

EMPTY TOMB PROJECT

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A Pope for Christ, A Pope for You

The Early Words and Actions of Pope Leo XIV



Ordinary Struggles and Joys



A Summer Psalm





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ETP: The Magazine INSIDE THIS ISSUE

A Pope for Christ, A Pope for You — Page 4-6
(By Thomas Griffin)

Pier Giorgio Frassati: Ordinary Struggles and Joys — Page 8-9

(By Matt Chicavich)

A Summer Psalm — Page 11-12
(By Peter Vanderberg)

How to Be Moved By Scripture — Page 13-14 (By Mary Molloy)

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.



A Pope for Christ, A Pope for You

By Thomas Griffin

We have a new pope: our first American pope.

So many were stunned when Pope Leo XIV was named as the next successor of Peter. So many voices within and outside of the Catholic Church claimed that there was no way that the pope would be from America. This could mean a lot for the American church but, more importantly, Leo appears to be the pope that our entire world needs.

He was born in Chicago, Illinois and later attended Villanova University. He joined the Augustinians and later became a provincial. He spent fourteen years in Peru, providing service to the local church community. In 2023 he was asked to lead an office in the Vatican devoted to the selection of new bishops around the world.

After being elected to serve as the leader for the Dicastery of Bishops, he said "I still consider myself a missionary. My vocation, like that of every Christian, is to be a missionary, to proclaim the Gospel wherever one is."

His first words as pope were: "Peace be with you all."

Leo continued his initial address explaining his choice of these words, "This is the first greeting of the resurrected Christ, the good shepherd who has given up his life for God, and I should also like this greeting of peace to enter our hearts and our families."

These two statements appear to be critical to the pope's mission. Leo has consistently shown and spoken about the need for our world to have peace but also for the human heart to know Jesus - the only one who can bring true comfort within the challenges of life. He is for the individual person and for the world. The pope clearly believes that it is through the family that a relationship with Jesus, the peaceful shepherd, must be stressed and promoted.

He also spoke to the College of Cardinals on Saturday, May 10th. He took this as an opportunity to speak further about his vision for his pontificate as well as explain his choice for the name "Leo."



He sees his papacy continuing the mission of Francis, to have (among other things): "a return to the primacy of Christ in proclamation...the missionary conversion of the entire Christian community...loving care for the least and the rejected, courageous and trusting dialogue with the contemporary world in its various components and realities."

Jesus must take the center stage of our individual lives and he must be the primary focus of the faithful as they journey through their concrete lives. The only way that we can accomplish this Christ-centeredness is through a commitment to daily prayer. This intimate dialogue with Jesus each day will enable us to speak more of him in our everyday lives.

As for his choice for Leo, the pope said, "because Pope Leo XIII in his historic Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* addressed the social question in the context of the first great industrial revolution. In our own day, the Church offers to everyone the treasury of her social teaching in response to another industrial revolution and to developments in the field of artificial intelligence that pose new challenges for the defense of human dignity, justice and labor."

The violations of human dignity that took place during the industrial revolution between 1750-1900 appear to be recurring again (or at least, they are at the beginning stages of returning). The move from farms to the cities was a shift in the need for workers in the bustling factories. Unfortunately, this work led to long hours, low pay, dangerous injuries and even child labor. Over time, the economic emphasis was more on production instead of on the value of the human person completing the work.

Pope Leo XIII wrote *Rerum Novarum* as a response to these injustices.

Pope Leo XIV chose his name to combat the new industrial revolution that is on the scene: the rise and growth of artificial intelligence. The choice of his name pinpoints his belief that this form of technology is already, and will continue to threaten the value of the person as well as the value of human work.

Similar to the age of Leo XIII, we must clarify that the Catholic Church is not against the use of technology. However, the use of technology (whether that be machines in a factory or AI) must be at the service of the human person, not the other way around. While AI can, and is, leading to benefits in the fields of medicine and can provide more time with loved ones through accomplishing long tasks it can also lead to many problems.

For example, if artificial intelligence is "more powerful" than human intelligence - what does that say about the worth of the human person? If AI can do a job more efficiently and effectively, should it replace human beings who rely on that job in order to take care of themselves and their families? Simply because a machine can perform a task more quickly than me, does that mean it is better than me?

These similarities between the impact of AI on the economy and the impact of the industrial revolution on the workforce are very evident. The response of Leo XIV can, most likely, be



viewed in the way that Pope Leo XIII wrote about the challenges of his time. We must reflect on what it means to work and what it means to be a human person (where does our dignity come from?).

