

Mary, Martha & Lazarus

Friends of our Lord



Jesus Visits Mary and Martha

³⁸ As they went, He entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and listened to His teaching. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she came to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Then tell her to help me."

⁴¹ Jesus answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. ⁴² But one thing is needed. And Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

The Death and Resurrection of Lazarus

Now a certain man was ill, Laz'arus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Laz'arus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it."

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Laz'arus. ⁶ So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go into Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹ Thus he spoke, and then he said to them, "Our friend Laz'arus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep." ¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Laz'arus is dead; ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."



The Raising of Lazarus
Caravaggio, circa 1609

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Laz'arus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world."

²⁸ When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; ³⁴ and he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. ⁴² I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me." ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Laz'arus, come out." ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."



Detail of the Raising of Lazarus by Caravaggio

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him; ⁴⁶ but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council, and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." ⁴⁹ But one of them, Ca'iaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all; ⁵⁰ you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." ⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death. (John 11:1-53)

After the Resurrection of Lazarus

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Laz'arus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² There they made him a supper; Martha served, and Laz'arus was one of those at table with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" ⁶ This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it.

⁷ Jesus said, "Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came, not only on account of Jesus but also to see Laz'arus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Laz'arus also to death, ¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus. (John 12:1-11)

The Church of Saint Lazarus and the First Tomb of Lazarus

The earliest records of a church commemorating the lives of Mary, Martha and the resurrection of their brother, Lazarus, places the construction of a church sometime during the 4th century. These older churches along with the present churches (Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox) are to be found in the West Bank town of *al-Eizariya*, formerly known as Bethany, the home of the three sibling friends of Jesus. The site was originally chosen because of its proximity to a cave which matched the historical evidence given in the Gospels account provided by Saints Luke and John.



In 390, Saint Jerome mentions a church in Bethany built by the Byzantines known as the Lazarium. The pilgrim, *Egeria*, recorded her in journal that she attended the liturgy for Lazarus on the Saturday in the seventh week of Lent and noted that "so many people have collected that they fill not only the Lazarium itself, but all the fields around." This church was destroyed in an earthquake during the 6th century, but another was built to replace it soon after. This church was repaired and expanded upon during the Crusader period under the direction of Queen Melisende of Jerusalem sometime during the early to mid 12th century. The Queen also had a Benedictine convent built with its own church dedicated to Saints Mary and Martha. With the fall of Jerusalem and the surrounding territories under the control of the sultan Saladin the Benedictine nuns of Bethany went into exile. Over a period of the next several hundred years most of the buildings associated with Saint Mary, Martha, and Lazarus fell into disrepair as the town of Bethany was left without a Christian presence.

In the 14th century a mosque was built at the site which included parts of the Christian buildings. In the 16th century the Ottomans built a larger mosque, *al-Uzair* Mosque. For about 100 years after the mosques constructions Christian pilgrims were invited to pray in the mosque, and also to visit the Tomb of Lazarus which had an entrance within the mosque's property. This practice was eventually discouraged by the Christian religious authority, and for a period of time the Tomb of Lazarus was unavailable to pilgrims. Sometime during the 16th century the local Muslim authorities granted the Franciscans permission to cut another entrance to the tomb of Lazarus giving access to Christian pilgrims. In 1863, "the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land" gained title to a plot of ground close to the tomb of Lazarus. Nearly a hundred years later in 1953 the Church of Saint Lazarus was built on the Franciscan custodial land.



Saint Lazarus, "friend of Jesus."
First Bishop of Kition, Cyprus



Mosaics of Mary, Lazarus, & Martha



Original Byzantine Mosaic Floor/Church of Saint Lazarus



Segments of the Crusader Church



Main Altar/Church of Saint Lazarus
"I am the Resurrection and the Life"



Chapel from the Crusader Church



Jesus and the home of Mary and Martha
Church of Saint Lazarus



Dome of the Church of Saint Lazarus

"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die



Plaque outside the entrance to the “First” Tomb of Lazarus



Entrance to the Tomb of Lazarus



Looking down into the entrance of the burial chamber. Photo taken within the burial chamber anteroom.



