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MARCH 2023 ISSUE

EMPTY TOMB PROJECT

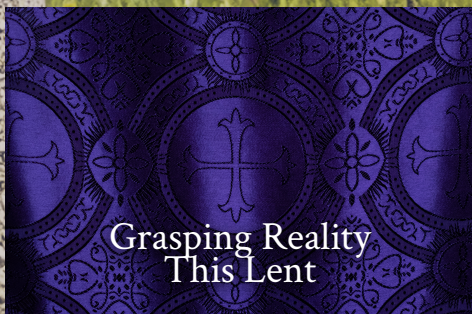
THE MAGAZINE

*Die Before
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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:

In exciting news this month, we have partnered with Ocean Financial Federal Credit Union and they were graciously willing to sponsor our March issue. You will find their logo on each page and a full page ad with a description of their great work.

Ocean Financial is extremely active in building up the Catholic Church on Long Island and they are THE bank for Catholics in our area. Each branch has Christian art and crucifixes in their lobby and they are committed to specifically serving Catholics in all of their banking needs. Please visit their website or a local branch for more information.

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

MAJOR HEADLINE: Die Before You Die

By Thomas Griffin

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "If a man has not discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live." What are the things and people that we would make the ultimate sacrifice for? Who resides at the center of our lives?

In the season of Lent we all have something that we are sacrificing: a favorite food, less screen time on our phones, social media, or possibly even our morning coffee. Whatever it is that we decided to give up, why did we do it?

If you are like me we often enter Lent with the same mentality as the years prior. I have been giving up ice cream and dessert since I was in middle school, and I still do today. Spiritual maturity, and Jesus himself, asks us to consider why we do the things that we do. These small sacrifices are ways for us to learn how to die to ourselves. They are opportunities for us to be reminded of the fact that God is real, Jesus is God and that he made the ultimate sacrifice for me.

Therefore, when we make sacrifices during this sacred season we are invited to ponder the love Christ had for us when we are tempted to or offered the chance to go back on our promise of sacrifice. Reflecting on Christ more often will bring us closer to him as a real living person and remind us that faith is not an idea or a philosophy to follow but a reckless love story of God's pursuit for your heart. Inside of that love story, like all love stories, we are called to sacrifice - to die to ourselves for the sake of love for the other.

I was in attendance at a funeral recently, and the homily was both inspiring and challenging. The priest spoke about how the deceased was a woman of deep prayer and sacrifice (among many other virtuous things). Then he gave a phrase that he admitted that he often cites at funerals, especially when it is so obviously applicable. Jesus asks us to learn how to "die before you die."

The priest chose the gospel of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies. The only way for that grain to become something more is to sacrifice itself, to die. But in dying it fulfills its purpose. Jesus said, "Whoever loves his life loses it" (John 12:25). Our life is so precious, so valuable, that it can only reach its climax when it is given away in service to others because we were made for love and love entails sacrifice.

The heroic men and women in our lives and of history were always people of sacrifice. They died to their own selfishness, ego, personal desires, and arbitrary cravings. They consistently died even before their death. In doing so, they mirrored Christ. That sounds nice and holy, but it has immense practical implications for one's life.



We all know people who clearly make themselves the center of attention. If we are honest, we all do this from time to time. We prefer to speak about ourselves over asking questions to another person in conversation. We place our “wants” over and above the needs of our spouses or kids or coworkers. Jesus had to speak about the grain of wheat and consistently preach about sacrificial love because he knows that the human heart is prone to place itself at the center of the universe.

Lent comes to us every year in order to break us out of these habits and place us back on track to becoming the men and women we were created to be. In the time we have left this Lent, how can we die to our own ego and selfishness? What are the sacrifices we know that we should make (for our family, in our relationships, in our faith lives, etc.), but that we have been putting off for an extended period of time?

Let us pray for the courage and the perseverance to die before we die. To be men and women, as MLK challenged us, who are willing to make huge sacrifices for our relationship with God and our relationships with others. Doing so will make us fully alive, and will make us more fit for the life that follows Lent and the life that awaits us in eternity.

