

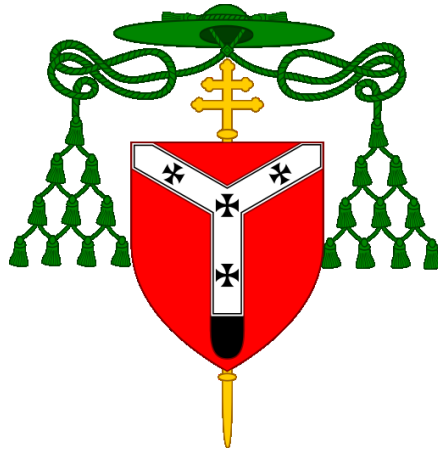
SAINT PAUL'S HAREFIELD

A Monthly Miscellany



Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Romans 8:31-35



St Paul's Harefield

His eminence John Carmel, Cardinal Heenan, Archbishop of Westminster, has this day canonically erected the above parish of Harefield, and dedicated it to Saint Paul, Apostle of the nations.

5th April 1967

Parish Priest: Father James Mulligan

2 Merle Avenue, Harefield

UB9 6DG

07809 398171 01895 822365

Email: harefield@rcdow.org.uk

Mass daily at 9.15am ... Sunday Vigil Mass: Saturday 6.30pm

Sunday Masses: ... 9.00am and 11.00am

Holy Hour Monday: ... 9.45am - 10.45am

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament: ... Friday 8.30am, Saturday 8.30am

Rosary each weekday morning after Mass

Confessions: 6.00pm Saturday – or indeed any time that a priest is available

Online Morning Prayer: 8.00am

Online Night Prayer: 9.00pm

Please note: St Paul's church is live-streamed 24 hours per day

SAINT PAUL'S HAREFIELD

A Monthly Miscellany

September 2023

Feast Days and Saints' Days in September 2023

September falls during the liturgical season known as *Tempus per Annum* or **Ordinary Time** (formerly *Time After Pentecost*), which is represented by the liturgical colour green. Green is a symbol of hope, as it is the colour of the sprouting seed and arouses in the faithful the hope of reaping the eternal harvest of heaven, especially the hope of a glorious resurrection. The liturgical colour green is worn during prayer of Offices and Masses of Ordinary Time.

The Holy Father's Intentions for the Month of September 2023

For people living on the margins: We pray for those persons living on the margins of society, in inhumane life conditions; may they not be overlooked by institutions and never considered of lesser importance. (See also <http://www.popesprayerusa.net/>)

3. TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, *Sunday*
 8. Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Feast*
 9. Peter Claver (USA), *Memorial*
10. TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, *Sunday*
 12. Most Holy Name of Mary, *Opt. Mem.*
 13. John Chrysostom, *Memorial*
 14. Exaltation of the Holy Cross, *Feast*
 15. Our Lady of Sorrows, *Memorial*
 16. Cornelius and Cyprian, *Memorial*
17. TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, *Sunday*
 19. Januarius, *Opt. Mem.*
20. Andrew Kim Taegon, Paul Chong Hasang and Companions; Ember Wednesday, *Memorial*
 21. Matthew, Apostle, *Feast*
 23. Pius of Pietrelcina; Ember Saturday, *Memorial*
24. TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, *Sunday*
 26. Cosmas and Damian, *Opt. Mem.*
 27. Vincent de Paul, *Memorial*
28. Wenceslaus; Lawrence Ruiz and Companions, *Opt. Mem.*
 29. Michael, Gabriel & Raphael, Archangels, *Feast*
 30. Jerome, *Memorial*

29th September
Feast Day
Saints Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael



Angels—messengers from God—appear frequently in Scripture, but only Michael, Gabriel and Raphael are named. Michael appears in Daniel’s vision as “the great prince” who defends Israel against its enemies; in the *Book of Revelation*, he leads God’s armies to final victory over the forces of evil. Devotion to Michael is the oldest angelic devotion, rising in the East in the fourth century. The Church in the West began to observe a feast honouring Michael and the angels in the fifth century. Gabriel also makes an appearance in Daniel’s visions, announcing Michael’s role in God’s plan. His best-known appearance is an encounter with a young Jewish girl named Mary, who consents to bear the Messiah. Raphael’s activity is confined to the Old Testament story of Tobit. There he appears to guide Tobit’s son Tobiah through a series of fantastic adventures which lead to a threefold happy ending: Tobiah’s marriage to Sarah, the healing of Tobit’s blindness, and the restoration of the family fortune.

