

The Magazine of the Diocese of Salina • A Sister Publication of *The Register*

# faith

AUGUST 2025  
Volume 6: Issue 4  
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Empty womb,  
aching heart

**PG. 4**

A miraculous  
survival

**PG. 6**

Mary, Shield  
of Peace

**PG. 18**

A father's  
testimony  
following the  
loss of his  
daughter

OUR  
INNER  
*hope*





*“We have been called to heal wounds,  
to unite what has fallen apart and to bring  
home those who have lost their way.”*

— St. Francis of Assisi

*“Catholicism has shaped my entire perspective of reality. I began losing my sight at the age of five and a search for meaning ultimately led me to experience God’s infinite mercy.*

*The most profound reality in my eyes is that Jesus suffered. When disability weighs heavily on me, as it often does, I look to Jesus as my guide.*

*When I feel as though my dignity is not being respected, I turn to Jesus so that I might respond gracefully. I know He is walking with me. In Christ, I know my true dignity and worth.*

*Moreover, this helps me to be compassionate to those who live on the margins of our society. It allows me to recognize the personhood of every individual.”*

Emily went on to serve as a resident assistant in her residence hall during her senior year. After graduating from Notre Dame, she enrolled in the University of Texas-Austin Law School. Emily wants to devote her career to advocating for people with disabilities.

Emily may lack eyesight, but what tremendous insight she developed in her life!”

I, too, found this story incredibly powerful. Despite her blindness, she knows who she is, and she wants to give hope to others.

We are all called to give people hope, no matter what might be going on in our lives. Recently, a bishop, who is a big football fan, shared something with me that gave me a lot of hope. He talked about going to football games and joining in cheering for their team as they came out of the tunnel and onto the field. But now when he goes to games, he thinks of something else. Imagine, he said, St. Mother Teresa going through a tunnel entering heaven. There are hundreds of thousands of people clapping loudly as she enters. These are the people who she gave hope to, who also passed on hope to others — all because St. Teresa encountered them and brought them Jesus.

This bishop said that perhaps when we die there will be the people whom we helped standing on either side of the gates loudly waving, whistling and ever so joyfully cheering us on.

Hope. Pass it on. It’s worth it! †

In Christ’s service,

*+ Gerald L. Vincke*

**Most Rev. Gerald L. Vincke,  
Bishop of Salina**

## Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

**R**ecently, I attended a conference with 30 other bishops at the University of Notre Dame. While we were there, Father Bob Dowd, CSC, the president of the university, gave a talk. He shared a story about a young woman named Emily that I would like to share with you.

“Emily was a student in a seminar on religion and politics I taught a few years back. At the age of five, Emily began going blind due to a rare eye disease. I cannot imagine how a young child makes sense of gradually going blind; gradually no longer being able to see parents, loved ones and the world around them. At the beginning of the semester, I typically ask students in the class to write a reflection on how their faith has shaped the way they think about the world. Emily, who was completely blind at the time, wrote the most extraordinary reflection.

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# Empty womb, aching heart

## A TESTIMONY

### SHELLY

We were very young when we were married.

We moved to Virginia for Dan's first job and where I finished college at University of Virginia. It's a medical university, and you can enroll in studies to make a little extra money. I signed up for a fasting study to see how eating disorders affected fertility. During the course of a few months, the doctors realized I never ovulated. A cyst grew over the ovary, and it would not release.

The main doctor told me it would be difficult to get pregnant when I was ready to have children. I thought surely the doctor was wrong, as I was the youngest of nine children and no one else in my family seemed to be having problems. After college, eight years of marriage and several moves, including back to northwest Kansas, we were finally ready.

We wanted everything to be perfect. A year went by with no results. I decided to quietly visit my doctor. She put

me on Clomid, a drug that stimulates ovulation, which I took for six months.

I started getting a lot of questions about when we planned to start our family from neighbors, family and friends. I did not feel like announcing our struggles. In fact, the more people asked, the more protective I became of the process. I think that was really the hardest part — wanting a child, feeling so broken and not having anyone to talk to about it. Dan just didn't quite understand what I was going through. This was not something that could be easily fixed.

However, God was so good to me. It was during this time that God brought me back to the Catholic Church, to confession and to the Eucharist. He put people in my path who challenged me to find the truth in the Church. He sent me a friend to our little neighborhood. We immediately connected and found out through many conversations that she too was going through the infertility journey. In this friendship, the Lord gave me a lot of consolation. We attended a prayer group with a few church members, and I shared a bit

of my infertility journey with them. They prayed for me regularly.

Dan was never a hindrance. He was ready and willing to do whatever I decided I wanted to do. I moved on to a specialist. I went from doctor appointment to doctor appointment

like I was training for a race. I became obsessed with the fertility drugs, my cycle and the different procedures. It really began to consume every aspect of my life. In this craziness, I can see little

nuggets of love that God gave me. My nurse would pray with me before each appointment. Dan would see how it was affecting me and not leave my side. Looking back, those hormones must have created mood swings; however, I cannot remember him ever complaining about it.

There was a book called *Empty Womb, Aching Heart* that I stumbled across. It was written for both spouses to help them understand each other. This book really helped Dan and me navigate what the other person was going through. It also showed us that many people felt just like we did. All the feelings of guilt

BY DAN  
AND SHELLY  
WAHLMEIER  
SUBMITTED  
PHOTOS





that I was the problem, that I was not doing enough or that I was doing too much were normal.

This was a three- or four-year process. Having your cycle start over again every month was devastating and caused so much anguish. I would be angry with God, but I also knew God had big shoulders. He could handle my frustration. I knew He understood that I was not angry with hate but with hurt. He knew that when I was in church and saw a little girl in her daddy's arms that my ache was not just for me but for Dan, too.

I cultivated a relationship with the Lord where I did all the talking and not a lot of listening. However, He, too, was always with me. It took many years to work that out, to learn to listen. I know some women are upset when friends and family become pregnant. I can commiserate with them, but I never felt those feelings. I believe that is a grace God gave me. I never wanted anyone to feel the pain I felt — the feeling of loss, of failure, of not measuring up as a woman.

Finally, after my doctor said he had done everything he could for me and sent me to a different specialist, who said in vitro fertilization was all that was left, I decided that was it. I was done. It was an actual relief to make that decision.

Dan and I never envisioned our life without children, as we both love kids of all ages. We had many discussions along the way about adoption, so that became the next step in our journey. We adopted a sibling set from Kansas; I am so grateful for their lives. They have brought so much joy and love! We are so blessed by who they have become. We are now grandparents, and that is a beautiful gift!