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

Living the Faith Grasping Reality This Lent

By Theresa Marino

Against the backdrop of modern popular thought which holds the elimination of suffering above most other ideals, the ancient ascetic practices of Lent proposed by the Catholic Church seem to many as antiquated at best and masochistic at worst. The Church's reminder to be charitable to the poor through the practice of almsgiving is generally well-received by Christians and non-Christians alike. But increased prayer and fasting by way of voluntary penances? Are we Medieval monks? Are we superstitious, oldschool grandmothers? Could a good God expect us to impose suffering on ourselves needlessly? Does the Church really expect the average lay person to meet these lofty standards of sanctity in the modern age?

It would surprise most naysayers just how practical and applicable to real-life the Catholic Church's rationale is in this matter. In fact, it is the world of our day - not the Church of our day - which allures us with a false hope of life untainted by suffering or pain. We are coached through most popular modes of culture to visualize and manifest whatever life goals we desire after our own image. It has always been Christ who breaks that rosey-eyed view of earth's sojourn with the words; "If you would be my disciple, pick up your cross and follow me."

The Church teaches therefore, that it is precisely through spiritual training - the voluntary taking up of small crosses when it is avoidable - that we ready ourselves to meet the larger, more daunting and unavoidable crosses that are the unfortunate reality of an imperfect and broken world in which we live. As ancestors of Eve and inheritors of Original Sin, we know there is no set of circumstances we can manufacture through independence, positive thinking, education or any form of human striving which could shield us entirely from the suffering, disappointment, sickness, tragedy and inevitable death of our fragile humanity. This notion firmly in hand, Mother Church, in love and wisdom, advises us during the season of Lent to face head-on the passion and death which we all must endure as authentic followers of Jesus and citizens of reality.

Christ compels us to "pick up" our cross. Note how this is phrased in the imperative form - as a command. Most things we're commanded to do require a domineering of the emotions by the will, since they don't feel good. Otherwise, we'd do them without being commanded. Picking up one's cross goes against the natural desires of flesh and popular persuasion. Yet, herein lies the tactic by which Lent trains us to distinguish ourselves as Christians who are prepared for all things the world can hand us - even death.

Fasting, in essence, is a chosen detachment. It is done in order to prepare ourselves for the unchosen trials of life through which we will be forcibly detached from our comforts. With Lenten disciplines tried and tested, we can meet and respond to such trails from a place of strategy rather than novice naivety. Temporary deprivation of small comforts - "giving up"

something for Lent - seems a relatively small price to pay for greater discipline gained over our bodies, minds, hearts and wills. But when something is removed, it leaves a hole which cries out to be filled. That's where prayer comes in.

If fasting is the intentional detachment from things which are not ultimate goods, then prayer is the opposite. It is the voluntary attachment to what (Who) is the ultimate good. Namely, Christ Himself. Fasting creates the space, and prayer fills it up with God. Otherwise, we would surely be tempted to fill the space created by lack of caffeine with irritability, lack of bread with vanity, lack of wine with self-pity. Fasting and prayer has been the winning combination for religious people through millenia not because of its loftiness, but because it is essential to human thriving! By these means we learn how to embrace the cross as Christ does, not to avoid it as the world does.

It seems fitting that the beginning of the Lenten season always overlaps with the feast of Saint Valentine, because it is Divine Love which kept Christ on the Cross for us. Made in His image and likeness, we know that even the most beautifully assorted chocolates or rousing sexual experiences aren't enough to fulfill human longing. Nor are these worldly expressions of love strong enough to keep us nailed to our crosses. It is God's love alone which is not angry or selfish but truthful, perseverant and hopeful. It never fails, as we surely do. It is His love alone which can keep us steadfast in our Lenten devotions this season, and all the resolutions for love's sake that we take up in this life besides.

Theresa Marino is a New York native who has served the Catholic Church throughout her twenties in various ministry capacities. Currently a middle school Religion Teacher, she has also worked in high school campus ministry, music ministry, mission work and parish settings.



