

Walk With Us

A Publication from the Women's Ministry Board of St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Community

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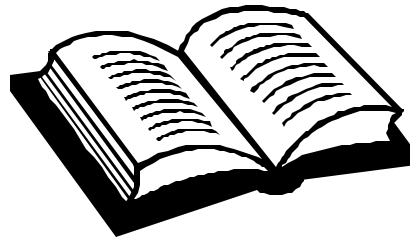
Book Review: *Old Testament Story, An Introduction*

Don Benjamin, Ph.D., a biblical scholar, has taught in St. Paul's adult education program about the Old Testament. The content of those teachings has now been published. The following is a review of his new book.

The Old Testament Story is a fresh scholarly look at the stories and culture of the Hebrew peoples. Benjamin, professor of biblical studies and religion at Arizona State University, states that his book "teaches students how to listen to the words that the Bible speaks, and how to understand the people of ancient Israel who crafted these remarkable words." The biblical stories offer insights into the struggle to answer the questions about life and death, right and wrong, the divine and human that is the focus of this text.

Benjamin is particularly sensitive to the women of the Old Testament, recognizing that the world of the Bible was patriarchal but that many traditions or interpretations have projected their own sexism into this world. Understanding the society and customs of these ancient peoples offers a greater understanding and respect for the ways in which biblical women believed and handed on their beliefs. The women in these stories display courage, faith, strength, ingenuity, dignity, talents

and worth. In the story of Adam and Eve, Benjamin suggests that the writers of the story see Eve as the heroine who chooses fertility and mortality over immortality by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Sarah and Hagar are seen as strong women who are both given land and children by God. The two midwives who save



The Old Testament Story, An Introduction with CD-ROM by Don C. Benjamin
Fortress Press, \$29 ISBN 0-8006-3621-X

Moses in the Exodus story outwit the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt by saving the Hebrew babies. Rahab in the Book of Joshua saves the city of Jericho through her own cunning and quick thinking, outmaneuvering both the Israelite and Canaanite warriors. Ruth and Naomi in the Book of Ruth are persevering widows who negotiate like monarchs for a new life and place for themselves and their children in Israelite society.

The Old Testament Story includes very informative chapters on

"Learning the Bible" and on "Living the Bible" for Jews, Christians, and Muslims who believe these stories to be God's revelation. Also included with the book is a CD-ROM, featuring Libronix software, which provides a full searchable text of the book, links, discussion questions, and additional bibliography.

Understanding the meaning of these ancient stories to the people who lived them and the people who wrote them down can help break open God's word to us today. What were the difficulties our foremothers and forefathers faced? How did they solve their problems? How did they listen to God's voice? Do we face similar problems today? Can these stories help us find answers? Often these stories have been encrusted with layers of cultural traditions but this comprehensive and engaging biblical studies book can help us to see the original intent of the ancient peoples and may be an opportunity to make a new connection with this powerful God of ancient Israel.

~ Reviewed by Laurie Metzler

Coming Soon...

The Women's Ministry Board is sponsoring two self-defense workshops later this summer. Al Garza will teach the classes with hands-on activities as well as practical ways to minimize risks. One of the classes will be geared to junior high and high school girls. Please watch the bulletin for further details.

Mark Your Calendars!

Women's Mini-Retreat
Saturday, October 2, 2004

Stay tuned for more details!

Women's Retreat

We are Holy Women: Living Our Passion & Speaking Our Truth

Over 100 people attended the Women's Retreat at St. Paul's on February 7, 2004. The speaker was Eileen Raffaniello Barbella, Ph.D., a psychologist and spiritual director, who discussed the importance of every woman finding her own personal vocation. Barbella urged each of us at the retreat to begin the process of determining our life's calling. Using two biblical relationships (Mary and Elizabeth, and Martha and Mary), she illustrated how connection to others can help define personal vocation.