Through this journey, we have had several couples come to us and ask for prayers and for someone to talk to who understands. Those relationships are very special to us. This process has also helped us be firmly pro-life and help us see that all life is a gift.

## DEACON DAN

Infertility is a difficult journey, especially when both spouses dream of having a large family. As a man, I felt the weight of needing to “fix” everything, but infertility left me feeling completely inept. It was a struggle I never anticipated, and as a simple farm boy from western Kansas, the situation felt so foreign to me. I realized quickly that no amount of problem-solving would fix what was happening.

I found it especially hard to understand the pain my wife, Shelly, was going through. Her mental health and emotional state were being deeply affected, and I didn't know how to be there for her in the way she needed. I felt like I was falling short as a husband. To make matters worse, my faith was weak. I wasn't the spiritual leader our home required. I was lukewarm in my beliefs and lacked any sort of prayer life. I thought I could handle it all on my own, and I was blind to how serious things were becoming.

Looking back, I can see now how much I needed God. I had no real understanding of what Shelly was going through. She was enduring a pain that was so private, and people's well-meaning advice — “Just count your blessings” or “You just need to relax” — only deepened her suffering. To me, those words didn't seem to have the same effect, but they were like daggers to her heart. She would smile, but I now understand how much they wounded her.

Through this journey, God worked on my heart. His quiet presence and love were there, even when I didn't fully see it. I realize now that He was using our suffering to draw us closer to Him. Over time, He helped me see beyond my own blindness and opened my heart to His plans for us. Our infertility wasn't about having children — it was about learning to trust in God and surrender to His plan. Once we did, everything changed. Our marriage grew



stronger, and I slowly became the man and spiritual leader I needed to be for Shelly and our home.

Shelly and I both have a big heart for those going through infertility. We both recommend reading a book by Marlo Schalesky called *Empty Womb, Aching Heart*. This book brought a tremendous amount of healing and understanding. I was able to comprehend what Shelly was going through, and Shelly was able to understand my pain as well. It helped bring unity into our suffering.

The pain of infertility never fully goes away. Like any wound, it leaves a scar — a mental and emotional scar that stays with us. Even after all these years, if we talk about it, it brings tears. It has been more than two decades, but the ache is still there. Yet it serves as a reminder of what God did for us through His grace. We were heading in the wrong direction, and His plan for us was far greater than anything we could have imagined. He turned our struggles into a beautiful story of faith and redemption. †

*Deacon Dan and Shelly have been married 31 years. They have two children who are both married with one child each. They are members of St. Joseph in New Almelo.*





BY KATIE  
HAMEL

# A MIRACULOUS SURVIVAL: PRAY, HOPE AND DON'T WORRY

**J**anel Weigel is the longest living survivor of thymic carcinoma. At least, that's what a few of her doctors have told her. She and her husband of 42 years, Rick, often feel uncomfortable sharing their miracle story. So much of it seems unbelievable, but every bit of it is true. It all happened.

In 2000, when Janel was 37 years old, she was diagnosed with thymic carcinoma, a rare form of cancer with a poor prognosis. She was given 18 months to live. Her cancer was wrapped around her vena cava. There were spots on her lungs, diaphragm and liver. Her doctor informed her that once the cancer progressed to the liver, there was nothing that could be done. A bleak picture was given to the Weigels.

"I was very fearful," Janel shares. "I had three kids. I wanted to see them receive their first Communion and graduate. I wanted to be at their weddings and meet my grandchildren. I kept thinking of everything I would be missing."

And with that fear, Janel clung even more tightly to her Catholic faith, specifically her devotion to Mary. "I leaned on the Rosary. I prayed it every night." Janel's love for the Rosary stemmed from her grandparents, who gave it to her parents, who gave it to her. The Rosary was a source of comfort for Janel. Speaking to the Mother of God, through the prayers of the Rosary, as well as the Memorare, brought her hope.

Spiritually, when Janel received her news, she lamented, "Why is this happening to me?" But with time and through unceasing prayer, her thoughts changed. And instead of begging God for an answer, she gave Him her cancer. "It needed to be in His hands. I gave it to God and let Him take care of me and my family."



In the midst of this, Janel underwent chemotherapy and radiation. At a check-up to see how the cancer had progressed, the doctors and the Weigels were stunned to learn the cancer had begun to diminish — some of it had even disappeared. The bleak prognosis of 18 months was no longer so bleak. With this specific type of cancer, the positive news was unheard of. It was a miracle.

In 2013, the cancer returned. Janel was sent to the Mayo Clinic, but before

leaving, she and her family held a prayer service for healing with their parish priest. Rick shares, "It was overcast, and the sun was covered up all day. But when the priest prayed over her, the sun peeked through the clouds and shone directly on her. And when the prayer was finished, the sun disappeared again. We all asked each other, 'Did you see that happen?' We all saw it, and we all nearly couldn't believe it."

## A DEVOTION TO PADRE PIO

While Janel found comfort in the Rosary, the prayer of her youth. Rick found it in the intercession of Padre Pio.

"My devotion to St. Pio started when Janel was receiving chemo. There was a religious sister who was a chemo nurse. She could see that I was struggling to understand it all. She gave me a book about Padre Pio, and I read it in probably three days.

"It was amazing what he went through growing up and later his stigmata. It really made me turn to him. I had some Padre Pio prayer cards that I would give out, and I prayed for his intercession every night.

"Padre Pio once said, 'Pray, hope and don't worry.' Without faith, you really have no hope. I never really was kept from worrying, but after a while, I began to worry less."

Rick's devotion to Padre Pio is not one he kept quiet. He constantly shared his love and zeal for the saint. He always carried in his wallet a prayer card and Padre Pio medal. Earlier this year, Rick had the opportunity to venerate a relic of Padre Pio. He reverently placed the prayer card he had been carrying since Janel's diagnosis to the relic and sat back to pray when he soon noticed a young man.

"There was a kid, probably high school age. He just cried. He didn't kneel on the kneeler but on the floor. I could tell something was really bothering him. Just watching him, I started filling up with tears, because whatever he was going through moved me. I felt the Spirit come over me, and I walked over to him and said, 'I have no idea what you are going through, and it is none of my business, but I've been watching you, and I wanted to give you this.' And I gave him the prayer card I had just touched to the relic. The one I had been carrying for years. He was so thankful. I have no idea what his name was, but I pray for him every night and that Padre Pio will take care of him."



