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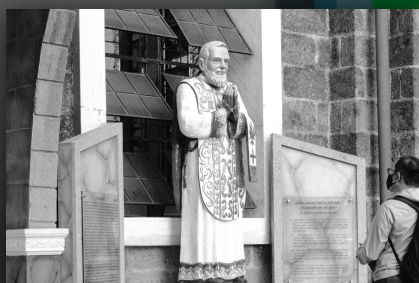
SEPTEMBER 2024 ISSUE

# EMPTY TOMB PROJECT

THE MAGAZINE

## *Don't Worship Your Phone*

*Rejecting the Idol  
of Screen Time*



Decrease Your Worries  
With Padre Pio



The Adventure of Faith



The Reason for School

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# ETP: The Magazine

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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](mailto:EmptyTombProject@gmail.com) and join us in the mission! All donations are tax deductible.





# Don't Worship Your Phone

By Thomas Griffin

During my second year of teaching, a tragedy struck our school. A student who had just transferred to a nearby school for 8th grade took his own life. The community, school and student-body were shaken. As the religion teacher and campus minister I met with the pastor before school the next day and we spoke about how we should address the students.

We knew that, above all, we needed to communicate that God was real and that God is with those who suffer while also reminding them that God can heal any situation. In the coming week, that same pastor led the funeral Mass. I sat with a handful of students who knew the deceased very well.

Two pews ahead of us sat a couple in their thirties, on their cell phones the entire Mass. Even as the priest was consecrating the bread and wine, the holiest part of Catholic Mass, they continued to scroll through Instagram. I'll never forget the look on the faces of my students that day. They were only thirteen years old but they were amazed that these adults could worship their phones at a funeral Mass.

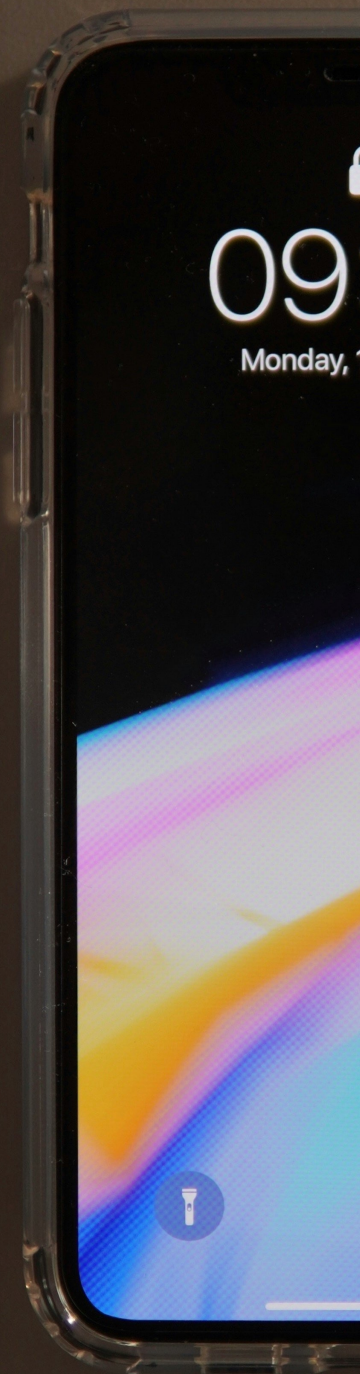
That funeral was seven years ago.

In our nation today, 97% of Americans own a cell phone and nine out of ten own a smartphone. The average child gets their first cell phone at the age of 11 and almost all kids have a cell phone by the age of 15.

According to Consumer Affairs, "on average, cell phone users look at their phones 144 times a day," and the average American spends 4 hours and 39 minutes on their phone each and every day. Over the course of the year that means that we spend almost 70 days staring at that small rectangular device in our pockets.

Most religions gather once a week for their worship which tends to last roughly an hour. That is around 52 hours a year, a little more than two days worth your time. There are 8,736 hours in a year. Americans spend almost 20% of their time each year on their phones while only about 21% of us attend weekly worship services according to Gallup.

We have a country of individuals who worship their phones.







This is not a cry of an old-fashioned technological curmudgeon. The advances of technology, as well as artificial intelligence, have changed our world in many phenomenal ways and it will continue to do so. We live in the most comfortable time in world history. The problem is that we are so comfortable that we don't know what to do with our time.

