

EMPTY TOMB PROJECT

Storm Your Beach

Remembering D-Day, 80 Years Past



Truth and Your Infinite Worth



Prayer During Summer



Mary Crushes Snakes



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What is The Empty Tomb Project?

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 men and women encounter Jesus as a real living person their lives will be radically changed.

We are an evangelization 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 (and beyond).

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 rely on the faithful designers at Startup Catholic 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 via email: EmptyTombProject@gmail.com and join us in the mission! All donations are tax deductible.



Storm Your Beach

By Thomas Griffin



In Matthew (10:5-15), Mark (6:7-13), and Luke (9:1-6) there comes a point when Jesus has taught his disciples well and he gives them the task of continuing to spread his message of the Kingdom of God. He wants them to tell others about who he is. He wants them to change their lives because they have forgotten about God. All of these accounts speak about Jesus giving them instructions for their journey. He tells them not to take much with them and then Jesus explains that there will be towns that accept them and their message, and there will be towns that do not accept them and their message.

The latter will be places that may even be hostile towards them. It is very interesting to note that Jesus does not say "If" you enter a town that does not welcome you. The translation usually says, "Whatever town," or "When you enter," a place that does not welcome you. In other words, before he sends them out on this mission Christ tells them that they will face adversity and challenge. Jesus gives them full warning about what they are going to face. Opposition is a guarantee.

I always wondered why Jesus was so specific about those who would oppose him? I mean we know that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. In his divine nature he knows what will happen to them, but do the disciples really need to know about it before they go? Wouldn't it be more positive to talk about and focus on the great places and people the disciples will encounter? Why does he focus on the negative ones and the tough ones as his friends are leaving for an exciting mission?

On June 6, 1944 we will remember the 80th anniversary of D-Day. Over 150,000 Allied troops were transported on 5,000 boats that stormed the beaches of France. They faced unprecedented odds because of new weapons that had been produced by the Nazis. Hitler was able to produce the newest machine guns that fired around 1,200 bullets a minute (20 bullets a second). The Axis Powers strategically placed these weapons and pointed them to the shoreline of France in anticipation of an attack.

The troops who were storming the beach that June day and who were headed to the frontlines knew all about these horrific weapons. The Allies had the intelligence about what they would be facing - what the bullets would do if they pierced their flesh. The General's involved knew exactly what they were all up against.

This fact is why the pictures from the day of this invasion are so captivating and inspiring. Especially any photos taken of the boats as they are a distance from the shore. Since the invasion was so important, the Army had created special boats to protect the men from fire as they approached the beaches. These boats had high walls so the men would be protected from gunfire.



However, it also disabled them from seeing what exactly was in front of them. The gate would be in the front of the boat and all the soldiers would be facing in the same direction as they drew closer and closer to the drop off point. The soldiers would only be able to see the back of the head of those in front of them as they were waiting, and waiting, and waiting for the command to be sent into the frontline.

They were waiting for the moment to storm the beach.

They all knew that they would be staring down the barrels of these lethal, lethal weapons. The soldiers knew that they were up against extremely difficult odds, but they stormed the beach anyway.

The Gospel passages referenced above are often labeled "The Mission of the Twelve." Specifically in Mark's Gospel, Jesus first calls the apostles to himself and then he sends them out on their mission. It is important to note that he is sending them out directly after he had gone back home to Nazareth. When he goes to his hometown people reject him; they want nothing to do with him actually. Now he is sending out his followers and he tells them to go out two by two and take barely anything with them. He describes situations where some people will accept their message, but then he quickly moves on to the fact that many places will reject you: just like he just experienced in Nazareth. Many people will not welcome them or listen to them. Jesus knows that they are going to face their own frontline, their own gun fire. Jesus sends them anyway, he calls on them to storm the beach.