Upon arriving at the Mayo Clinic, Janel was once again given a prognosis of 18 months. Once again, she began a regimen of radiation and chemotherapy, only this time, she was required to stay at the Mayo Clinic. It was especially challenging for her, as it was her youngest daughter's senior year.

Her family was supportive, however. Her children, siblings and parents were all there for her. And her grandpa told her that he prayed a Rosary for her every single day. In the midst of her trials, Janel was blessed to be surrounded by people who loved her.

Being surrounded by so much love and support motivated Janel to do something extremely brave — she began the search for her birth mother. Adopted as a young girl, Janel had never known her birth mother, but a friend of a friend, in a roundabout way, made contact with Janel's mother. The two were able to connect. It was emotional, but now Janel and her birth mother have developed a beautiful relationship. With it, Janel has discovered even more family in the form of two new sisters.

The cancer has come back six times. And six times, Janel has beaten it. There was also a heart scare, but Janel seemingly and miraculously overcame that, too. She credits all of it to God.

The question she asked at the onset of her cancer journey she repeats today. But what was once asked with a forsaken heart is now asked with loving disbelief. "I look around me and see others, and I ask, 'Why me? It has been 25 years. Why me?'"

"I am so blessed and so undeserving. So I continue to pray. My faith never wavered through this. I am blessed to receive the Holy Eucharist and the sacraments. I come from strong Catholics, and that is what I hope I can instill in my kids and grandkids. Church, God and prayer are all important. They are what get you through the hard times." †



# Our inner hope

## A FATHER'S TESTIMONY FOLLOWING THE LOSS OF HIS DAUGHTER

**W**hen I first learned about the 2025 Jubilee Year theme, *Pilgrims of Hope*, I was very excited about the coincidental upcoming release of my book, *Blessings From Becky, Breathing in Faith*. As one of the overarching themes of my book is hope in God, the timing of its release during the Year of Hope seemed predestined.

**BY JEFF KEATING** Becky was my daughter, born with cystic fibrosis, who struggled her whole life to be thought of as normal. Witty, charming, bubbly, capable of talking people into many crazy stunts, her 29 years were a paradox of living to the fullest vs. struggling to stay alive. As Becky's Catholic education (St. Xavier High School, Benedictine College) formed her faith, she embraced her role as a mentor to share that faith: as a CYO youth group leader, as a blogger and as a big sister to four siblings. Throughout her life, Becky seemed to ponder

life's basic questions; What was God's plan for her life? How could she learn to trust and hope in God? While she struggled at times to find the answers, in the end, Becky learned to accept her crosses with such fervor that she truly mirrored Christ and displayed the themes of hope described by Pope Francis. I want to share with you some of her journal entries that captured her hope while living with a terminal illness.

In Pope Francis' document officially proclaiming the Jubilee Year, he acknowledged that everyone knows what it is to hope, that in the heart of each person hope dwells and this hope has nothing to do with mere "human" optimism or the ephemeral expectation of some earthly benefit. No, he wrote, it is something real, already accomplished in Christ, a gift daily bestowed upon us.

What is this hope? St. Paul described it like this: Affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. (Rom 5:3-5)



I feel light and hopeful, happy and optimistic. Something good is on the horizon, I can feel it. I feel braver. **I want to die within myself, Lord, so that I can rise with You and become new.** I want to make a difference. I want to help. I want You to need me, too. You clearly have a plan.”

*me, too. You clearly have a plan. Pardon my impatience in not seeing it as clearly as You yet. It's been almost a year since last Easter. An awful lot has changed in that year. I'm learning that God gave me a wonderful family; good, caring, and kind friends; and, most of all, happiness. My irritation with the transplant spikes now and then, but mostly, especially during Lent, I feel hope — an emotion I've been sorely missing the past six or seven years. God said it. I believe it. That settles it.*

St. Paul continues his thought process by stating that as this proven (or Christ-like) character is developed within us, we are filled with hope. With this hope, we trust God is walking with us and that we will make it through each trial. With this hope, we are confident that God has a good and loving plan for our lives. And with this hope, we are assured that we will be with Him in heaven. Becky displayed this type of hope, that to which Pope Francis alluded; something real, a gift daily bestowed upon us. From her post three years after her transplant:

*As of today, I am the longest living mycobacterium-infected, double-lung transplant survivor in the world! This summer, my doctors will present my case internationally, so that others in my situation are given a fighting chance. How incredible! Nowhere in my past 28 years had I planned on my current living situation being a part of my life story. The chapters are more complex than I would've chosen; the storyline, more suspenseful. But the length of each continuing chapter is an unanswered prayer I never realized I needed. What started out as a book about survival has turned into a testimony of hope. On my darkest days, when I'm being pulled down by the anchor of uncertainty, I remember that hope floats. This month, hope is my brother graduating high school — a day I wasn't sure I'd live to see. This hope is the constant tug on my heartstrings back to the surface and back into the fight. Battle hard, breathe easy! #lifeisbeautiful*

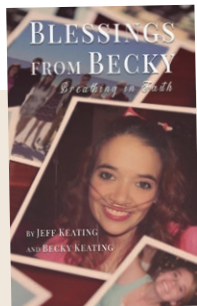
To St. Paul, trials and afflictions become opportunities to build up our faith. If we can maintain our trust in the Lord through these, we find God's love strengthening us, building endurance. Becky wrote a Lenten reflection as she was experiencing end-stage cystic fibrosis and beginning to prepare for her transplant journey. Her experience provides a real-world example of Paul's words, demonstrating how afflictions strengthened her faith and produced endurance:

*Each day, I get a little sicker and am growing weaker physically. But I also feel myself growing stronger spiritually. It's not about me. It's about what God has planned for me. This Lent, I've felt hope steadily growing stronger. I used to say hope was a wasted emotion. How foolishly stupid I was. Hope is what helps us survive. I've heard God speaking to me more through Scripture this Lent than I have my whole life. "Be not afraid; I am with you always." Each day, a subtle reminder that He has great plans for me. Each new day a reminder saying, "I love you so much! Here's another day. You must first die within yourself to rise in Christ." You are my best friend, Jesus.*

*Transplant evaluation starts Monday. We're driving to Texas Easter Sunday. Just as Christ rises to save my soul, to give me a chance to make it to heaven, so do I rise. I have been through the gauntlet this year. I have carried a cross so heavy that some days it seemed to break my back. I have been angry and doubted You, God, multiple times, yet You come through, and never have You forgotten me. Maybe the worst is yet to come. But it won't be anything we can't accomplish together.*

For St. Paul, persevering and enduring through afflictions produces proven character as one grows virtues like kindness, compassion, humility, charity and patience because God's love continues to strengthen us. These virtues form in us the very image, or character, of Christ. Becky's Lenten reflection continued, illustrating these virtues were present and growing in her:

*I feel light and hopeful, happy and optimistic. Something good is on the horizon, I can feel it. I feel braver. I want to die within myself, Lord, so that I can rise with You and become new. I want to make a difference. I want to help. I want You to need*



To learn more about Becky's transplant journey, purchase the book "*Blessings From Becky, Breathing in Faith*" on Amazon.