"First," wrote Leo XIII, "labor is *personal* because the force which accomplishes any task adheres to the person, and is his own altogether. Further, he exercises his skills for his own advantage. Secondly, a man's labor is *necessary*, for this reason: He works to support himself. Indeed, it is a law of nature, which must be obeyed: A person must preserve his own life."

There is nothing personal about AI. If it is implemented in the workforce in an extreme manner it will further isolate the human being. If it replaces the jobs of so many people, it will also prevent them from preserving their own lives and will, therefore, violate their dignity.

The entire issue of technology (whether we are speaking about its influence on jobs, the economy, education, etc.) comes down to knowing what it means to be a human person. The value of the human being is not equal to one's ability to perform work fast. It is also not equal to one's "cash value" in their workplace. Each and every human person is unrepeatable because their worth comes from Who made them and Who saved them.

God deemed that this universe was not "good enough" without you in it. Jesus deemed you worth (even though we are not) being mocked, beaten, and killed for. Our value does not come from what we can do but from Who we belong to. When we forget this fact, the powers of this world degrade the dignity of the person.

As Pope Leo XIV said in his first homily as pope, "A lack of faith is often tragically accompanied by the loss of meaning in life." As we continue to journey through the seemingly uncharted waters of the rise of new technologies, let us not be afraid. We have a pope who desires to guide us, protect us and lead us to the Good Shepherd.

And, we have a God whose only desire is to be united with you and convey to you that you are worth dying for.

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.

PAGE 6



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Pier Giorgio Frassati: Ordinary Struggles and Joys



By Matthew Chicavich

When my wife was pregnant with our first child, we decided to not find out whether or not the baby was a boy or a girl. We were pretty sure it was a girl and had her name lined up: Madeleine Therese, after my late mother and St. Therese of Lisieux. Still, we were stalwart in our resolve to remain surprised on the day of our child's birth.

Not knowing the sex of the baby presents certain challenges to preparing for your first child though. What color do we paint the room or what type of pajamas do we put on the baby registry? Not being the most organized person, these did not seem to me like significant obstacles to welcoming a newborn into our home. For my wife, whose preparations skills rival FEMA, not knowing if our baby was a boy or a girl was truly a struggle. The last straw was the arrival of a knitted baby blanket in a neutral green color from Aunt Monie. Yuck. We would now request the gender of our baby at the next sonogram.

I recall the response to finding out our first born was a boy. "Are you sure?" The sonogram technician quickly revealed the evidence. What now? What do we name our baby boy?

After some prayer, the answer was clear. Our son would be named after Pier Giorgio Frassati.

Pier Giorgio Frassati's Feast Day is July 4th. He will be canonized on August 3rd of this year. Since I first came to know Blessed Pier Giorgio about 15 years ago, he has become more popular. He is considered a patron of youth and often depicted in his mountain climbing garb or laughing with friends. Pier Giorgio was jovial, popular, and a practical joker. He was also a man of deep prayer, love for the poor, and devotion to the Eucharist.

I first met Pier Giorgio through the Frassati Fellowship of NYC. My wife and I were introduced, betrothed, and married via this young adult Catholic group of believers. The Fellowship organized two annual retreats, monthly dinners, holy hours, and weekly Bible studies amongst other opportunities for community and spiritual growth. My wife and I were eventually part of the governing council and led weekly Lectio Divina at the Kolping House on the upper East Side.

What was so attractive about this community was the palpable joy at every event. Yet, a deep desire to be in intimate relationship with Jesus through the Eucharist, Scripture, and his Church was the inspiration for every gathering, big or small. It was as if Pier Giorgio were there. We wanted this same joy and devotion in our home. So, we Americanized Pier Giorgio and named our son Peter George. Little did we know that Pier Giorgio would also walk with us



Even though Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati exuded the joy of following Christ, he can also teach us about the struggle of being an ordinary Christian. Blessed Frassati was in love with a friend, Laura Hidalgo. Maria DiLorenzo, in *An Ordinary Christian* explains that Laura was a girl "Pier Giorgio's parents would certainly have looked down upon and judged unworthy to marry their only son." In short, Laura was not of the same social class as the Frassati's. Knowing his parent's potential disapproval, Pier Giorgio sought spiritual direction concerning his love for Laura. After a time of discernment, Pier Giorgio decided to bury his feelings for Laura out of respect for his parents. How did Pier Giorgio deal with this struggle? Here we find the depth and beauty of our future Saint:

"Today, in the struggle, I can only thank God, who in his infinite mercy desires to give me this heartache, so that through these difficulties I might return to a more spiritual interior life" (letter to Isidoro Bonini, January, 29, 1925).