Human beings are made for worship. That is a biblical truth but it is verified through an investigation into our behavior. Everyone has something that they hold to be most important to them. For some it is their job, others it's their family, others it's their money and for others it's their faith. In Old English the word "worship" can also be translated as "worth-ship." Whatever a person deems to be most worth their time and attention is what they worship - it is their number one priority and mode of operation in life.

At that funeral Mass that couple decided that their phones were worth more than giving honor to the child who had lost his life. If you are like me you can also see yourself, and others, constantly choosing to look down at their phones rather than say hello to someone walking by you on the street or standing next to you in the grocery store. We know we should get off our phones but we spend countless hours a week mindlessly scrolling through pictures and random videos. We know we should put it down and have a conversation with a loved one or read a book, exercise, or even pray, but we don't.

For this reason, even 57% of Americans have claimed that they believe they are addicted to their phones. This is one reason why God spends so much time in the Bible pleading with His people to not give themselves over to the false idols of other religions. God knows that false gods will leave us empty and addicted. When we worship anything, or anyone, that is not God we will be left empty because there is an infinite size hole in the human heart and it can only be filled by the infinite. Since we are left empty the human heart needs to constantly pursue that false god in order to feel some sort of satisfaction. Then, the day ends and we begin the endless empty pursuit again.

So today, let us choose to reject the worship of our phones and spend some time in silence reflecting on the more important questions of life. Who am I? Where did I come from? Is there a God? What happens when we die? Let us choose to give our time and attention to something greater than a screen.

If we do that, hopefully we will live more for others and less for ourselves - more for the everlasting things and less for the things that pass away. If we do that, hopefully no one will be scrolling on their phones when our loved ones are reading the eulogy at our funeral.

Thomas Griffin is the chairperson of the Religion Department at a Catholic High School on Long Island where he lives with his wife and three children. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine. He is the author of Let Us Begin: Saint Francis's Way of Becoming Like Christ and Renewing the World.





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# Decrease Your Worries With Padre Pio

By Matthew Chicavich

“Pray, hope, don’t worry.” - St. Padre Pio

I remember hearing this phrase for the first time in late March of 2020 after the country went into lockdown due the COVID-19 pandemic. A group of Franciscan Friar seminarians at St. Leopold’s Friary began ministering to the faithful via Facebook Live and YouTube. These CFR’s would go next door to St. Casimir Catholic Church, turn on the camera, expose the Eucharist, and invite anyone watching to pray with them. The holy hour would include Eucharistic Adoration and preaching along with praise and worship music. Each day, different friars would take turns preaching and leading the music.

During one of the first nights, Fr. Isaiah Hoffman and Fr. Luke Sweeney began playing a song I had never heard before. It began with the refrain, “pray, hope, don’t worry.” The song paints the image of God sending his angels to protect, guard, and guide us. It invites the listener to find rest and strength in God by calling on Him as often as we breathe. “Abide in Him...Pray, hope, don’t worry.”

The mission of St. Leopold’s friary during that lockdown period was a great solace to my family and I during those first few weeks of the COVID-19 outbreak. Church doors were locked at that time. It was a gift to hear that music and those words of comfort while being virtually near the Eucharist. Only later did I learn that these words, “Pray, hope, don’t worry” originated from another, more well-known friar: Padre Pio.

Padre Pio is quoted as saying: “Pray, hope, don’t worry. Worry is useless. God is merciful and will hear your prayer.” St. Pio of Pietrelcina is a modern day Italian saint who is commonly known for his mystical gifts from God. These include the discernment of souls, the ability to read consciences, miraculous healings, bilocation, gift of tears, levitation, the odor of sanctity, and the stigmata that he suffered for 50 years. Books are devoted to the well documented stories of the supernatural presence of God in his life. Vivid photographs witness to the wound marks of our crucified Lord on Padre Pio’s hands.

He publicly celebrated Mass with bandages over his hands to hide the nail marks. Blood can be seen, and those present speak of an “odor of sanctity” emanating from his person. Though these stories are attractive to read and share, I believe what Padre Pio is advocating for all of us is less sensational.



As we celebrate St. Pio's feast day on September 23, his words call us to something so vital to our own journey in this life: the place of prayer above everything else.