Photo taken from within the burial chamber looking towards the exit of the chamber leading to the anteroom



Jan looking down into the anteroom. This is as far as her claustrophobia would permit her to go. Nevertheless, she may have been standing where Jesus stood when He said, “Laz’arus, come out. Unbind him, and let him go.”

So What Happened to Lazarus, Mary and Martha after the Accession of Jesus?



Church of Saint Lazarus, Larnaca, Cyprus

To answer this question we need to look beyond the Holy Scripture and into Tradition. There are two very separate accounts of what happened to the family of Bethany, one according to Orthodox Tradition, and the other to Catholic. The older of the two Traditions is the Orthodox and it possesses (at least in my opinion) a longer and perhaps more persuasive historical provenance.

As we learned in the Gospel of John, Lazarus was a “wanted” man.

⁹When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came, not only on account of Jesus but also to see Laz'arus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests planned to put Laz'arus also to death, ¹¹because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and

believing in Jesus. (John 12:9-11)

After Jesus' ascension into Heaven, Lazarus would have been a visible reminder to the Jews of the messianic claims that the Apostles were making regarding Jesus. This would have been a threat to the religious authorities of Jerusalem, and for this reason, Lazarus and his sisters fled Israel, and took up residence on the island of Cyprus in the town of Larnaca (ancient Kition). Lazarus met with Paul and Barnabas while they were on their missionary journey to Cyprus and they ordained him as the first bishop Kition.

Lazarus was said to have been a very serious man. According to legend it is said that after his resurrection that he only laughed once on the occasion of seeing a man steal a pot. It was reported that Laz'arus laughed and said, *"the clay steals the clay."* It was said that Lazarus' seriousness was because of what he had experienced during the four days after his death and before his resurrection, that is, the suffering of those souls in Hades prior to his own resurrection. So impressed was he by this experience that he dedicated all his energy for the redemption of souls of all men and women through faith in Jesus Christ. According to Orthodox Tradition his sister, Mary and Martha, joined their brother in this mission in Cyprus.



Interior of the Church of Saint Lazarus

It is believed that Lazarus lived another thirty years and was buried in the small church he had established in Larnaca. In the 9th century Lazarus' bones were discovered and in accordance to the tradition of the times his bones were transferred to Constantinople, the Patriarchy of the Orthodox Church. The locals retained some of the bones for their church which were held within a reliquary in the church in Larnaca. These relics still reside in Larnaca in the church that the Byzantine emperor Leo VI the Wise had erected some 1100 years ago. This church, the Church of Saint Lazarus still stands today. In the 13th century the relics of Saint Lazarus were stolen by Crusaders during the 4th Crusade. It is believed that one of the Crusaders brought them to Marseilles, but over the centuries they vanished. The Church of Saint Lazarus in Larnaca suffered damaged through the centuries usually due to wars. The church has undergone extensive repair through the years and is an important pilgrimage site to Eastern Orthodox Christians.



Iconostasis of the Church of Saint Lazarus

There is also the Tradition of the Virgin Mary visiting Bishop Lazarus of Kition which I have included below which is taken from "*The Life Of The Virgin Mary, The Theotokos*", written and compiled by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, Colorado, 1990., pp. 432 & 439.

“Returning from Ephesus and Antioch, the Mother of God then remained in Jerusalem for a considerable period. During this time, St. Lazarus, whom the Lord had raised from he dead on the fourth day of his reposed (John 11:14-44), was living on the island of Cyprus. The Apostle Barnabas had consecrated him as bishop.

Now St. Lazarus had a great longing to behold the Theotokos whom he had not seen in a long while. However he dared not enter Jerusalem for fear of the Jews, who still sought him. The Theotokos learned of this and wrote St. Lazarus, the true friend of her Son, a letter wherein she comforted him. She asked him to send a ship to her that she might visit him in Cyprus, for she would never demand of him to come to Jerusalem for her sake. When the holy Lazarus read her letter, he will filled with tremendous joy and, at the same time, he wondered at her great humility.