From Peter George's struggles with breast feeding to making the U12 MLS Next soccer team, we have tried to invite Pier Giorgio Frassati's intercession into our son and family's life. He teaches us that we all can struggle while remaining joyful.

The Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium* explains that when lay people witness to Christ it has "peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world" (LG 35). This was definitely true of Pier Giorgio.

His life was filled with parties, mountain-climbing and practical jokes along with the typical struggles of a young man. All of this because his faithfulness to Christ was marked by a deep holiness. His witness to Christ was stronger precisely because of his great passion for life, in both the joy and the struggle.

Trying to live our vocation as lay people to the fullest, let us allow Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati to inspire us to strive for holiness in the ordinary as well.

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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A Summer Psalm

By Peter Vanderberg

He did not leave himself without witness, for he gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filled you with nourishment and gladness for your hearts.

— Acts 14:17

Can it be true that summer rain is an act of God—soaking parched earth, strengthening trees that strengthen us, their fruit swollen with divine sugar?

Rain wakes us from our breakneck trance with deep breaths of fragrant air shared by everything green exhaling. That verdant gift reminds us that we too are holy & not forgotten, essential in ever-expanding cycles.

Rain hallows the ground just as prayer fills your chest with faith & patience learned from wild strawberries that sprout unexpected & cicadas that wait years, called by rain to sing a summer psalm.

When a gift is given, be grateful, but also think about why *this* gift why *this* earth for us. How could God know it is exactly what we always needed & more than we could ever want?

Abundance is for sharing. Each open hand receiving, or extended in offering multiplies our God-given portion perfectly as every natural fractal: branches, crystals, lightning, & love through generations.

Just as your grandmother asks if her gift still warms you, God also asks through our own longing if creation still satisfies, still draws our sighs.

Let the people say yes, thank you, amen.

The heavens belong to the Lord, but he has given the earth to the children of Adam.

— Psalm 115

PAGE 11



The Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you. — John 14:26

Every day, I make lists of things to remember in mind & soul:

keep silence when rage blooms
pray always—especially when
crows call overhead as you leave home
a hawk is seen wheeling above mourning doves
light through trees & stained glass illuminates chapel walls
someone asks if I have a minute to talk
give to everyone who asks—don't ask about deserving
let forgiveness be as natural as breath

Forgive yourself—Holy Spirit reminds me—can't go back to fix things but remember, years from now, what will you wish to return to?

Who would you love more, what would you say or do before is it too late? It's not too late—now is the day of salvation.

This poem grew from the practice of *Lectio Divina*. Each morning I pray with the daily Mass readings and write down a word or phrase from each scripture passage. I reflect through writing on these passages and how they connect to my life. Sometimes this writing leads to poems.

Peter Vanderberg teaches at a Catholic high school on Long Island. His published works include Weather-Eye, Crossing Pleasant Lake, celestial navigation, Drownproof, and war/torn.



How to Be Moved By Scripture

By Mary Molloy

"If there is anything in this life that sustains a wise person and helps to maintain serenity amid the tribulations and adversities of the world, it is first and foremost, I believe, the meditation on and knowledge of the Scriptures." - St. Jerome

When I was growing up, I often heard in classes on the faith how important praying and reading Sacred Scripture is. I remember in high school trying to just sit down with my Bible and read and feeling completely lost and at times bored. I would hear stories about saints who would randomly open a Bible and receive a deeply meaningful word from Scripture that was exactly what they needed to hear. It was clear that the Bible sparked movements and conversions. I was puzzled at how this happened because besides a few stories that seemed downright out of a soap opera in the Bible I never felt my heart moved by Scripture.

Everything changed when I took an Old Testament class during my sophomore year of college. Our professor was so deeply moved by the biblical stories that one day, while teaching about Moses interceding for his people with outstretched arms, he began to weep with profound emotion at the realization of the challenge of intercessory prayer. My classmates and I sat in stunned silence as we suddenly grasped Scripture's potential to deeply impact our lives and vocations in ways we had never experienced.

As the course progressed, I encountered biblical figures in entirely new ways. Previously, I had only known them through children's coloring pages and sentimental reflections that made these characters seem flat and uninteresting. Now I began to understand their stories through the deeper meaning of the original text and the unity of the content of the entire Bible, guided by the Catholic Church's authority and Tradition that safeguards the proper context and interpretation of each passage.

In seeking God, we quickly realize that no one is self-sufficient. Rather, we are called, as Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Constitution *Seeking the Face of God*, to move beyond self-centredness, drawn by God's Holy Face and by the "sacred ground of the other", to an ever more profound experience of communion.

