Commandments, go to Confession, and act sacrificially because they desire to be with Jesus and become like him.

Finally, the last words recorded by the pope shortly before he died were: “Jesus, I love you.” Some speculate that these are his final words because he was responding to Jesus’ words to Peter in his Resurrection appearance on the Sea of Tiberias (John 21). Everyone remembers Peter’s disastrous threefold betrayal of even knowing Jesus while he is on trial. Here, Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Peter answers, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love.”

In his final words, Benedict, who stood as the earthly Peter, responds to the question that Jesus asks each one of us at every moment of our lives. Beyond all else, Benedict loved God. When we boil down our lives, let us respond in the same way. If we do so, we will be remembering Pope Benedict XVI and be aligned with the sole reason why anyone is Christian in the first place.

Thomas Griffin is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine.

A person with short brown hair is seen from the side, looking out at a sunset over a mountain range. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue, and the mountains are silhouetted against the light. The person's face is partially in shadow.

Trusting in Providence with Charlie Brown

By Thomas Salerno

Along with countless fans the world over, I adore Charles M. Schulz's classic Peanuts comic strip. I've always had a soft spot for good ol' Charlie Brown. In many ways, Charlie and I are kindred spirits. We both have a natural pessimistic streak. During moments of anxiety or uncertainty, we both have a tendency to catastrophize, imagining the worst possible outcomes. When setbacks strike unexpectedly, we both usually panic, throwing up our hands and shouting "Good grief!"

Yet for all Charlie Brown's dramatic displays of pessimism, I believe that deep down he's secretly an optimist. I can prove it to you. Sure, Lucy may think he's a "hopeless blockhead," but no matter how bad things get and no matter how much he may gripe and complain and feel depressed, Charlie Brown never gives up. More importantly, he never loses his innate kindheartedness.

In the fiber of his being, Charlie Brown knows that things often have a way of working out for the best. Divine providence is always at work in the world. I've seen God moving in my own life, and I'm sure you have too.

After graduating college, my "sensible" and "practical" plans for the future all seemed to fall apart. I was accepted to graduate school, but I soon found that I wasn't financially or psychologically prepared for it. I had to temporarily defer enrollment. Then temporarily became indefinitely.

Meanwhile, I ended up working an internship in New York City. It wasn't glamorous work, but it was paying my bills. I clung desperately to the hope of a permanent position. It was not forthcoming.

Then the 2020 pandemic hit and I was out of a job in a New York minute. My life seemed like it was in complete shambles. To paraphrase something Charlie Brown once said, I felt like I was losing control of the whole world.

Without anything else to do, I began taking my latent creative talents more seriously. I started exploring my faith through blogging and freelance writing. I prayed earnestly to God that if this radical career shift was really His will, He would prosper it.

Over time, things began to fall into place. When I needed material assistance, God led me to those with the resources to help. When I was plagued by worry and self-doubt, he sent friends to encourage me. When I was uncertain of the way forward, he opened unexpected doors. I soon discovered a hidden passion for using my voice to communicate, inspire, and entertain.

If the pandemic never happened, I might still be toiling in obscurity doing work that did not completely satisfy me, all the while squandering the talents God gave me for writing and speaking. If I hadn't put my hope in God and sacrificed my need to be in complete control of my destiny, I would not have been open to embarking on the bigger adventure the Lord had in store for me.



Living a life grounded in trust can be scary, even for Christians. It's much easier to stick with the safe, practical option, rather than step out boldly in faith. But I can assure you, when you give the Lord room to work in your life, you will be blessed in ways you may not expect!

Remember the ending of A Charlie Brown Christmas? Charlie Brown picks the poor, sad-looking Christmas tree that nobody wanted, convinced that he's doing the right thing. At first he's ridiculed by the other kids, but Charlie Brown's confidence and optimism are rewarded — the little tree is transformed by loving hands into a joyful expression of faith and hope..

It's true, I don't have advanced degrees or an impressive title, and I'm certainly not rolling in cash. I still have plenty of bad days. There are times when I want to channel my inner Charlie Brown and howl that "everything I do turns into a disaster!" Yet, beyond all the anxieties and challenges of life, I've discovered an abiding sense of purpose and satisfaction, knowing that I'll be using my God-given talents to have a positive impact on the world around me.

I realize now that there's a bigger plan at work than what I can perceive from my limited human perspective. No matter what obstacles or setbacks I may face at the moment, things really do always seem to work out for the best when we surrender to God's Providence. Don't be afraid to take a chance and trust in God. If you let Him, the Lord can surprise you beyond your wildest hopes and dreams.

Thomas Salerno is an author, freelance writer, and podcaster from Long Island. You can follow his work at thomasjsalernowrites.com.

TAKEAWAYS:

1. Truth Does Not Change.
2. Pope Benedict Has Much to Teach Us.
3. Listen to the Bible in a Year Podcast.
4. God is Always There for Us.



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