Without a moment's delay, he sent a ship for her together with a letter of reply. Whereupon, the Theotokos, together with Christ's beloved disciple, John, and others, who reverently accompanied them, set sail. It is said that she had sewn St. Lazarus an *omphorion* (a bishop's stole, pall) with *epimanikia* (cuffs) and that she wished to present them to him personally. The year was 52 A.D. After praying for the new flock on the Holy Mountain (Mt. Athos), the Theotokos and those with her entered the ship with joy, and set sail for Cyprus. Upon arriving in Cyprus, she found the holy Lazarus in great sorrow, for he feared that her delay had been caused by a storm. He was unaware that divine providence had brought her to Mount Athos. However, her arrival speedily changed her sadness into joy. The Theotokos then presented him with the *omphorion* and *epimanikia* that she made for him. She then related to him all that had happened in Jerusalem and on the Holy Mountain. They then offered up thanksgiving for everything.



**The 2nd Tomb of Saint Lazarus
The Church of Saint Lazarus, Larnaca**

After staying in Cyprus for a short while and consoling the Christians there, she blessed them and journeyed back to Jerusalem."

Reflections

Jan's Reflection:

The Resurrection of Lazarus was the last miracle Jesus performed prior to His passion. He had gone back to Judea because His friend was very sick. Jesus waited and as a result Lazarus died. It was four days before our Lord arrived. In this there was absolute certainty that Lazarus was truly dead. This gave Jesus the opportunity to perform a miracle His disciples could witness that would change everything in preparing them for Jesus own death and resurrection.

One witnesses the depth of Jesus' humanity in His love and relationship with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. He became deeply troubled and wept when He saw them. He hastened to go to the tomb of Lazarus. Remember he had been dead for four days and there would have been an odor. He called his friend, Lazarus, to come out of the tomb. He came out bound hand, foot and face. Jesus had called him out of death and into life, pointing the way for all of us who believe.

Jesus had often gone to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus and this is where He went right before His passion. Jesus valued their friendship. Imagine what conversation they might have had just before Jesus left for His passion. Good friends challenge each other to be their best. They are able to open their hearts to each other and share their greatest joys; their greatest fears and deepest concerns.

As I reflect on this miracle I realized that this is a new relationship I need with Him; I need Jesus as friend and have Him sit with me in prayer and in all my concerns. I've known Him as Savior, Redeemer, Prince of Peace, King, and Lord of lords, but friendship is a great place to cultivate a deeper, more real relationship with Him. Thank you, Lord, for the gift of friendship.

Kevin's Reflection: A Reflection on the Value of Friendship

"Our friend Laz'arus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep."

What is the value of a friend? Are they those who click "like" on my social media posts? Are they those who affirm my thoughts and feelings? Or is a friend one who "awakens" me something beautiful that I was blind to, who "wounds" me with the truth when I am in error, or who "sharpens" me to live more virtuously or think more critically? Am I open to receive this latter type of friendship, and am I willing to be this kind of friend in return?

This Photo-Journal reflection is going to be about "friendship." In thinking about friendship I caught myself having a negative reaction as if this topic was too mundane to write about in this journal of the holy sites of Israel. Wouldn't it be more appropriate if I wrote my reflection on Christ being the "resurrection and the life?" Then again, maybe I have not held friendship with the esteem that it deserves. When Jesus told his disciples that they were His friends He elevated this relationship to the level of the sacred. Every disciple of Jesus should strive through grace to be His friend and a friend to all his brethren.

¹⁵ *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:15)*

What then is a good friend? The Holy Scripture has quite a bit to say about friendship, but in this reflection I want to focus on my own experience of friendship. To what end? I hope that in doing so I come to a better appreciation of those who were my friends at various stages of my life and in doing so value friendship for what it is—a gift of God to remind us, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2:18). In this reflection I will not be including family members or my wife as they represent an entirely different category of relationship. Also, I am limiting this reflection to just three friends whose mark upon me I bear to this day even though I have not seen or spoken to them in years.

Alan A Childhood Friend

"It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out."

Alan and I shared an extraordinary and imaginative life together. What to some might have appeared to be just another cookie-cutter, mundane, middle-class neighborhood was the arena where Alan and I unlocked that door with the keys of our imagination, traveling through time and space we encountered new life and new civilizations and boldly went where no two kids had gone before. Yes, we were a generation raised on the Twilight Zone and Star Trek (the original series of course), and with Alan as my Science Officer we negotiated our lives through the uncertainties and perils of the sixties and early seventies with its Cold War sirens and "take cover" drills, and social upheavals, and we had fun doing it.