Barbella began by discussing the healthy relationship of Mary and Elizabeth, who were two women helping each other, living their passion and speaking their truth. Interestingly, the most important component of their connection was not intimacy, but mutuality, which is mutual involvement and engagement. When two people connect, as Mary and Elizabeth did, there is zest or energy and increased clarity. The relationship helps the individual to better define self. In contrast, in a non-mutual unhealthy relationship, one person is more involved in the relationship than the other. Mary and Elizabeth's special connection teaches that relationships can bring us self-understanding, thereby helping us to discover our personal vocation.

Barbella believes that every woman needs to live out God's call and to get clarity on how to accomplish that successfully. To help us discover our life's calling, she suggested we imagine Jesus in front of us, asking two questions: *Who do you say you are? Who do you say I am?* In order to determine who we are, we need to ask ourselves: *Is there something of my personal vocation that gets lived out in all of my relationships: mother, daughter, wife, work, etc.?*

The relationship of Mary and Elizabeth was a healthy one that helped each woman to better understand her calling. Unhealthy relationships can keep us from defining our personal vocations by attempting to do that for us or by preventing us from establishing a separate self. Each of us has a strong desire for connection, but we need to be a self before we can connect with others.

The biblical story of Martha and Mary, which is about more than *being vs. doing*, illustrates the consequences of de-

selfing. Barbella believes that the deepest desire of our hearts is God's will. Because the deepest desire of Martha's heart was to be with Jesus and not cooking in the kitchen, she was "anxious and worried." Mary was acting in the way that Martha wanted to act. It was Martha who told Jesus: "Yes, Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the son of God, the one who is coming into the world." Her desire was to be with Jesus. Because she didn't know herself and what she wanted, she was upset. Mary was living out her heart's desire; Martha was not. This relationship teaches us that we need to find and live out our calling or we will experience Martha's frustration instead of Mary's peace.

Fear can negatively affect our relationships with family and friends, causing us to disconnect from others or to disconnect from self in order to please others. Sometimes *virtuous* anger can help us set the boundaries that are necessary for establishing self. Unhealthy anger is either stuffing anger down and becoming a doormat, or blowing up like a volcano. We need healthy anger, which can be loud and strong. It can give us the energy to fight injustice and to set boundaries, and the ability to say "yes."

Healthy anger can help us to have the courage to have faith and accept that we belong to God and to acknowledge that we are precious in his sight. He is making us in this *now* moment and giving birth to whom we are. At times, we get "pulled into the kitchen" and get distracted; hence, we need to reconnect to ourselves by taking time for solitude. Jesus invites us to come away to that deserted place, to bring ourselves to that solitude where we can find God. The door to solitude is often loneliness, but if we are lonely, it is often because we are disconnected from ourselves, not from others. We need to ask ourselves: *Whose kingdom am I serving? Am I acting to please God or to please others?*

In closing, Barbella suggested we daily use the practical survey *GRACE* to help us find God. It is as follows:

G*rat***itude**: Thank God for everything.

R*equ***est for Light**: Request for the light of the Holy Spirit to see with God's eyes.

A*ccounting for Attitudes*: Account for our actions and the desires beneath our actions.

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C*on***trition and Charting the Course**: Ask 'how did I fail?' Ask for forgiveness and make a better plan.

E*ntreaty for Energy and Enthusiasm*: Ask for the energy and enthusiasm to try again.

~ Re-cap provided by Jenny Suffredini

Emily Sievert's Mission Trip to Guatemala

Due to a combination of my naive nature and my attraction to "interesting adventures," I recently found myself on a lay mission trip to Guatemala. I left on March 13 (with what I hoped was an open heart and mind, as well as a thirst for adventure) and spent a week with 19 fellow Catholics, ministering to a population of indigenous Mayans who live in the mountainous areas of Santa Cruz del Quiche, Guatemala. I tried to have an attitude of "whatever happens...happens." I would take everything as it came.

The way that the week unfolded was so completely different from what I expected. The experience turned out to be quite a personal challenge for me in many ways. My greatest challenges, however, were in the realm of the spiritual. I now believe that God used my naiveté to get me to Guatemala so that I could learn what I needed to learn at this point in my spiritual journey.