The memorials of Gabriel and Raphael were added to the Roman calendar in 1921. The 1970 revision of the calendar joined their individual feasts to Michael’s.

SAINT PAUL'S HAREFIELD WELCOMES YOU

We extend a special welcome to those who are single, thinking of marriage, married, divorced, widowed, well-heeled or down at heel or down and out.

We especially welcome wailing babies and excited toddlers or bored teenagers.

We welcome you whether you can sing like Pavarotti or Maria Callas or Roy Orbison - or just mime (lip synch) or hum quietly to yourself.

You're welcome here if you're 'just browsing,' just woken up or just got out of bed the wrong side or just got out of prison. Whether a high flyer or a plodder.

You'll fit in here if you are a classical music aficionado or a punk rocker. You're welcome whether you are a cool dude or not, if you are an Elvis fan, a Johnny Cash fan, a Heavy Metal fan or (God forbid) a fan of Barclay James Harvest.

We don't care if you're more Christian than Pope Francis or Saint Mother Teresa, or haven't been to church since Christmas twenty-five years ago.

We extend a special welcome to those who have come only to scoff.

We welcome keep-fit mums, golf widows, football dads, joggers, bikers, starving artists, tree-huggers, line dancers, latte sippers, vegetarians, vegans, bumper sticker philosophers, existentialists, logical positivists and junk-food eaters.

We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted.

We welcome you if you're having problems, are down in the dumps or don't like 'organised religion' or have anger management issues.

We offer a welcome to those who believe in the Loch Ness Monster.

We welcome those who are tattooed, pierced, both or neither.

We offer a special welcome to those who took the wrong turning and wound up at Saint Paul's by mistake.

We welcome pilgrims, tourists, seekers, day-dreamers, doubters ... and you.

A Warm Welcome to you from Saint Paul's Harefield

Pilgrimage for the Planet



The Season of Creation is celebrated by all Christians worldwide from 1st September to 4th October (feast of St Francis of Assisi)

The theme for this year is “***Let Justice and Peace Flow ... like a Mighty River***”

You are invited to take part in a ***Pilgrimage for the Planet*** along our mighty river, the River Thames.

We will walk along the Thames Path from the Cutty Sark in Greenwich to the Thames Flood Barrier. During the walk there will be an opportunity to reflect and pray:

- *listen to Creation’s Song (the beauty of nature along the Thames path, and stopping at the Greenwich Ecology Park)*
- *listen to Creation’s Cry (the damage we are doing to the Earth, symbolized in the Thames Flood Barrier which is being used far often than it was ever intended to be, due to rising sea levels)*
- *listen to Creation’s Call (how is God calling us to become part of a mighty river of humanity to protect God’s creation?)*
- *reflect on the Message of Pope Francis for this year’s Season of Creation*

DATE: Saturday 9th September 2023

STARTS: 10am from Our Lady & St Catherine’s church, Bow or 11am from the Cutty Sark DLR

ENDS: 4pm Prayer at the Thames Flood Barrier *

WALKING DISTANCE: 7km (4½ miles)

Please bring a packed lunch

**From the Thames Barrier you can take the 161 or 472 bus to North Greenwich and then the 108 bus to Bow and Jubilee line to other destinations OR the same buses in the other direction to Woolwich Arsenal DLR*

WORLD YOUTH DAY



Todos: our Church is for everyone exclaims pope to WYD crowd

World Youth Day Lisbon, Portugal

Pope Francis asked the 1.5 million young people who attended World Youth Day to take "what God has sown into your hearts" back to their home countries and build a joyful Church that is open to all.

Young pilgrims hailed the Holy Father's description of the Church as for "everyone, everyone, everyone" as he asked the jubilant flag-waving crowd to repeat that refrain with him in Lisbon's Eduardo VII Park, amid shouts of "*todos, todos, todos*" - "everyone" in Spanish and Portuguese.

As he did often during the trip, the pope solicited engagement from the crowd, asking them to repeat after him or consider in silence a question he posed.

"Please, let us not convert the Church into a customs office where only the 'just', 'good', and 'properly married' can enter while leaving everyone else outside, he said. "No. The Church is not that," he said. Rather it is a place for "righteous and sinners, good and bad, everyone, everyone, everyone."

Pope Francis had earlier told reporters that "the Church is open to all," in reference to women and gay people being excluded from some sacraments, but admitted that "there is legislation that regulates



life inside the Church."

"This does not mean that (the Church) is closed. Each person encounters God by their own way, inside the Church, and the Church is mother and guides each one by their own path," he responded.