Alan was a nerd before the term had been invented. During the early years of our friendship he built "devices." It started with the creation of what he called the "Black Box." It was a literal black box not much bigger than a shoebox. As you may know a "black box" is "usually a complicated electronic device whose internal mechanism is usually hidden from or mysterious to the user" (Wikipedia). Whether or not it was a "black box" to Alan I am not sure, but it was certainly to me. All I knew is that it was extremely powerful drawing its energy from power sources throughout the galaxy (an idea Alan got from watching a 1950's era sci-fi movie called *Kronos*). Alan did explain to me that unlike modern electronic equipment, which operated off of electrons (electricity), the Black Box operated using positrons. To this he added a number of "peripherals" including a Time Machine, Inter-Galactic and Inter-Dimensional Portal Traveling devices, Force Fields that covered both Alan and my house should the Soviets launch a nuclear attack (unless we got into an argument in which Alan would withdraw the force field from my house, which always led to an expeditious reconciliation), and a host of other devices too numerous to mention. So many adventures! I looked forward to every weekend and especially the summers where I would spend endless hours playing with Alan.

I began to realize, however, that Alan was not "playing;" for him it was real. My father recognized this also, and he told me that I should not encourage my friend, as he was too old for this type of play. I knew my father was right,

but I was four years younger than Alan and I wasn't done playing and I didn't want him to stop playing either. One day, during that summer when Alan was transitioning from Junior High to High School, I saw him standing in his back yard. I walked over to his house, opened the gate, and went to him; he just stared down into a hole in the ground and did not look up or acknowledge me.

"What are you doing?" I asked. He looked distant, and thoughtful. He did not respond so I stepped closer to look into the hole. In the bottom of the hole, which I could tell he had newly dug, I saw his four to five inch thick journal. I recognized it, but had never seen its contents. The Journal was Alan's most carefully guarded secret. It contained schematics of all his "devices" including the "Black Box." In addition to that the Journal included records of every adventure through space and time that he and I had ever taken together, including those "secret" missions that he had been on himself! It was a veritable treasure trove of our childhood together. Alan grabbed the shovel next to him, scooped up a load of dirt, and tossed it into the hole.

"Stop! What are you doing?" I shrieked, grabbing his arm.

"I can't do this anymore," Alan said, looking at me sadly.

Now I understood why he looked different—he was becoming an adult. Deep down I knew this day had to come. Alan threw some more dirt into the hole.

"I don't want to grow up," I mumbled.

"Don't worry, Kevin. There are so many exciting things to learn and to do. And guess what?"

"What?" I said, looking up at Alan with renewed hope.

"I got a new telescope this past week and I'll be taking it out tonight for the first time. Come over when it gets dark and we'll look at the Rings of Saturn."

I did, and many nights thereafter. Alan shared with me the new and exciting things he learned in High School—especially Chemistry, his favorite subject, which would become mine also. Alan also shared his love of classical music. We would listen to music for hours, sometimes even days such as when we listened to a marathon session of the Wagner Ring Cycle. Mostly, he shared his love for science and I followed, as best I could, in his footsteps. He got A's both semester from Mr. Gregory, the notoriously difficult Chemistry teacher at North Hollywood High School; I got a B and then an A. Alan went on to get his bachelors in Chemistry at Cal State University, Northridge. Five years later I got my bachelors from the same university in Chemistry and Biology the same time Alan was completing his PhD in Chemistry from UCLA. I went onto UC Davis and got my Masters in Clinical Nutrition, but by this time our paths no longer crossed.

What an extraordinary gift of friendship Alan was for me! I dare say that I think the influence he had on my life, although different, was perhaps equal to that of my parents and siblings. Alan expanded my imagination by quantum levels (as he might say it). Under the tutelage of his friendship I was filled with a sense of wonder not only in regards to the natural world, but in the power of a disciplined mind to wonder, to ask questions, to discover, and to attempt to answer the how's and even the why's of things both simple and grand. Alan's gift to me reminds me of a commentary that Francis Bacon, the "father" of modern science, wrote about Psalm 25:2,

"It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out."