Through this class, I discovered my mistake had been interpreting Scripture solely through my limited experiences rather than through the Church's accumulated wisdom—thousands of years spent exploring the context and meaning of each biblical word, whether explaining original Aramaic terms in their historical context or clarifying the spiritual meaning of poetic passages never intended to be taken literally. I began to see the Bible as one cohesive story preparing us for history's greatest plot twist: God becoming human, confronting death, and defeating it by identifying with the poor and outcast, then rising to Eternal Life. Scripture, I learned, must be



read through the lens of the Kerygma—the core truth that we are created for intimate relationship with God, who loves us so profoundly that He offered His own life to save us from our sins and their just punishment.

The words of Sacred Scripture were not written to remain imprisoned on papyrus, parchment or paper, but to be received by a person who prays, making them blossom in his or her heart. The Word of God goes to the heart. The Catechism affirms that: "prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture so that a dialogue takes place between God and man" (CCC #2653). This is where prayer leads you, because it is a dialogue with God.

I continue to learn that Scripture must be read prayerfully. St. Bernard of Clairvaux emphasized that Jesus, the Word, always visits the soul in prayer, though we often fail to recognize his presence. To truly pray with Scripture, we must empty our hearts of self-reliance and preconceptions about God. We must approach prayer and Scripture with the heart of a beggar—desperately hungry to receive the Bread of Life, Jesus, the Divine Word.

I remember a time when I was feeling particularly isolated and bogged down with the grief of the death of a loved one. I opened the readings for Mass that day and immediately read the line "The Lord is close to the broken-hearted, those who are crushed in spirit, He saves" (Psalm 34:18). I burst into tears realizing that in my lowliness God came running to meet me very tangibly in his Word.

How do we encounter the Word in Scripture? I'm still learning, but I've found that approaching prayer with honesty, vulnerability, and a sense of need creates the right disposition to receive what the Lord wishes to give. When I come to Scripture merely to demonstrate knowledge or prove a point, my heart remains unmoved. But when I approach Scripture seeking to know God wholeheartedly, humbly receiving the Church's guidance on each passage's meaning within Scripture's broader context, I find transformation through deeper union and relationship with Jesus the Word.

In summary, effective prayer with Scripture requires a posture of seeking and neediness—the need to encounter God and receive His presence in our lives. This posture demands receptivity, setting aside our biases and ideologies to simply receive God's revelation as He intended. This requires dedicated prayer time and a Christ-centered approach, recognizing that everything in Scripture finds its fullest expression in Jesus Christ.

Mary Molloy teaches Religion at a Catholic high school on Long Island. She received her BA & MA in Catechetics and Theology from Franciscan University of Steubenville. She has spent the last 15 years in ministry both international and domestically. Her favorite thing is to serve the poor and spend quality time with her loved ones.



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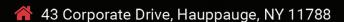
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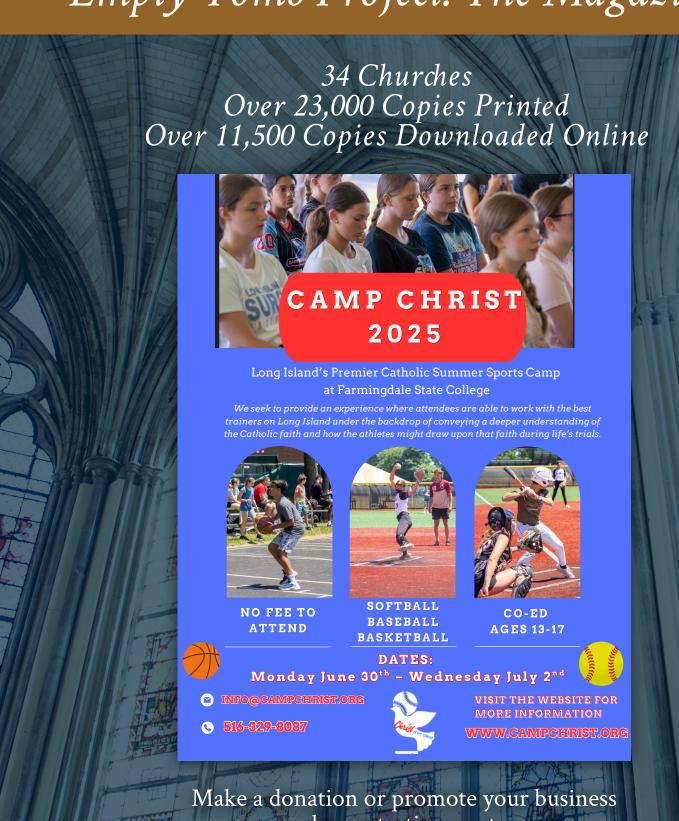


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