"Prayer is the oxygen of the soul" is another phrase attributed to Padre Pio. Above all, he was a man of prayer. He knew deep in his heart that he could not do the work God was calling him to do while on earth without the normal and seemingly ordinary act of spending time with Jesus in prayer each day. Although bilocating and levitating sound like an attractive goal of prayer, Padre Pio points to intimacy with Jesus and dependence on him in everything we do as the true purpose of prayer.

How can we worry when we know God will take care of us no matter what the challenge: work, family, finances, health, and even a pandemic? And, we know we are in God's loving and safe arms when we spend time with Him in prayer each day.

Worry is useless because we become aware of the presence of God that is always with us. We are invited into that powerful truth each and every time we pray. The more we do so, the less we will worry. Because God gives us the grace of hope. Prayer gives us the ability to see that all will be well because we live in His arms. That leads to the gift of hope, no matter the circumstances. That leads to less worry and more confidence in the One who will redeem every challenge with his sacrificial love.

So, this month, spend extra time in prayer. Be a person of hope, and watch as God allows you to worry less even if your situation doesn't change. Accept the invitation: pray, hope, and don't worry.

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.







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# The Adventure of Faith

By Theresa Kainen

Consider the parable of the “faithful” and “lazy” servants in the Gospel of Matthew (ch. 25:14-30). Jesus tells the story of a Master who has entrusted his servants with talents of various quantities before going away on a long trip. Upon his return, he praises those who have invested and multiplied the sums they were given to take care of, but upbraids the one who “out of fear” (Matthew 25:25) buried his in order to keep it safe.

Not to put too sharp a point on the moral of the story, but it seems that God does not value conventional safety nearly as much as he values taking risks for the sake of what is worthwhile. It seems He wants us to live vibrantly, courageously and with great expectation, as opposed to the alternative of clutching tightly to the familiars of our state in life. A lesson which is hard won and easily lost to those of us who “out of fear” like to control every possible variable and leave nothing to chance. But could it be that when we fear to lose what has already been given us, we “bury” our chances of living with the greater spiritual wealth that God desires us to have?

Pope Saint John Paul II famously said that “life with Christ is a beautiful adventure.” This was a man who lived through the Nazi occupation, studying to become a priest clandestinely since it was an offense punishable by death to do so at the time. The Pope passed the time of his youth by performing in theater groups, skiing and hiking on the Alps, and was the most well-traveled Pontiff in history. We need to look no further than the lives of our other saints to find that this sense of righteous risk-taking is wholesale a trademark of those who lived most radically for Christ and therefore made the best and longest impressions on our great Catholic tradition.

But do we trust God to help us do this? Are we willing to step off the ledge and comfort of the familiar in order to have the adventure of our lives which God has invited us to? Are we willing to let go of what is known and let God help us... get married to the person we’ve been dating for 3 years, to tell the unpopular truth in our workplace, accept the new position we’ve been offered, invite the life of a new child into the family, publish that book that we’ve been longing to write, give up that habit that’s got too strong a hold on our daily free time? Could it be that God has placed these spiritual itches there precisely for the purpose of scratching them?

Here is what we know for sure as people of faith. God has a unique and unrepeatable plan for each unique and unrepeatable soul He has created. By bringing us each into existence at this particular time, place and set of circumstances, we can be quite certain that we are the **ONLY ONES** that can accomplish the mission that has been asked of us because the mission of the day will exist only for a short while. Which souls are depending on us to be courageous right now? Which souls will be inspired by our lack of fear, and decide to fulfill the dreams that God has for them also? It is a mystery why God asks this great task of us; the task of our participation in





multiplying His talents and gifts, since He could obviously do this without us. But nonetheless, God wills that we imperfect, fearful, and tepid creations work together with Him as co-creators and helpers in bringing about the realization of His Kingdom. So, we must! And with some vigor if we know what is good for us.

The challenge is to reject the temptation so sit by and hide the treasure of an adventurous faith because of laziness or fear. We surely are free to give into temptation, but when adventure calls and it is time to take the plunge to greater depths, let us choose to be ready like the many saints who came before us.

Let this be a lesson in trust - a radical trust which can only be learned by the stretching of our character and relying entirely on God. We take these leaps of faith into unknown places not foolishly, but with the knowledge of God's sovereign promise that He will always be with us.