"Nay, the same Solomon the king, although he excelled in the glory of treasure and magnificent buildings, of shipping and navigation, of service and attendance, of fame and renown, and the like, yet he maketh no claim to any of those glories, but only to the glory of inquisition of truth; for so he saith expressly, "The glory of God is to conceal a thing, but the glory of the king is to find it out;" as if, according to the innocent play of children, the Divine Majesty took delight to hide His works, to the end to have them found out; and as if kings could not obtain a greater honour than to be God's playfellows in that game" ~ Francis Bacon, The Advancement Of Learning

Would it not be appropriate to replace "kings" with "friends" in the above Proverb?

"It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of friends is to search things out."

Did not Jesus tell His disciples that they are His friends because He will reveal everything to us? He only asks that we value this revelation by seeking it out with all our hearts, minds, and souls.

I might no longer travel through time, or enter another dimension, but I knew that if I followed in Alan's footsteps life would be forever an adventure of learning and sharing the joy of that knowledge with others as he had done with me. Through our "innocent play" Alan taught me that the most glorious thing in life is to search out the mysteries of God's creation, and once discovered to revel in their Beauty. Thank you, Alan; and thank you God for giving Alan to me as a friend.

Laurie A High School Friend

Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy. (Proverbs 27:6)

It was my first day as a senior in high school and I had been looking forward to taking Anthropology from Mrs. V., whom my brother and sister had as a teacher eight and four years earlier, respectively. They had both warned me that she had a funny tick whereby she would purse her lips repeated at regular intervals. I was told not to laugh, so I was preparing myself. I entered the class, and surveyed the room. I wasn't sure if Mrs. V. would assign seats, but in the mean time, I thought, I might as well sit by students who looked studious or perhaps to be more honest, pretty. I spied to very attractive young ladies sitting next to each other chatting; they clearly knew each other from before. I saw an empty seat next to them.

"Is anyone sitting there?" I asked.

"You are," one of the girls answered.

"Thanks," I said sitting. "I'm Kevin."

"Hi Kevin, I'm Laurie" replied the girl who had said, "Your are."

"I'm Yolanda," replied her friend.

"Well I'm glad to meet both of you," I replied while taking out a notebook getting ready for class.

"Oh, Mrs. V. won't be here any time soon," Laurie laughed. "I've had her before. She's got bladder problems." Both girls laughed heartily.

"I see. So what class did you have with Mrs. V.?" I asked.

"What's that around your neck?" Laurie asked, ignoring my question.

"What?" Not only was I wondering where that question came from, I was wondering what she was even talking about. I fumbled to feel around the neckline of my T-shirt and felt the chain. Then I remembered the crucifix I wore under my T-shirt. I pulled it out from under my shirt and showed it to Laurie.

"My crucifix," I said. "I'm a Catholic."

"Why do you wear it under your shirt? Are you ashamed of Jesus?"

I'm sure my mouth fell open in shock and bewilderment.

"I...I..." Mrs. V. thankfully entered the room. Saved!

Not an auspicious beginning to a friendship, but as it turned out we ended up being boyfriend and girlfriend, albeit for a rather short period of time. However, in that short period of time I came to admire Laurie's boldness with me, and others, with whom she shared the Gospel of Christ. She introduced me to a whole new world of Christianity when I attended church with her for the first time, a Monday night prayer meeting. I was apprehensive at first; I grew up in the Pre-Vatican II Church and family that frowned upon even visiting a church that was not Catholic. But this wasn't just any other church, this was an Assembly of God Church, and that means Pentecostal (in Catholic circles that would be Charismatic, but at the time that was mostly unheard of and I certainly didn't know anything about the phenomenon). Pentecostals and Charismatic believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were not just for the first century Church, but even more so for now (I'll explain that in a minute). Imagine a 17 year old fairly devout Catholic boy standing in a massive auditorium like church building devoid of almost all signs of Christianity, save a cross in the front, hearing "tongues," prophecy, and worship in the Spirit and all of this was followed by "testimonials," and an