Of course, St. Paul is not saying that the only way to grow in hope is through affliction and suffering. I did not experience the pain and suffering that Becky did, yet God also poured hope into my heart throughout the journey. God's love can calm our fears, heal our minds and lift our eyes to heaven no matter the circumstances — it is what fills us with hope! From my own reflections shortly after the transplant:

*During the week I stayed with Becky in the hospital, one discussion I particularly recall started with Becky claiming that she was sorry she had agreed to the transplant. She would have preferred to stay in Kansas, where she would not have had to miss her siblings' lives. She would not feel this energetic, but that life was better than this. "What do you think, Dad?"*

*I told her those were not my thoughts. "Had you stayed in Kansas, I doubt that you would have survived the winter. You'd already be dead by now. My preference for you is not that you live your life waiting to die, but that you are living to live, or dying to live. There were never any guarantees that the transplant would happen, and if it did, we knew there were fairly high odds that the mycobacterium would flare up and cause problems. That has happened. So, I was never certain the transplant would work out, but I had hope that the transplant could be successful and that it could lead you back to living a full life. I still have that hope. The lungs themselves are functioning wonderfully, if only that incision can heal. Maybe this will do the trick."*

For me, if suffering and affliction weren't at work, what was producing my endurance of character, filling me with hope? It was the signs from God that I witnessed along the way. Some subtle, some rather astounding, but all showing me that God had not abandoned us on this journey. As I further reflected while staying with Becky during that time in Texas:

*Always, I had been filled with hope leading up to the transplant. Vividly, I remembered one day in the rectory telling Father Kerry, "I can't see the end of the road. But I can feel with all of my heart that this is the road God wants me to be following to prepare Becky for the transplant. I am not sure that the transplant will ever occur. I am not sure, even if the transplant does occur, that Becky is going to survive it or that the mycobacterium will not end up taking her life. But I have full conviction that God wants us to pursue this transplant."*

*God had provided so many signs during the transplant journey. We were driving to Dallas for Becky's initial transplant visit on Easter Sunday. Over a year later, Becky was transplanted on Ascension Sunday. When no housing options seemed possible, suddenly places to live appeared. We found Becky a puppy born on the day of her transplant. Out of nowhere, Becky's transplant surgeon was sitting in the check-in room when Becky was near despair. Her new surgeon and I were wearing the exact same shoes. During the darkest hours of that summer, I prayed, "Surely, God, you would not have given all of these signs, answered all of these prayers, only to have Becky succumb to the mycobacterium in this way, with the infection getting deeper and deeper and entering her bones. Surely, there's more than this — a miracle." And then I would start another rosary: "I believe in God ..."*

*Suddenly, this phrase took on new meaning. I believe in God's plan, that all of the signs meant something. I have faith that God's will shall be done. I trust in God and shall not despair, not lose hope, even as I don't understand His ways and why things keep getting worse. "I believe in God" — the very words my own dad had written as he lay on his deathbed, telling the doctors to remove his ventilator. Sometimes, it was the only prayer I could make, a longing, groaning deep from my soul. I learned to see it as the most important line in the rosary: "I believe in God."*



St. Paul concluded his thought process with the affirmation “and hope does not disappoint.” I agree with that. It may seem strange to hear me agree as I did lose my daughter. In fact, I’ve been asked, “How did you maintain your hope (or faith, or marriage) when your child passed?” I have trouble understanding this line of questioning. Why should I have been expected to lose hope just because Becky died? We are all going to die. It’s not to say I don’t miss Becky. I do; her smile, her conversation, her little nicknames for me and, especially, her inner peace. Yet, God did not fail her, did not abandon us. He dwelt firmly within her, a presence made manifest within her that shone out to others she met. God walked with her in those last months, and with her last breaths she was overcome with a sense of peace and

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Jesus, by His cross and resurrection, has given us every reason to hope. He has redeemed us from sin and death. **This hope sustains the journey of our lives, even when the road is winding and exhausting.** It allows us to see the ultimate goal of heaven, so that, without fear, we can strive to build a merciful and peaceful world.”

calm, begging for something to come towards her. I trust that was Jesus, and she is with Him now. If God’s hope can do that for Becky, flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone, then God can do that for me, if I, too, can but persevere. And if a sinner like me, then anyone.

Jesus, by His cross and resurrection, has given us every reason to hope. He has redeemed us from sin and death. This hope sustains the journey of our lives, even when the road is winding and exhausting. It allows us to see the ultimate goal of heaven so that without fear we can strive to build a merciful and peaceful world. God wants to pour His love into us so that we can persevere and endure the challenges of this world as we live in the hope and confidence of the kingdom, not fearing death.

From Becky’s final reflection that we released as her last words after her death:

*Just know that God is for you, not against you; you are not alone, and your prayers are always heard. I know with absolute certainty two things. First, if God brings you to it, God sees you through it. Without my faith and absolute devotion to my homeboy Jesus, I wouldn’t be talking to you now. Life has a way of really testing us. You may rise to the occasion or fail miserably. But either way, you’re not in it alone. Too often we think if we don’t get the outcome we wanted or prayed so hard for, then it was all for nothing. But I can truly attest to the beauty of unanswered prayers and even more so to the sanctity of answered ones. And second, life is so beautiful. I have been blessed. †*





**Council of Nicaea 325. Fresco in Salone Sistino, Vatican**  
Giovanni Guerra (1544-1618) and Cesare Nebbia (1534-1614).

# On the creed

BY DR. ABRAHAM B. FISHER

**T**he word “creed” comes from the first word of the prayer in Latin, *credo*, meaning “I believe,” and that is a very good description. In simplest terms, it is a statement, or profession, of what is believed by the Church and those who profess it.