There we were, a group of 20 Catholic adults. It might seem that we had so much in common; on some level, we were very much alike. But the ways in which we lived out our common faith seemed radically different at times. Because of all that we experienced together, there were many opportunities for intense and personal discussions, and often those conversations turned to discussions of our faith. Many times, I found myself struggling to find common spiritual ground with my fellow travelers. I realized that I was being challenged to look closely at where I was in my spiritual journey and at the same time being called to make peace between my spiritual self and my Catholic self. Only quite recently have I discovered how very different the

two can be. In coming to understand and accept others in terms of where they were on their journey, I had found one of the keys to understanding and accepting myself. I realized that in coming together as a group to minister to these people, we somehow were also being given the opportunity to grow in our own faith.

Much of what we saw and experienced was not surprising or shocking. I had expected to see general poverty as well as a lack of essential needs like medical care. However, at one point during the week, we were welcomed into the home of one of the Mayan families. It was an experience that had a profound effect on me and one whose memory I hope to carry with me forever. I believe that this was one of those defining moments for me. I felt as though a place in my heart had been opened.

The home that we were to visit was typical for this area, consisting of one room constructed of straw or adobe with a dirt floor. As we approached the crude dwelling various family members came out to greet us. Once inside, however, we were met by a young woman and several small children. Our interpreter spoke a few words to her and explained that the woman's husband had died recently. After another brief conversation with her, he turned to us and offered one word: "suicide." Weeping quietly she raised her eyes and silently pointed to the rough wooden beam, from which he had hung himself, only inches above our heads. I realized that, here in this small room, these people share experiences of life and death, pain and suffering and, at times, I am sure, much joy and hope. It struck me how intimately they live their lives. If God

is revealed in the details of our everyday lives, then might that explain why I felt, so profoundly, God's real presence in that room? We then asked if we might pray with her. United in prayer in this remote place in the mountains of Guatemala, we could at least share her burden of sorrow, if only for a few moments.

On departing that day, I felt immensely grateful to have been a part of that "church" experience. I could not help but feel that this is how we are called to minister to each other. To join with each other in the daily experiences of life, death, joy and sorrow thereby acknowledging and affirming our humanness. For me, at least, I think that this is where God waits for me.

So much of what I experienced that week seemed almost surreal because it transported me completely out of my proverbial comfort zone. I returned with a desire to become a better and holier person. By becoming holier, I mean becoming more the person that I am in God's eyes. Toward that goal, I hope to nurture that part of me that I discovered to be so alive and so capable of extraordinary growth. I learned that the difficulty is sometimes in remembering that growth can be uncomfortable, or even downright painful, while it is happening. I hope to keep myself from running away from these opportunities in my life.

What I had originally thought might be an "interesting adventure" turned into an incredible spiritual experience for me. I have begun to ask myself what else might God offer me in the future if only I am willing to "Let go and let God." Things might get really interesting!

Tune in to Catholic Radio - 1540 AM

What is the official name of the Catholic Church? What is the significance of John the Baptist's referral of Jesus as the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29)? What does the phrase 'He descended into Hell' really mean in the Apostles Creed? What does GIRM stand for, and what is its purpose?

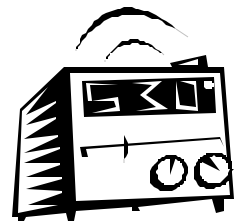
If you can answer some or all of these questions, I'm going to guess that you are an avid listener of Catholic radio, locally broadcast on station KGBC, 1540 AM. If you could not answer any of the questions, then I would highly recommend that you tune in so that you, too, can begin

to learn more about our Catholic faith.

KGBC (also known as St. Maximilian Kolbe Radio) is locally operated by Eternal Truth Broadcasting, Inc. It is a non-profit, listener supported 24/7 Catholic radio station. (Currently broadcast all 24 hours in English, it is the hope of Eternal Truth Broadcasting—with an increase in donations from its listeners—to eventually also broadcast in Spanish.) Besides learning so much about our Catholic faith through its various programs (Open Line, Catholic Answers, Teachings of Jesus Christ, just to name a few), you can also

tune in to pray the daily Mass, the Rosary or the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy. A full listing of the station's program schedule can be found on its website at: <http://www.maxkolberadio.com/schedule.html>.