A phenomenal book to read about "going on mission" is called *Resilience*: *Hard-won Wisdom for Living a Better Life* written by a former Navy seal. This is what he says about 'frontline':

"As Navy SEALs, we understood the word 'frontline' to mean the place where we met the enemy. The frontline was where battles were fought and fates decided. The frontline was a place of fear, struggle and suffering. It was also a place where victories were won, where friendships of a lifetime were forged in hardship. It was a place where we lived with a sense of purpose.

But "frontline" isn't just a military term. You have a frontline in your life now. In fact, everyone has a place where they encounter fear, where they struggle, suffer and face hardship. We all have battles to fight.

And it's often in those battles that we are most alive: It's on the frontlines of our lives that we earn wisdom, create joy, forge friendships, discover happiness, find love and do purposeful work. If you want to win any meaningful kind of victory, you'll have to fight for it."



The frontline is scary - battles are not fun. But Jesus sent the disciples there anyway, to storm the beach, because he knows the consequences: he knows that victory will come from it. At D-Day the Allied troops won. Most scholars and historians agree that this was the turning point of the war, of defeating Nazi Germany. The frontline is scary, but it is always worth it.

Jesus does not ask us to enter our frontlines alone. For this reason he sends the disciples out in pairs because he knows they will need support. This is why community is such an important part of our Catholic faith and this is why we worship together as a Church each Sunday. When we all come together for Mass, Jesus really and truly shows up, and we actually get to receive him. He is the strength for our victory on the frontlines of our lives.

Out in the world today, it is tough and it is really hard to remain faithful. The Catholic faith, what Jesus said and who he is, is counter-cultural. Many people do not like the Church or religion at all, for that matter. Many people think that we are fools for what we believe in this day and age. Whether it is at work, school, home or just hanging out with friends, wherever people tend to degrade the Church, Christ, or truth, whenever people single you out for going to Mass or for what you believe or for standing up for what is right or holy or just plain good. That is your D-Day. That is your frontline. That is where Jesus is sending you.

As Jesus said, it is not a matter of "if" you will face rejection for your faith, or if you have a frontline in your life. It is a matter of confronting the frontline in your life, looking at it, and having the strength and the courage to storm the beach anyway.

God constantly comes to us, He chose us, we did not choose Him (John 15:16). He comes to us for a specific reason: to bring us to Himself. Then He sends us out to get others. Our faith is all about the frontline, it is all about being sent. God is constantly being sent to us, and now it is our turn to go out for Him and spread His message of truth and love.

Find your frontline, find your beach.

And storm it.

Thomas Griffin is the chairperson of the Religion Department at a Catholic High School on Long Island where he lives with his wife and two sons. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of *Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine*.



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Cremation is becoming increasingly popular among the broad population, Catholics included. Many people do not realize that cremation is permitted for Catholics as long as it is not chosen in denial of Christian teaching on the Resurrection and the sacredness of the human body. When cremation is chosen, the full course of the Order of Christian Funerals should still be celebrated, including the Vigil Service (wake), the Funeral Liturgy, and the Rite of Committal. The preservation of this order allows for the greater expression of our beliefs and values, especially, the sacredness of human life, the dignity of the individual person and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Church teaching insists that cremated remains must be given the same respect as the body, including the manner in which they are carried, and the attention given to their appropriate transport and placement. The cremated remains of a body are to be buried or entombed, preferably in a Catholic cemetery, and using the rites provided by the Order of Christian Funerals. The following are not considered to be reverent dispositions that the Church requires: scattering cremated remains, dividing cremated remains and keeping cremated remains in the home.

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Mary Crushes Snakes

By Matthew Chicavich

From the time of the early Church to today, the Blessed Mother's role in our relationship with Christ has become more and more clear. Though the old adage says "a stream is clearest near the spring," time has only brought more clarity to who Mary is and her importance in Salvation History. From her few recorded words in Scripture to the Vatican approved Marian apparitions in recent history, over time, the Lord has revealed how essential a relationship with the Virgin Mary is as we seek intimacy with God. St. John Henry Newman explains that for a doctrine to develop it must adapt, mature, germinate, and be molded by the world around it. For instance, though the four Marian Dogmas have been present in Tradition since the early Church, it wasn't until 1950 that Venerable Pope Pius XII declared Mary's Assumption an infallible dogma.