This year marks the 1700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea, which is where the Catholic creed was originally formulated. In honor of the anniversary, please continue reading for an in-depth explanation.

■ **I BELIEVE IN ONE GOD** This is the creed’s “most radical and important profession.”<sup>1</sup> Without this, nothing more can be said. In this one simple phrase, we declare first that God exists, emphasizing that we are neither atheists or agnostics — the strongest possible denial of all forms of idolatry. Secondly, we affirm that God is *one*: God is the One revealed to Israel. As Christians, we understand our story *within* the story of Israel, not apart from it, but as the fulfillment of it. Professing that God is one says two things: that we believe in only one God (we are not polytheists); and that there is only one God to believe in! We have not chosen one god from among many to worship. Rather, we affirm that there is only one. The God revealed in the Old Testament and the God revealed in the New Testament are the same — the one, true God.

■ **THE FATHER** Just as the creed’s opening words leave no doubt that there is something in God that is one, so this phrase emphasizes that there is, at the same time, something that is multiple. If there is a father, there must be a



child, in this case the Son. We are only seven words into the creed and already beginning to profess faith in God as triune. Furthermore, professing faith in God as Father affirms that God is *our* father, making us brothers and sisters of Christ and heirs of the heavenly kingdom. Knowing and relating to God as Father, even “abba” (“daddy”), is often underappreciated. It is not so in every religion. For Muslims, for example, God is not Father but Master. This radical statement emphasizes God’s unfathomable love for us.

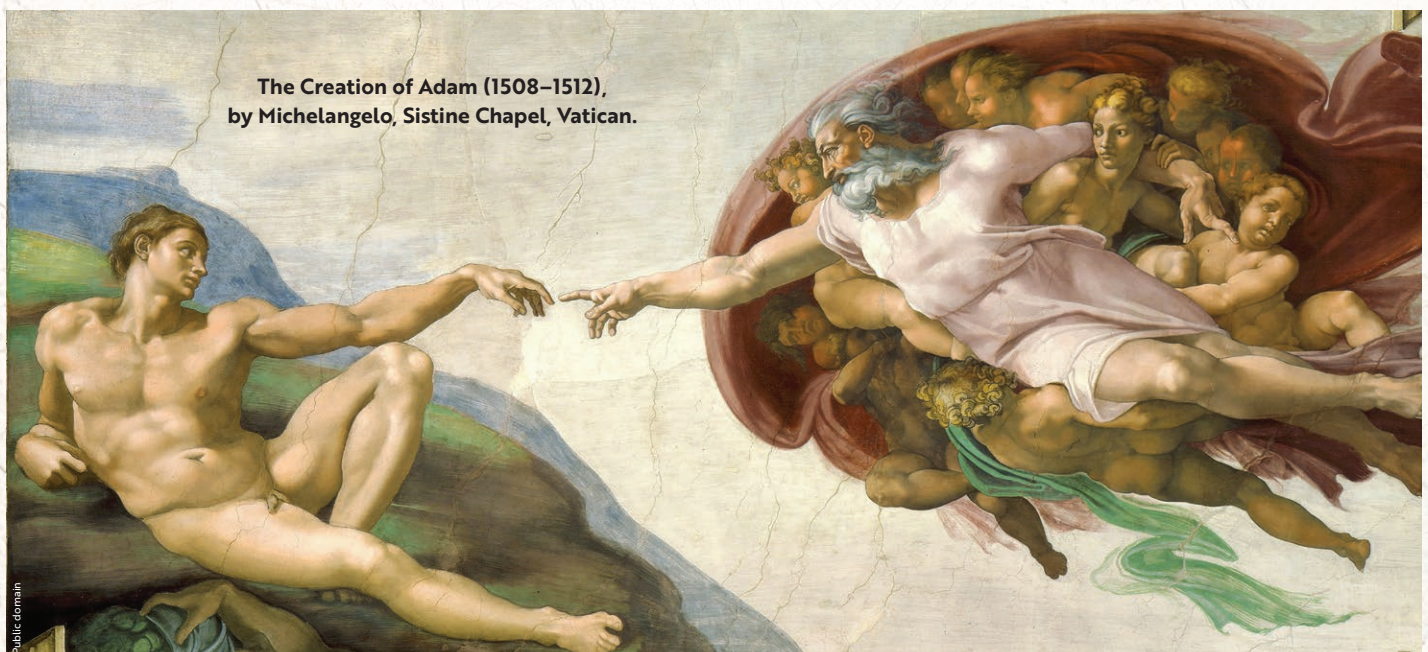
■ **ALMIGHTY** This single word reminds us that all things are possible with God. God exercises power and authority over nature, demons, sickness, weather, sin, death — *all things*. In addition, this affirmation allows us to respond to the mystery of evil and human suffering, reminding us that, in His mightiness, God is also able to bring good out of all things.

■ **MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH** This is a defining characteristic of God. God, the creator of all that is, is not Himself created. Whatever is created, whatever has a beginning, is not God. But this statement goes further: It also emphasizes that God created *all* that is, directly refuting heresies such as Gnosticism, which taught that the material world was evil and thus could not be directly created by God. They claimed God first created a demi-god or lesser god, who then created the earth and all that’s in it. This statement leaves no room for such teachings: There is only “God” (creator) and “not-God” (created). There is no third category. Finally, by this statement, we affirm that creation is ongoing; God is constantly creating all that is, here and now.

■ **OF ALL THINGS, VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE** Ancient peoples assumed that God created spiritual, invisible things. But some heretical sects, such as the Gnostics and Marcionites, believed the material world was evil and therefore could not have been created by an all-good God. This phrase of the creed makes it clear that God created all things, and therefore *all things* — both spiritual and material — are inherently good.

In contrast, most modern people give priority to the material world that can be discerned by the senses, measured and analyzed, but hold the invisible as suspect. Many assert that nothing exists that cannot be perceived by science or the senses. This phrase of the creed rebuts such ideas, insisting that, yes, there are elements of reality that are not perceptible to the senses but are nonetheless real and created by God.

■ **I BELIEVE IN ONE LORD, JESUS CHRIST** Jesus is called “Lord” here, which is highly significant. By the time the creed was composed, “Lord” had moved away from an earlier meaning akin to “sir” or “master” and had become widely used as the proper name of God. The name given to Moses at the burning bush was too holy to utter, so “Lord” (*Adonai*) was spoken instead. To name Jesus “Lord,” therefore, was to assert His equality with Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the one true God. It is to claim a sharing of the same nature, power, authority, eternal existence and creativity. Furthermore, to name Him “Christ” (Greek *Christos*, “anointed”) is to assert He is *the Messiah* — the one foretold by the prophets, the Savior.