altar call to accept Jesus as one's "personal Lord and Savior." And to top the evening off, healings conducted by the ministries of the church as well as a few itinerant faith healers during which more than a few were "slain by the Spirit." No structure to the service that I could discern, no common prayers recited neatly by the congregation, and certainly nothing like a Eucharistic service. At first I thought, "Well there's something they have in common, they all have with them their Saint Joseph Daily Missiles, but they turned out to be Bibles. Oh, lest I forget, everyone, including Laurie, was speaking about the Lord's imminent return and something called the Rapture, which they would be experiencing when He appeared in the clouds. Oh, and lest I forget, this was the reason why the Church needs these charismatic gifts now, for the great evangelization that will precede the return of the Lord. What???"

Laurie knew that I was "blown me away" (the vernacular at the time) by the service, but she answered my questions the best she could and when she couldn't she directed me to people who could. Most of what I learned was entirely new to me. The authority they cited for their answers was always Scripture. What happened to the Church Fathers, Tradition, the Saints, and the Magisterium? Gone! I was definitely entering dangerous territory, yet I was intrigued (and admittedly motivated in maintaining and developing my friendship with Laurie). Ultimately, the question I had to ask myself was, "Can I go to these church services with Laurie and still be a good Catholic?" I believed that I could, so I did and this continued even after Laurie and I broke up; we stayed friends though until she moved away with her father and we lost track of each other.

Laurie was instrumental in bringing my Christianity to another level. I know some Catholics may balk at such a statement. I am not suggesting that every Catholic should experience what I did; this was the path that the Holy Spirit had *me* on (or at least the best path He could given my peculiarities and faults). And yes, my love of the Bible pretty much started here, along with having not only a "communal" but also "personal" relationship with Jesus Christ. I learned from Laurie that if Jesus was to be anything in my life He had to be everything, not that I have always lived that ideal. And yes, I was baptized in the Holy Spirit, and still can pray and worship in "tongues."

God, it is said that you work in mysterious ways, well in my case, perhaps not that mysterious. You used a pretty girl to put a hook in my mouth and reel me in a little closer to you. Not the only time you did that, Lord. Thank you, God for the friendship you gave me with Laurie. It may have been a short relationship, but it changed the direction of my life by You became the direction of my life. The Book of Proverbs tells us,

Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy. (Proverbs 27:6)

Laurie, you wounded me when you asked me if I was ashamed of my Faith. Thanks, Laurie, for shocking me out of my complacent Christianity that first day I met you at in Anthropology class. And thank you, God, for the grace to be open enough to receive the gift that you gave me through a friendship with Laurie.

Tom Mid-Life Crisis

As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend. (Prov 27:17)

I have to provide a bit of background before I can discuss my "mid-life crisis," and how Tom figured into the situation and his lasting influence on me. I was about 22, still "halting between two opinions" (going to the Catholic Church and an Assembly of God church), when somehow (don't remember the details) I was given a pamphlet called, "Identical with Christ." It argued that the goal of the Christian life was not one of imitating Jesus (as in "what would Jesus do?"), but to be conformed into His image, to be "like Him," as John and Peter spoke of in the scriptures:

² *Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* (1John 3:2)

³ *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.* (2Peter 1:3-4)

This was new to me, perhaps it shouldn't have been, but it was. I am not exactly sure how to explain what happened to me when I read this little pamphlet; perhaps Annie Dillard said it best:

"I see something, some event that would otherwise have been utterly missed and lost; or something sees me, some enormous power brushes me with its clean wing, and I resound like a beaten bell."

It was the resounding of this Truth that knocked me off the fence, and I left the Catholic Church and the Assembly of God and joined the nondenominational Charismatic church whose pastor had written the pamphlet. It was in this church that I met my wonderful wife, Jan. Her beauty, intelligence, her spontaneous joy, and exuberant love for God, and amazingly here love for me, was without a doubt the best thing that I received at this church. Unfortunately, however, the Truth that I spoke of earlier somehow had gotten lost in a quagmire of church upheavals, power struggles, questionable doctrines, and abuses. After twenty years, it was time to go. It was a difficult decision, one that I made with my wife, our two daughters, and also Tom D.