It is a fruitful exercise to trace the development of doctrine through Church history as God has revealed the truth about Mary over time. The Church's teaching on Mary's Immaculate Conception was a point of contention among some famous holy people. A three-century long debate ensued between scholastic theologians including St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and St. Albert the Great who held Marian devotion close to their hearts. The 1439 Council of Basel affirmed this belief and the Council of Trent about 100 years later declared Mary free of original sin. The observance of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception began with Pope Pius IX's encyclical *Ineffabilis Deus*. Interestingly enough, the official acceptance of this devotion is bookended by two Marian apparitions.

In 1830, the Blessed Mother appeared to St. Catherine Laboure and asked her to produce the miraculous medal, honoring the Immaculate Conception. After Pope Pius IX's encyclical, Mary famously appeared to St. Bernadette at Lourdes in 1858. When St. Bernadette asked the beautiful woman to identify herself, the Virgin Mary replied, "I am the Immaculate Conception." It is as if her two appearances were given as further proof of the Church's declared doctrines.

Mary's identity is wrapped up with the defeat of sin - sin that began in the Garden of Eden. St. Irenaeus of Lyons once wrote, "The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience. What Eve bound through her unbelief, Mary loosed by her faith" (*Adversus haereses* 3:22).





Going back to early Church tradition, the Eve-Mary parallel is a doctrine of Mary that is worthy of focus. It can be considered the first attempt at theological reflection about the Mother of Jesus. Around the year 150, Justin Martyr, one of the Church's earliest apologists, explained the role of the Virgin Mary as a new Eve in a surviving work called *Dialogue with Trypho*:

[The Son of God] became man through a Virgin, so that the disobedience caused by the serpent might be destroyed in the same way it had begun. For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, gave birth to disobedience and death after listening to the serpent's words. But the Virgin Mary conceived faith and joy, for when the angel Gabriel brought her the glad tidings that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and that the power of the Most High would overshadow her, so that the Holy One born of her would be the Son of God, she answered, "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). Thus was born of her the Child about whom so many Scriptures speak, as we have shown. Through him, God crushed the serpent, along with those angels and men who had become like the serpent (Ch. 100).

In Paul VI's 1974 Apostolic Exhortation, Marialis Cultus: On the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he recognizes the importance of Mary's Fiat in the liturgical celebration of the Annunciation. He identifies this moment as the "beginning of the redemption and of the indissoluble and wedded union of the divine nature with human nature" (#6). As the "new Eve," Mary's consent to being the Mother of God is the "culminating moment in the salvific dialogue between God and man" (#6).

The dichotomy between the old Eve of Genesis 3 and Mary, the New Eve of Luke 1, is clear. Eve's distrust of the Father through the promptings of the devil brought death into the world: sin. Mary's complete trust in the Angel Gabriel's message bore life: Christ. The serpent deceived Eve, but through Mary the serpent's head was crushed. Mary's fiat overthrows Eve's consent to Satan's promise. Mary's perfect humility humiliates the proud spirit of wickedness.

The Marian devotional plurality is a beautiful part of the Catholic Faith. God invites the faithful to accept the Blessed Mother's invitation to draw us closer to her Son. Modern society offers plenty of temptations and traps to send the fervent soul off course. Why not seek the guidance of a loving Mother? In *True Devotion to Mary*, St. Louis de Montfort beautifully describes the help Mary offers in spiritual battle: "Satan, being proud, suffers infinitely more from being beaten and punished by a little and humble handmaid of God, and her humility humbles him more than the Divine power." Because of this we should always seek the aid of our powerful Mother. Let us end our reflection by doing so:

Let us pray: O Queen of Angels: Your fiat overthrew Eve's baleful consent to the ancient Serpent, crushing his head, exposing his deceits, and healing the wounds inflicted by his venom, through the Son you conceived, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Come to our aid, Our Lady of Victory! When the battle rages, when our strength fails, when the Enemy wounds us, when defeat seems certain: With your mantle cover and protect us; with your bright banner above us, dispel the darkness; so that we may rally again in combat through the invincible power of your Son.

that we may rally again in combat through the invincible power of your Son.