Or, why not just tune in? I assure you that you will come away having learned some valuable truth or insight about our beautiful Catholic faith.



The Passion of the Christ: A Review

When you see the title of this article, you might be saying to yourself: "what, *another* review?" Over the past few months there certainly have been more than a fair share of reviews, in both secular and Christian media alike, about Mel Gibson's movie. What I'd like to offer you here is not so much a review, but rather a personal experience of the movie.

Due to the enormous amount of media coverage of *The Passion*, I felt I had a pretty good idea of the graphic detail of the movie. And, thanks to my Catholic upbringing (Stations of the Cross, Sorrowful Mysteries, display of the Crucifix - and not just a cross - in Catholic churches/chapels) and 6 years of study of Latin and the ancient Roman culture, I was not surprised by the horrific treatment of Jesus. Don't get me wrong - I was (and am still) incredibly moved by the love Jesus has for me to have endured such excruciating pain, but I was not shocked by the detail in which it was portrayed in the movie.

No, what had more of an impact on me - and something I *didn't* read or hear about in the many reviews of *The Passion* - was our Blessed Mother's reaction to the all of the events surrounding Jesus' death. Perhaps it is because I am a mother myself, but I was very moved by Mary's actions throughout the movie. Though I have not experienced the death of a child myself, I know how quickly I react to even a mere scratch on one of my children; so I can only imagine how heart wrenching it was for Mary to have witnessed Jesus' torture and death. However, you don't see an outburst of hysterical emotion by Mary at any time throughout the movie. Yes, you can see that she is deeply pained and distressed by what her Son is going through, yet there is a calm about Mary that can only come from her complete faith in and acceptance of God's plan. (Of course, that shouldn't be surprising - recall Mary's strength of faith in God's will at the Annunciation.) In fact, in one scene, during Jesus' carrying of the cross, you see the devil walking along one side of Jesus, while Mary is walking along the other. The



devil and Mary are staring - almost glaring - at one another. My impression was that of the quintessential good versus evil. There you have the devil, who defies God and battles Him for the possession and ruin of people's souls; and then there is Mary, who, in accepting God's plan with complete faith, plays such an important role in the salvation of mankind. After watching the portrayal of Mary's acceptance of God's will without question in *The Passion*, I came away with the message that, to truly trust in God's plan for our life doesn't mean that we will be without trials or pain or suffering, but that we will have the peace, strength and grace to accept what comes our way and know that it will work for His greater good and glory (Rom 8:28).

Though there is not enough room to write about all of the scenes involving our Blessed Mother that deeply moved me, one more that I'd like to share with you takes place after the scourging of Jesus. At this point, Jesus has been led away, but Mary remains behind. Once the crowd has dispersed, she rushes over to the pillar at which Jesus was tortured, and begins to wipe up his blood from the ground. How precious was her Son's blood - not just to her as His mother, but to all for whom His blood was shed! I can't even begin to tell you how much more I now cherish the cup of blood I receive at Communion. My mind usually flashes to this scene in the movie, and I pray that I may revere Jesus just as Mary had.

If you have not yet seen *The Passion*, I would encourage you to do so. I think you will find that the movie can help strengthen your understanding of the Catholic faith and traditions we have, and thus draw you even closer to Jesus in prayer. And, if you come away with a similar experience that I had, you might also enjoy a renewed admiration of our Blessed Mother and benefit from a closer relationship with her.

~ Review written by Lorraine Hancock

Were You There?

The Women's Ministry Board presented "A Woman's Way of the Cross" on Friday, April 2, during St. Paul's Lenten series. It highlighted women saints and prominent Catholic women who have been leaders in our Christian way of living. Among the women highlighted were: Catherine of Sienna, who wrote of Jesus as a bride with 3 steps, each representing a stage of spiritual life - a fall, a rising, and a moving forward; St. Margaret of Scotland, who was known for her love of the poor and used her resources for them as well as gave of her own time to them; and Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who served Jesus through serving his suffering brothers and sisters. May we continue in their examples to be daughters of the church and walk with Jesus each day!

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