Saintly Schoolteachers

By Sarah Griffin

After fifteen years as a Catholic school student, four years as a Catholic school teacher, and one year as the Assistant Principal of a Catholic school, I was beginning my first year as Principal of - *you guessed it* - a Catholic school, an elementary school grades Nursery through 8. I knew what to expect from other principals: working with the parents is the most challenging part of the job, and the tuition will not cover operating costs. But after five years as principal, I uncovered a much more important and beautiful fact: **Catholic elementary school teachers are saintlike.**

Their God-given Patience

The human brain does not fully develop until a person is in their mid to late twenties. This means that elementary school children are going to make mistakes and sometimes learn the hard way. Catholic school teachers not only know the biology of a child's mind, but they know that each child, and each of their parents, wears the face of God. Their patience with student misbehavior and 'difficult' parents is extended. When it comes to establishing boundaries and taking disciplinary action, it is done with compassion in partnership with parents, and with the goal of improvement, not embarrassment or arbitrary penalization. Rule-breaking in a Catholic school is also soul-effacing. So, acknowledging a child's mistake through action invites the best opportunity for learning and continuing on the path to Heaven. Parent partnership is essential because parents are their children's first and most important teachers.

Their Heavenly Mission

I would call public school teachers saints as well, but I'm not sure if that's allowed - and that's kind of the point. Public school teachers can never fully form any child despite their efforts because in their practice they are forced to deny one essential part of a child: the soul, God's image within each of us. District efforts for professional development to promote moral codes, character education, or social emotional learning simply cannot get close enough to the truth of Jesus Christ's love and example. Children's souls need care and development just as much as their minds need to be challenged and their bodies need physical exercise. Catholic school teachers explicitly recognize that their students are meant to get to Heaven, and they are meant to help them get there. Regardless of their content-area passions, Catholic school teachers know that there is no history lesson, basketball game, or mathematical equation that is more important than daily opportunities for prayer and worship. Educating the whole child must include their spiritual formation.

Their Daily Sacrifices

Catholic schools are filled with teachers who have been forming children in faith for decades. Catholic school teachers accept that they will likely not reach fame or fortune - they are not looking for it. They accept a salary lower than public school salaries because they are more than just teachers. They are peacemakers, role models, faith leaders, and regularly work miracles in their classrooms seeing the purity and goodness of the children in front of them - a bully is just a child who is crying for help, and a low achiever is one who just needs some motivation.

Consider real sacrifices that Catholic school teachers make to form children in faith. This Lent, consider making a financial contribution to a Catholic school, or to organizations that provide scholarship funds to families who cannot afford a Catholic education such as Tomorrow's Hope Foundation (Diocese of Rockville Centre) or the Inner-City Scholarship Fund (Archdiocese of New York).

The Archdiocese of New York recently announced that 12 schools will be shutting their doors at the conclusion of this school year. School closings will continue to happen as long as Catholic school teachers and the beautiful work they do is not shouted from the mountaintop. Their miraculous work with children should be celebrated more than the premiere of any artist's music video or amazing athlete's play. Lent coincides with 'enrollment season' for Catholic schools planning for the 2023-2024 school year. If you are a parent, guardian, or grandparent, ask yourself this question: what kind of teacher do you want your child to have? One who cannot possibly help your child reach his or her potential because of limitations of a public school's mission? Or, one who is *saintlike*, caring for the soul as much as the mind and body?

Sarah Griffin is a wife and mother of two girls who lives on Long Island. She is a former Catholic school principal and teacher who remains involved in the strengthening of Catholic education.



Current Events: Encountering Christ at the Well

By Matthew Chicavich

The Gospel of John paints the picture of the encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman (John 4:4-42). Scripture tells us that as Jesus left Judea he passed through Samaria on his way to Galilee. He came to a town called Sychar and sat down at a well by himself while his disciples went to find food. It was around noon. At this time and place, Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman.

Several aspects of this encounter already stick out as unusual. During the hottest part of the day, the well would normally be traffic free. Manual labor in the heat of the midday sun was avoided at all costs in ancient times. Yet, the Samaritan woman arrives right on time. It is the perfect setting for the encounter of God with His daughter.

The Samaritan woman comes carrying more than empty water jugs. She shows up carrying the pain of her past and present ridicule. A weight that she endures daily. She chooses to experience the struggle of fetching water from the well in the heat in order to be alone and away from constant criticism and accusing eyes. Perhaps this is not a choice. Perhaps this is what her life has become. The Samaritan woman is an outcast.