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.



Truth and Your Infinite Worth

By Thomas Griffin

A large mission of the *Empty Tomb Project* is to give readers ongoing access to the latest Church news while remaining steadfast to the truth. Our topics are meant to feed readers in a spiritual way as well as in a way that gives courage to those who desire to remain courageous and stand by the truth. Jesus Christ, and the Catholic Church, is counter-cultural. What we preach as true is no longer held as important. Some would say that what we hold to be true is dangerous. We know it is quite the opposite.

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that the truth is the conformity between one's mind and reality. To conceive a thought or opinion about reality does not mean that one's claim is true. In fact, it could very well be wrong. We verify the truth of a claim based on reviewing the evidence in the real world. Remaining firm in the truth allows us to uplift human dignity.

Furthermore, Jesus claimed to be the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). It is through Christ that we come to greater clarity on who we are as human beings and who God is calling us to be. Through his way become holy. Abiding by his teachings grounds us in the truth because God cannot make an error. God made us, so trusting in His words can only benefit us.

We have covered some headlines that have arisen as a result of words from Pope Francis as well as documents from the Vatican. Through it all, the Church, Christ and the Empty Tomb claims that truth is unchanging. Women will not become priests, that is impossible. Marriage is only between one man and one woman - that could never change. One's gender is determined by the biological sex one is born with. It is based on his or her chromosomes - that is scientific fact.

In one of the newest documents by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) the many truth claims of the Church are made even more clear. *Dignitas Infinita* was published in April and explains the infinite human dignity that each person is born with. Its opening line states: "Every human person possesses an infinite dignity, inalienably grounded in his or her very being, which prevails in and beyond every circumstance, state, or situation the person may ever encounter" (*DI* #1).

The document quickly makes a clarification on what it means about human dignity in order to avoid any confusion. Some might read the words that the Church teaches that all people have human dignity (no matter what) and think that means people can do whatever they wish. This is not the case. "This (possible confusion) brings us to recognize the possibility of a fourfold distinction of the concept of dignity: ontological dignity, moral dignity, social dignity, and existential dignity" (DI # 7).



We will concern ourselves mostly with ontological and moral dignity. Social dignity refers to the quality of one's living conditions. The extreme poverty in which many people live around the globe means that they are living in an "undignified" way (DI #8). Existential dignity refers to the fact that some people are living in perpetual states (addiction, serious illness, violent family environments, etc.) that bring about the discussion of living a "dignified" life. The need to help those in either of these situations comes from the ontological and infinite dignity of every single human person.

One's ontological dignity is determined by one's being. Since all human beings are made by God, in His image and likeness, their worth can never be taken from them. This type of dignity is infinite because God is absolutely infinite and His love is unconditional and unending. We see this revealed in the emblem of our faith, the cross. The cross shows us our worth: you are worth God's life.

Moral dignity means that human beings are given free will. At times, we use our freedom well and we act according to our nature (the good). Other times, for a variety of reasons, we choose to use our freedom poorly and we violate the human dignity of ourselves and/or others. This type of dignity is paramount for *Dignitas Infinita* and the Catholic Church. God loves each and every person infinitely - He died for them. No one can ever lose their human dignity because their worth is found in Who made them.

That is not contradictory to the fact that, as the declaration explains, abortion, euthanasia, gender theory, sex changes, and many other issues are violations of human dignity. I love my children more than words can communicate. However, my kids often mess up and are in need of correction. They need the help of their father and mother in order to discover what is good for them. Our culture needs the same guidance and Christ desires to give it.