God is the one who brings light into the world. God is Light itself, and shines in the darkness to enable us to see things as they truly are.”

■ **THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD** “Only begotten” denies at least two heresies that had become widespread at the time of the early councils: Adoptionism and, especially, Arianism. Adoptionists claimed that Jesus was born a normal human person, but was *adopted* by God at some later point and became divine. The affirmation that Christ is “only begotten” leaves no room for such error. Jesus is not God’s Son by adoption; He is begotten by God, Who is eternally “Father,” which means Jesus is eternally Son; He is not created. Arianism, a particularly problematic heresy, claimed Jesus was the greatest and most perfect of all creatures — but still a creature. Arius claimed, “There was a time when Christ was not,” in other words, He has a beginning. The council fathers recognized this error as denying the full divinity of Christ.

■ **BORN OF THE FATHER BEFORE ALL AGES** The council fathers went to great lengths to be abundantly clear about the full and complete divinity of the Son and avoid any “loophole” that could be exploited by a heretical group to affirm the creed while continuing to teach error. With this phrase, the creed first affirms that the Son was *born*. Not physically, of course, as human children are. Rather, the Son originates from the Father, as the perfect self-expression of the Father. The Son shares the Father’s very self. This takes place within the life of God and thus entirely outside of time, before there were any ages — eternally. The Son does not have a beginning.



*The Nativity by  
Lorenzo Lotto*

■ **GOD FROM GOD, LIGHT FROM LIGHT, TRUE GOD FROM TRUE GOD** While it is easy to read these three phrases as simply poetic repetition, they certainly are not — each contributes an important nuance to the point being made. Jesus is not a demi-god, an angel, a semi-divine being or an exceptionally powerful prophet. Jesus is God, and the divine nature of Jesus came directly from the God with whom the Jews and early Christians were already acquainted — the Father. Jesus received His nature from the Father, and just as a human child is “human from human,” so Jesus is “God from God:” fully God, truly God. True God from true God.

The middle phrase of this trio is particularly

interesting. It affirms another fundamental and unique attribute of God. God is the one Who brings light into the world. God is Light itself and shines in the darkness to enable us to see things as they truly are. God brings order out of chaos, combats ignorance with knowledge and corrects error with truth. The creedal assertion that Jesus Christ is “Light from Light” is specific. He is not just any light: the Light that came into the world at the Incarnation of Christ is the same Light that was called forth in Genesis 1. It is the Light that is God.

■ **BEGOTTEN, NOT MADE, CONSUBSTANTIAL WITH THE FATHER** Aimed specifically at Arianism, this clarification affirms once more that Christ is not created (thus, has no beginning). He is eternally begotten and, therefore, divine. The second half of the phrase makes sure that He cannot be held to be of a lesser divinity, or in any way is subordinate or



inferior to the Father: *consubstantial* is having the *same substance or nature*. The Father and the Son are distinct persons, but persons with the same divine nature.

■ **THROUGH HIM ALL THINGS WERE MADE** Another shot at both Arians and Gnostics, the creed here affirms that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, created all that is. Not only is He not a created being, but, in fact, He is the creator of all that is not God. The Son cannot be created, for it is not possible for Him to create Himself. All things are from God the Father, and all things are equally through God the Son. The triune nature of God is, if unspoken, ever present.

■ **FOR US MEN AND FOR OUR SALVATION HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, AND BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS INCARNATE OF THE VIRGIN MARY AND BECAME MAN** When the creed is professed at Mass, we make a profound bow for this phrase, for this is the great mystery of our faith: God, became man yet without ceasing to be God. The Son took on our human nature, perfectly united yet without confusion. This deep theological mystery is not possible to truly comprehend; it is only to be accepted in faith because it has been revealed by God as true.

He came down “for us.” Some find it arrogant to claim that the creator of the universe would care so much for humanity. But this is not about us being important; it is a statement of God’s immeasurable love. He came down “for our salvation,” for there is no other reason for the Son to unite Himself to human nature than for the purpose of our salvation. And in order to save humanity, this is exactly what had to be done. He had to become part of the human race without ceasing to be God.

■ **FOR OUR SAKE HE WAS CRUCIFIED** Jesus’ crucifixion was a self-sacrifice. His life was not taken by force, but given, freely, out of love. The form of His death was not only intensely agonizing but also reserved for criminals and enemies of the state — in other words for the most egregious sinners. Christ did not commit sins Himself, but took on Himself the sins of all mankind, and so willingly suffered the death reserved for the worst of sinners.

■ **UNDER PONTIUS PILATE** This detail serves as a reminder that worldly authorities did, and always will, actively oppose the



*The Heavenly and Earthly Trinities*  
by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, Public domain

truth and the kingdom of God. The two sides of this power struggle are represented by the only two human persons mentioned in the creed: Mary and Pilate. Mary represents a humble response to God; Pilate, human status, power and prestige. It is also good to remember that, as Christians, we have been on both sides of this struggle: We have been persecuted, and we have been persecutors. We must always exercise vigilance against this.

■ **HE SUFFERED DEATH** It is the suffering of Jesus, above all, that demonstrates God’s full embrace of our human condition. Jesus is “like us in all things, but sin.” (Heb 4:15) By His suffering and death, Jesus not only conquered sin and accomplished our salvation; He also transfigured suffering. Suffering is part of the human condition, but it need not only be destructive. Jesus offers us the opportunity to unite our suffering with His and make it meaningful, purposeful, and redemptive. As we share in His suffering, so also we will share in His eternal life.



*Christ Crucified* by Diego Velázquez

Diego Velázquez, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons





Ascension by John Singleton Copley

■ **AND WAS BURIED** The burial emphasizes the reality of Jesus' death, the ultimate expression of sharing in the human condition, and sets the stage for the resurrection. This is the furthest Jesus can go from heaven and the Father.

■ **AND ROSE AGAIN ON THE THIRD DAY** Jesus rose — not "was raised." While both phrases are used in the New Testament, and are important theologically, the creed emphasizes the agency of Christ to rise under His own power, as God, in fulfillment of His own prediction: "I have power to lay [My life] down, and power to take it up again." (Jn 10:18)

■ **IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES** Looking back at the Scriptures from a post-resurrection life and faith, it is easy to see how the prophecies all point to Jesus. We can finally understand what God was trying to tell us through the prophets all along.