If we do so, he will say to us one day; "Well done, good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share in your master's joy" (Matthew 25:21).

Who knows what kind of adventure He has prepared for us? There's only one way to find out!

Theresa Kainen 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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# Let Us Begin

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**Thomas Griffin**

Foreword by Fr. Mark-Mary Ames, CFR

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BOOK DESCRIPTION

Our culture is broken. The remedy is not a program or a worldwide initiative. The answer is found in personal renewal.



# The Reason for School

By Thomas Griffin

When God came to us, He came as a teacher.

Pope St. John Paul II once said that “Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ, of helping to form Christ in the lives of others.”

Jesus was known for his miracles and his captivating words. It was his teachings that drew thousands of people to crowd around him and hang on every word that he said. There was something about his message and there was something about him as a teacher that drove people to seek him out. As God, we can confidently say that Christ was the best teacher to ever do it. So, what can we learn from him about education and what does the Catholic Church have to say about what a school should be?



Jesus' teachings concerned the Kingdom of God. This was the main message of his life and this was what he came to establish forever. His preaching centered on who God is, who you are and who you are called to be.

First, education must be concerned with God because He is the source of all there is. Without God there would be nothing. He is the reason for your existence but He is also the reason that anything is comprehensible in the first place. God must be real because something cannot come from nothing. There cannot be an infinite chain of causes because that would mean there would never have been a first cause. Therefore, there would be nothing.

God is the source but He is also the Logos - the logic behind the world. Since God is Truth, He carved His creation with rationality and truth inside of it. For this reason, we can come to know things about the world and for this reason the world is understandable. If education is meant to be consumed by teaching students knowledge about the world, then we must teach them that it is only possible for them to know something because there is a God who created the universe in a particular way.

Catholic schools can pursue this lane of education in ways that other schools simply cannot. God is the source and the goal of Catholic education. When He is placed front and center, students and families begin to realize that without God we are lost.

Second, Jesus taught the crowds who they are - he revealed to them their identity. All human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. If you attended Catholic school you might have become numb to this phrase but it is critical for understanding the human person. We are made in God's image, meaning that we are made for relationship. God is an intimate and infinite interpersonal relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So, we must learn together, with others and we are called to form bonds with others along the way. School community and atmosphere is critical for a



learning environment because a student must know that he or she belongs if they are to flourish.

As made in the likeness of God we are given faculties that allow us to act in God-like ways. Namely, we have the ability to reason, choose and love. All three of these faculties are linked together and cooperate in unison. Truth is the conformity between one's mind and reality. When we come to learn something that is true we are actually encountering God. The ability to reason the way that we do is different from all beings because we have a consciousness - we can think about the fact that we think and we can contemplate the "why" questions of life that no other animal is capable of.

We are also like God because we have freedom. Freedom is not unhindered liberty. It is not the ability to do whatever you want, whenever you want, with whomever you want. Freedom is the capacity to do as you ought, not as you like. In this way, freedom is intrinsically linked with truth. For example, husbands and wives have the ability to be unfaithful to one another. However, that would make for a bad relationship and it would violate their vows. The truth of marriage, as being a lifelong exclusive commitment of sacrificial love, orders one's choices to remain faithful to one's spouse.

Human beings are also like God because we can love. Love is not a feeling. Love is willing the good of the other. Love is acting in a way that is best for another person. How do we know what is best for a person? We must rely on Truth in order to choose how best to love. Jesus' teachings and the witness of his cross showcase the fact that love, in its purest form, is driven by sacrifice. Love is when we act for another person, even when we don't feel like it.

Finally, Jesus taught about what you were made for. True education brings students to see that they are all unrepeatable and that they are all unconditionally loved by God who is their Father. God desires for us to be saints and nothing less because to be a saint means that we become like the One who created us. Our source is ultimately meant to become our home. Ultimately, education is meant to form young men and women into virtuous and sacrificial adults.

As schools become more crowded this month and as schedules become more chaotic may we all remember (student, teacher, parent or adult) that we are called to live radically for Jesus Christ. May we be willing to be schooled by him, so that we can encounter the One who gave his life so that we could live, and learn.

Thomas Griffin is the chairperson of the Religion Department at a Catholic High School on Long Island where he lives with his wife and three children. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine. He is the author of Let Us Begin: Saint Francis's Way of Becoming Like Christ and Renewing the World.



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