Abortion is the murder of innocent and defenseless children. Euthanasia claims that your worth decreases with your age and health. Gender theory and sex change is "a concession to the age-old temptation to make oneself God" (DI #57). These violations of the infinite dignity of the human person are teachings of the Church that are rooted in natural law, Scripture and the preaching of Jesus Christ.

While the culture might be championing them as freedoms and rights that human beings ought to have, we know better. The light from the empty tomb promotes the truth of free will. That freedom and sacrificial love must always work hand-in-hand. That true freedom lies not in what one can do but in what one ought to do.

Thomas Griffin is the chairperson of the Religion Department at a Catholic High School on Long Island where he lives with his wife and two sons. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of *Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine*.



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A Summer Well Spent

By Theresa Marino

Nothing kills a good habit quite like a holiday can. Whether it's a diet, a budget, or a sleep schedule... days off from the work grind just seem to implicitly give us permission to relax our personal disciplines as well. Prayer can so easily fall off the wagon and into the bin of lapsed habits over the summer. It's much easier to miss Sunday Mass while on a cruise, visiting family out of state, or trying to beat the weekend rush to the best parking field at Jones beach. How easy it is to skip our morning prayer routine when that long commute silence doesn't need to be filled. With bedtime and rising patterns later, those who are used to making time for a daily Bible devotional with their morning coffee rarely transition to a lunchtime verse with their Diet Coke!

The irony of modern human psychology is... the more leisure time we have, the less we seem to get done! As the old adage goes, "If you want something done, ask a busy person!" We are all good at managing a million priorities, and we are so seldom good at managing just the few. We saw this so plainly during the Covid lockdowns years ago, when people had fewer societal obligations than ever. Some used the found time to get in shape or read those books that had been on the to-do list since the kids were born. But most watched endless hours of Netflix, scrolled on social media and forgot to shower or groom indefinitely.

It is said that the time off from work made people into one of four things... a Hunk (those who got in great shape), A Chunk (those who gained a ton of weight), A Monk (those who took time to read or learn a new skill), or A Drunk (those who spiraled into a self-medicating mental health crisis). Funny how extreme those options are, yet there is so much truth in it.

But what if there was another way... the way of moderation. Saint Augustine wrote "Total abstinence is easier than perfect moderation." How true does that ring in your heart? We go from working late nights and attending every meeting at our children's school during the week, to mentally checking out and vegging on the couch for days to recover. There must be a better way! The summer is a great time to flex the muscle of moderation.

This coming summer season, Jesus is inviting you to the virtue of temperance, which can be defined simply as self-control or moderation. He is inviting us to re-frame our vacation time correctly, so that we can see it as a gift to help us enter more deeply into prayer, rather than losing that muscle altogether. We can approach summer not like a nose-dive into solitary sedation, but more like a retreat. A retreat doesn't mean you've quit the fight, but rather it's a strategic and temporary step back from conflict to regroup and restock. The intention is to come back more ready than ever to fight and... Win! Win the day, win the family time, win the joy, win the peace back into your life and the life of your family's schedule.



So what are some things that we can do to be intentional about not swinging to the extremes this summer? How about setting an alarm - not as early as the one you set for work, but early enough that you enjoy a good rest while not losing your entire morning? How about choosing one meal a day to splurge on so that you don't wind up "treating yourself" at all meals and blowing your entire calorie and monetary budget by July 4th? How about scheduling time for workouts alongside the leisure activities you've worked so hard all year to enjoy? How about downloading a spiritual audiobook or podcast to listen to while cooking dinner, to switch it up from those favorite reruns of Friends or The Office playing in the background during household chores? How about making weekday Mass or Adoration a part of your routine since your work hours have opened up between Sundays?

We can do this, summertime family. You don't want to become a Chunk or a Drunk this summer. Think more like a Hunk and a Monk set a couple goals, keep things moderate, keep God in the mix daily in some shape or form - and we'll all feel more refreshed and grateful for our time off than ever before, because it will have been a summer well spent.

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.

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