■ **HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, AND IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER** Two important points are emphasized here: 1) Jesus is no longer among the dead; He is risen and alive; and 2) Jesus now dwells with God the Father.

■ **HE WILL COME AGAIN IN GLORY TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD, AND HIS KINGDOM WILL HAVE NO**

**END** It is yet another assertion of Jesus' full divinity to say He is the one who is to judge. The authority to judge comes from sharing in the life of God. This phrase also affirms Jesus as the eternal king. The power of God has broken into humanity and inaugurated the kingdom on earth. This presents the Davidic kingdom, which Jesus now and forever rules, as the context for much of the Passion.

■ **I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE LORD, THE GIVER OF LIFE** Just as it was applied to Jesus, the proper name of God, "the Lord" is here applied to the Holy Spirit, emphasizing His full divinity and co-equality with the Father and the Son. The Spirit is also described as "the Giver of Life," a gift (whether temporal or eternal) only God can give. The Spirit is understood as that which animates all life, as can be seen when Jesus dies on the cross: "Crying out in a loud voice, He gave up His Spirit." (Mt 27:50)

■ **WHO PROCEEDS FROM THE FATHER AND THE SON; WHO WITH THE FATHER AND THE SON IS ADORED AND GLORIFIED** The triune nature of God is coming into focus, as the Spirit originates from both the Father and the Son. The Spirit is to be *adored* — a response due only to God. We do not adore anything other than God alone. The Spirit is also to be *glorified*. To glorify is to praise and recognize the greatness of God. The word glorify used here translates the Greek word *doxa*, which has an even stronger connotation: to recognize and acknowledge God's presence, power and claim upon humans.

■ **WHO HAS SPOKEN THROUGH THE PROPHETS** This seemingly casual phrase is actually the basis of all that has gone before! This is *how* God has revealed Himself as a Trinity of persons, by speaking through the prophets. Everything stated in the creed relies on the truthfulness of the affirmation that it is the Holy Spirit Who has spoken. If not, the Scriptures are not the word of God, and we have no revelation at all. It is worth noting that the past tense of this phrase is not meant to be limiting. The Spirit has not stopped speaking. He continues to speak through the Church in various ways.





God is the one who brings light into the world. God is Light itself, and shines in the darkness to enable us to see things as they truly are.”

■ **I BELIEVE IN ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH** These are known as the “four marks” of the Church. The Church is called to be one, and to be holy, and at the end of time when it is united with Jesus as His bride, it will be fully one and holy. Until that time, it continues to strive for unity and holiness in its earthly struggle. The Church is catholic (universal), both in its reach and its invitation; and apostolic, in both teachings and the offices it traces back to the apostles themselves.

■ **I CONFESS ONE BAPTISM FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS** The Church, in its creed, recognizes only one baptism. It is administered by the Church and shared by all

Christians. It is unifying. The creed affirms that this baptism is “for the forgiveness of sins,” which can be understood to have two meanings: 1) that it accomplishes the forgiveness of our sins (which it certainly does); and 2) that it is given so *that* we will forgive others who sin against us. It transforms us into persons who are both capable of, and willing to grant, such forgiveness.

■ **AND I LOOK FORWARD TO THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME** It is fitting that we end here, in this Jubilee Year of Hope, as the creed ends with this great expression of hope. Hope indeed, but not *mere* hope — a hope that includes the certainty of faith. It acknowledges our sense of expectation and the joy that accompanies it. Our faith tells us the life of the world to come will have three elements, which we await in joyful hope: 1) a resurrected, glorified body; 2) a glorified, heavenly re-creation; and 3) a just kingdom of God.

■ **AMEN!** “This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church.” Now, armed with a little more insight into the deep truths of the faith contained in these few lines, the next time you’re at Mass be “proud to profess it in Christ Jesus, our Lord,” and let your “Amen” be heard! †

*Dr. Fisher holds a Ph.D. in systematic theology from Marquette University, specializing in ecclesiology, sacramental theology and fundamental theology. After teaching in Wisconsin for many years, he now lives with his wife, Jan, on a third-generation farm in McDonald.*

1 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why it Matters*. Doubleday, 2005, p. 65.



*The Last Judgment, author unknown*

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#### EDITOR'S NOTE:

If you are interested in reading more about the creed, please visit [salinadiocese.org](http://salinadiocese.org) for further reading from Dr. Fisher.





# Mary.

# SHIELD OF PEACE

BY KATE WEISNER

It was the first time I needed prescription anxiety medication. I felt ashamed. As a future mental health professional, I told myself that I would never need such aids. I had navigated intense lows during my fall semester, and my anxious thoughts had started to control my life. I couldn't sit still or even sleep because my heart and mind raced constantly. Fight or flight was my daily mode. I was ready to defend myself from any perceived danger at any moment.





## MARY SHIELD of PEACE

Mary Shield of Peace, Bearer of the Christ,  
protect my soul from Satan's hidden attacks.

Keep me safe within your shield,  
and preserve me in the tranquility of Christ's peace.

When worry seizes my mind,  
Mary Shield of Peace, protect me.  
When anxiety disturbs my heart,  
Mary Shield of Peace, protect me.

When fear assaults my soul,  
Mary Shield of Peace, protect me.  
When despair crushes my hope,  
Mary Shield of Peace, protect me.  
When images violate my thoughts,  
Mary Shield of Peace, protect me.

When temptation overwhelms my strength,  
Mary Shield of Peace, protect me.

When shame overshadows my dignity,  
Mary Shield of Peace, protect me.

When lies distort my identity,  
Mary Shield of Peace, protect me.

When discouragement poisons my joy,  
Mary Shield of Peace, protect me.

When opinions consume me,  
Mary Shield of Peace, protect me.

When noise distracts me from God,  
Mary Shield of Peace, protect me.

O Mother Victorious, nurture in me  
the transforming Peace of Christ. Amen.

*Nihil Obstat:* Most Rev. Gerald L. Vincke, Bishop of Salina, August 22, 2024  
maryshieldofpeace.org ©2024

But the Holy Spirit came to my rescue when I found out that a new painting, "Mary, Shield of Peace," would be displayed for the first time at St. Isidore's Catholic Student Center. The image, paired with a prayer litany, depicts Mary as a protector, particularly against Satan's attacks on the interior life. Every time I felt a familiar wave of anxiety welling up within me, I prayed the first lines of the litany:

*Mary, Shield of Peace, Bearer of the Christ,  
protect my soul from Satan's hidden attacks.  
Keep me safe within your shield  
and preserve me in the tranquility of Christ's peace.*

Immediately, I felt a wave of peace engulf me. My heavenly Mother had extended her arms to me and brought me safely into her protection.