This is exactly where Jesus wants to meet the Samaritan woman: in her vulnerability, her struggle, in her pain. This is exactly where Christ wants to meet us.

Lent is a period in which we have an immense opportunity to take advantage of the rich graces Our Father has to offer us. Lent invites us to journey to the well of our souls, where Jesus wants to meet us. It is a time to clear away all the dead leaves and brush that surrounds the well, these earthly things we put before Jesus. Lent calls us to remove the masks and fake facades we wear to protect ourselves from the pains of life. Jesus invites us to let go of the comforts onto which we desperately grasp, and instead, cling to him and receive his Love.

At the well, Jesus reveals Himself to the Samaritan woman as the Messiah and offers a drink that will satisfy all her longings: "Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life"(Jn 4:14). We can conclude that the Samaritan woman experiences some sort of healing or conversion through her encounter with Christ. She has conversed with the Messiah and her first action is to preach to the very people she has been avoiding.

All that the Samaritan woman carried to the well, has been left behind: her water jars, her self indictment, her woundedness. She is no longer ashamed of her past. The Samaritan woman has accepted God's Love and identifies herself as a daughter of God.

Lent provides us the road map to the well. The three Lenten tenets of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving point us in the direction of the meeting spot. As we willingly take on sacrifice and struggle, our eyes are more capable of recognizing Jesus' Face and our ears are opened to more clearly decipher His Voice. Jesus journeys to the well and waits for us to bring him our empty jars so that He can fill them with the water that satisfies: His Love.

Matthew Chicavich teaches religion and physics at a Catholic high school on Long Island where he lives with his wife and four children. He has a masters degree in theology and a bachelor's degree in physics.



By Marc Piperno

Inspired by their beloved Grandpa Nunzi, keeping the traditions of the good ole days alive has become the center of owner Michael Napolitano's vision. To sit at the dinner table to talk and laugh with friends and family, while enjoying an elevated take on old world Italian cooking. Nunzis invites you to come and experience the "New" Good Ole Days and create more memorable moments for the people in your life that you care about.

Opening last October, Nunzis is quickly becoming the hottest new restaurant in Farmingdale. With the help of Michael's father Vincent and brother Vincent Jr., they have all worked tirelessly to demonstrate that the incredible dishes made in the kitchen are only rivaled by the fantastic hospitality of Nunzis, where everybody is treated like a VIP. Traditions and respect for the good ole days, have all been incorporated into a sleek and modern layout by renowned designer Derek Axelrod.

"In keeping our grandfather's traditions alive, you will eat with us, drink with us and laugh with us. Families and friends will all enjoy delicious food, fine drinks, good music and making memories," states Napolitano. The modern take on classic dishes, highlights a menu

that incorporates unique twists on old school Italian meals. With superb creations such as Grandmas Meatballs, Pappardelle & Lamb, Heritage Pork Chop, and desserts like Cannoli Cream with Biscotti.

Not to be missed are fascinating interpretations that will satisfy the cravings of adventurous foodies such as one-of-a-kind Limoncello Chicken Wings and a boisterous menu placement of a Philly Cheesesteak Sandwich. What Chefs Anthony LoCastro and Marc Wisehart have collaborated to produce, are memorable moments on a plate.

Nunzis is considered, by its loyalists as an immersive cultural experience that warmly embraces. The moment guests walk in the door they are dazzled by a lively environment that is both edgy and delightful. Both Axelrod and the Napolitano's worked harmoniously to launch what has now become a distinct trademark at Nunzis. Michael Napolitano seeks to enchant young and old alike by capturing a fresh, contemporary, and sleek look, with nods to the glamour and romance of classic Italian meals.

For more information, please visit nunzis1274.com, and on Instagram at [@nunzisfarmingdale](https://www.instagram.com/nunzisfarmingdale).

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1. What Are You Willing to Sacrifice Everything For?
2. Die Before You Die, And You Will be Truly Alive
3. Pick Up Your Cross and Be Set Free this Lent
4. Catholic Teachers Provide Holy Examples
5. The Well is Where We Need to Be

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