Tom and I shared not just the same church, but we also taught at the same public school for a time. We both ended up changing schools, Tom to a public high school closer to home, and me to our church's junior and senior high school. Our friendship developed over a period of about ten years and by the time I was heading into my "mid-life crisis of faith," so was he. We spent endless hours talking about the various issues that we had with the church, often over a Long Island Ice Teas. It was during these discussions that I became increasingly aware that our paths were diverging, Tom towards atheism, and I, with the encouragement of my wife, towards the church of my youth, Catholicism.

Tom started his trajectory towards atheism with the philosopher David Hume; my journey home began with Saint Augustine's, The City of God. To his credit, Tom dove into philosophy and as a result our conversations were peppered with terms like ontology, epistemology, criteria of truth, nominalism, and realism, all unfamiliar to me. I felt like I was playing one-on-one on an unfamiliar court, with virtually no knowledge of the rules of the game, against a star athlete. I became aware of one simple fact: I had spent my life learning stuff: science, religion, history, politics, all sorts of stuff. What I hadn't learned was thinking about thinking itself (metacognition). How do we come to believe something is true whether it be science or religion, or if a certain piece of art is actually "beautiful?" All I had was some vague notion of the Scientific Method (which is actually a myth) and faith (which is sometimes nothing more than "blind" faith). Tom brutalized me not only in my defense of the Christian faith, but my very understanding of what constitutes knowledge and reality. This led me to ask myself the following questions (not necessarily in this order):

- Why couldn't I make a good defense for my faith (Christian and Catholic) in my conversations with my atheist friend?
- If God is the origin of Truth, then the natural world (the domain of science) should be reconcilable with religion (the domain of faith) since God is the author of both. Why then, was I not able to articulate this reality to my friend as well as other secular unbelievers who used science in their defense of atheism?
- How and why did I leave the Catholic Church to join another church which I ultimately came to the conclusion was deeply problematic, and how can I be sure I don't make that mistake again?
- How can I be sure that the "experience" I had with the pamphlet, "Identical with Christ," was genuine, and if I have another such experience how I be sure that it is genuine and actionable?
- And if being *like Christ* is my *raison d'etre* (reason for being) then what church is best able to facilitate that transfiguration?

Little did I know that these questions, borne out of my many conversations with Tom, would lead to many years of study and I still feel as if I'm just beginning. Tom and I parted ways after awhile. I'd like to believe that if ever we meet again and have another discussion over Long Islands that I'd hold up my end of our conversation better than I did before. Tom challenged me to think critically and in doing so he gave me the impetus to study philosophy and theology, which has been a delight for me ever since. I am not sure if Tom benefited from our conversation, but they were of incalculable benefit to me. I am reminded of a proverb:

*As iron sharpens iron,
So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.* (Prov 27:17)

I am grateful for my friendship with Tom, he started me on this journey of intellectual and spiritual "sharpening." As a result of this reflection I now will pray for him frequently as I owe him a debt of gratitude. Let this be my prayer for you, Tom:

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:14-19)

* * *

Epilogue:

I started off this reflection thinking that “friendship” existed on the profane side of the “sacred—profane” dichotomy; profane being all the so-called mundane and worldly things of life. But, as I may have mentioned in a prior reflection that Christ, the God-man, united within His most Holy Self the mundanity of our worldly life in a “coincidence of opposites.” Thus, in Christ the sacred has entered into the profane, redeemed it, and has elevated it to the holy. This is true of friendship. Christ in calling Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, friends he elevated the relationship to the sacred. He extended that friendship to His disciples, not only those who were with Him for His earthly ministry, but to the entire Church.

In regard to my final question, “What church is best able to facilitate that transfiguration (to being *like* Christ),” I came to the startling realization one day when I heard the priest whispering during the Liturgy of the Eucharist the Eucharistic prayer...

“Through the mystery of this water and wine may be share in the divinity of Christ who humbled Himself to share in our humanity.”

... that it was the self-same Church that I was baptized in, the Catholic Church, where transfiguration could occur through Word, Eucharist, and as I have learned through this reflection, and some very good friends.