It is no secret that our society today is plagued by a phenomenon called "deaths of despair." Suicide rates, depression and anxiety are statistically the highest they have been in the past 90 years. Meaninglessness has become a shadow haunting each individual without reprieve, and chronic loneliness is becoming normalized beyond the point of concern.

In my efforts to understand this crisis, both personally and as a student in the mental health field, I found the triangle of relations — known as the CBT Triangle — very relevant. The CBT Triangle explains that thoughts create feelings, feelings create behaviors and behaviors reinforce thoughts.

Unfortunately, Satan is well aware of this triangle and can use it to his advantage. Using his knowledge about how our minds work, Satan first suggests to us some kind of thought — often referred to as an automatic thought. Then, if we choose to take in this thought and digest it, the thought can lead to negative feelings about ourselves or others — dictated by our core beliefs.

We are vulnerable to Satan's lies and the feelings these thoughts evoke, and since emotions are an incredibly strong part of our brain, they have significant influence on our behaviors. In the span of just minutes, a simple thought manifests itself as an action. If we are not aware of this attack tactic, our thoughts, feelings and behaviors can become self-destructive and even sinful habits.

It is clear Satan is focusing his arsenal of attacks on the human mind, but Church history has shown again and again that Mary, Bearer of the Christ, shows up "at all times and in all places" to rescue her children from "Satan's hidden attacks." In response to this domination of the mind, Mary, Shield of Peace, steadily addresses the mental health crisis through prayer.



To learn more about  
the devotion or order  
prayer cards, please visit  
[maryshieldofpeace.org](http://maryshieldofpeace.org)

The litany brings our experiences of darkness into the light by addressing emotions such as anxiety, worry, fear, shame, dis-

couragement and despair. Mary fills our hearts with understanding and peace. She knows what it is like to feel deep, frightening emotions. She not only makes us feel seen and understood, but she also helps break the cycle of thoughts and negative emotions that could easily transform into destructive behaviors.

Our mental health journey will always be just that — a journey. However, Mary wants to walk this journey with us and ultimately lead us back to Jesus. Without fail, Mary appeals to her Son on our behalf, asking Him to give us His peace. And in the wake of His grace, peace follows, healing and restoring us.

Mary, Shield of Peace, pray for us! †

*Kate Weisner of Olathe is pursuing her master's degree in clinical mental health counseling at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. She received her bachelor's in human development and family science from Kansas State University in Manhattan.*





CONSULT NOT  
YOUR FEARS BUT YOUR  
**HOPES AND  
YOUR DREAMS.**  
THINK NOT ABOUT  
YOUR FRUSTRATIONS,  
BUT ABOUT YOUR  
**UNFULFILLED  
POTENTIAL.**  
CONCERN YOURSELF NOT  
WITH WHAT YOU TRIED  
AND FAILED IN,  
BUT WITH WHAT IT IS STILL  
**POSSIBLE FOR  
YOU TO DO."**

– POPE ST. JOHN XXIII









# Hope *of the* brokenhearted

BY JODY WEIS

**W**hen trauma shattered my world, I grappled with invisible scars that threatened to twist my dignity and worth. My wounds were hidden, but I felt disfigured and utterly broken. Satan's lies assaulted my vulnerable heart, and I began to fear I was unworthy of God's love. Recovery seemed impossible, but the Lord did not abandon me. He rescued me with truth and taught me to hope in His love and mercy.

## HOPE OF HEALING

Sin and death poisoned the world when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Sadly, because of their original sin, you and I suffer the effects of brokenness in our lives too. In the aftermath of my darkest moments, I felt crushed. Healing seemed hopeless. But no matter my wounds, God did not give up on me — one small step at a time, God offered me His grace and healing. The truth is that God wants to make each one of us whole again. We still need to pursue earthly means of support through friends, family and sometimes professionals, but God offers us His concrete help today through prayer and the sacraments. *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; He rescues those whose spirits are crushed."*<sup>1</sup> Although we await full

restoration in heaven, God calls us to courageously give Him our "yes" now and choose to hope in the power of His real, healing graces.

## HOPE OF LOVE

We all have wounds. Whether from our own sins, from the sin of others or simply from the consequences of a fallen world, these injuries damage us and make us vulnerable to shame. As I struggled to accept my new scars, I started to believe my wounds made me revolting to God and unworthy of His love. Satan was hunting my soul. In desperation, I cried out to God and fell before Him in my brokenness. And God saved me with truth. In the depths of my heart, I heard the Lord whisper, *"I see your beauty."* He reminded me that I am His precious child. He re-

minded me of the Good News that our scars can't erase our dignity and identity as God's children. In fact, nothing we do or suffer will ever change God's love for us: *"... neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*<sup>2</sup> God stamps His love on our souls forever!

## HOPE OF NEW LIFE

Jesus changes everything. When I was engulfed by pain and darkness, the Lord rescued me — His light pierced the night, and now I am learning to see myself as He sees me. My scars will remain in this life, but no matter what I've been through, God is ever-faithful. He loves me and will not abandon me! In my distress, Jesus showed me the truth and gave my desperate soul hope of renewal. *"Behold, I am making all things new."*<sup>3</sup>

Jesus offers Himself to every one of us in our suffering and brokenness. If we hold onto Him in hope, remaining faithful to prayer and the sacraments, He will give us a share in His life, teaching us to see with His eyes and leading us on the path to eternal restoration.

The events of my life changed me forever. I was devastated, brokenhearted. I could not see the path beyond my suffering. Yet as I clung to Jesus, He gave me hope. I will be on this journey of healing and recovery for the rest of my life, but as the Lord continues to show me that *"hope does not disappoint,"*<sup>4</sup> I know the answer to my brokenness today is hope in Jesus Christ — the *"sure and steadfast anchor of my soul."*<sup>5</sup> †

*Jody Weis is a wife, mother and spiritual mentor.*

<sup>1</sup> Psalms 34:18. <sup>2</sup> Romans 8:38-39.

<sup>3</sup> Revelations 21:5. <sup>4</sup> Romans 5:5. <sup>5</sup> Hebrews 6:19.





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