Despite his age, Pope Francis showed no sign of slowing down on what was the 42nd international trip of his pontificate. He told journalists on the flight to Lisbon they trips "make me young again."

The pope's packed agenda had three to four official events per day, and he added private meetings with several groups and individuals at the Vatican nunciature in Lisbon where he was staying.

Among them was a group of abuse survivors who met with the pope for over an hour, during which they "dialogued about this plague" of abuse, the pope said.

The pope celebrated Mass with 1.5 million young people sprawled

across Lisbon's riverside Tejo Park and told them not to be afraid of pursuing their great dreams to change the world.

In addition to listening the testimonies of young people and fielding questions from some of them during public events, Pope Francis had a chance for more direct interactions with several young people during the trip. He heard the confessions of three pilgrims and ate lunch with a group of 10 young people.

The pope arrives in Lisbon's Eduardo VII Park. Above, hundreds of thousands of young people attended the Mass

The pope later shared that he spoke to one young man who had previously considered taking his own life and said youth suicide is a problem today, noting the challenge is especially prevalent in places where universities and the job market are very demanding.

After the closing Mass, the pope announced that Seoul, South Korea, would be the location for the next World Youth Day in 2027, drawing great applause from the South Korean delegations scattered throughout the crowd.

The previous morning, Pope Francis visited the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, where he again put aside his prepared remarks and spoke off the cuff, focusing on Mary and skipping over an expected prayer for peace in the world.

He later said that "I prayed to Our Lady, and I prayed for peace" before a statue of Our Lady of Fatima, but "I did not advertise."

In the shrine's Chapel of the Apparitions, marking the spot where the three Portuguese children claimed to see Mary in 1917, he said the open-air chapel "is like a beautiful image of the church, welcoming, without doors, so that all can enter."

Feedback from World Youth Day

Justice and Peace

11 September 2023, 12:45pm - 2:00pm

On Zoom

Feedback from World Youth Day in Lisbon

Young adults from the Dioceses of Brentwood and Westminster share their experiences of making an 'environmentally friendly' pilgrimage to World Youth Day - travelling by coach!

About Us

We meet monthly online on the second Monday of the month and also organise occasional other events online and in-person for mutual support and encouragement. Every meeting includes input on some aspect of the climate or environment and a sharing of best practice in resources and events.

Some events take place jointly with the Northern Dioceses Environment Group and guests from elsewhere are always welcome, as we all work together to animate the Catholic community in the long-term task of stabilising our climate and protecting our common home.

We are inspired by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching set out by Pope Francis in the encyclical 'Laudato Si' and the teachings on care for the earth and one another found in the Scriptures.

Participants include CAFOD and Diocesan staff and volunteers, 'Laudato Si' Animators, clergy, parishioners, religious and activists.

You are most welcome to join us as a one-off or to sign up and attend regularly.

For more details or to be added to the mailing list please message Colette Joyce, Westminster Justice and Peace Co-ordinator, colettejoyce@rcdow.org.uk

or call her on 07593 434 905

The Southern Dioceses are: Arundel & Brighton, Brentwood, Clifton, East Anglia, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Southwark and Westminster.

Website - [Southern Dioceses Environment Network](#)

Register - [Book with Eventbrite](#)

The Narrative of Married Love



*By Deacon Roger Carr-Jones
Marriage & Family Life Coordinator*

One of the many pleasures of the summer break is snuggling down to read a book. This varies from the delight of reading something new, through to the more nuanced one of returning again and again to an old favourite. The latter practice provides the opportunity to understand the text better, to pay greater attention to the details and to find ourselves drawn more deeply into the narrative. It is an opportunity for new surprises and clarifications, where we recapture the magic of the story and better retain the tangled plots. It also means that we become more aware of how the book was written, of its language and words.

Books come in a variety of forms, some of which are easy to read and others that require time and patience. Of this, one form is associated with family, social history and legends, the Saga. The style is unpretentious and unadorned. They are great to read. These long and epic stories written in a poetic form also seem well suited to one of the greatest narratives ever written, the story of our married love. It is one where, as co-authors, we record the events and deeds of a shared life. This does, however, require some mutual editing and periodic revisions as memories may vary, especially when we were distracted by writing with one pen rather than two.

At times our shared story can be written carelessly and untidily, yet in the rereading we often discover a new vocabulary with which to write the onward narrative. As this is a living narrative it cannot be left to gather dust on the shelf but remains open to new entries and rereading of our past. Returning to our never-ending story is surprisingly a



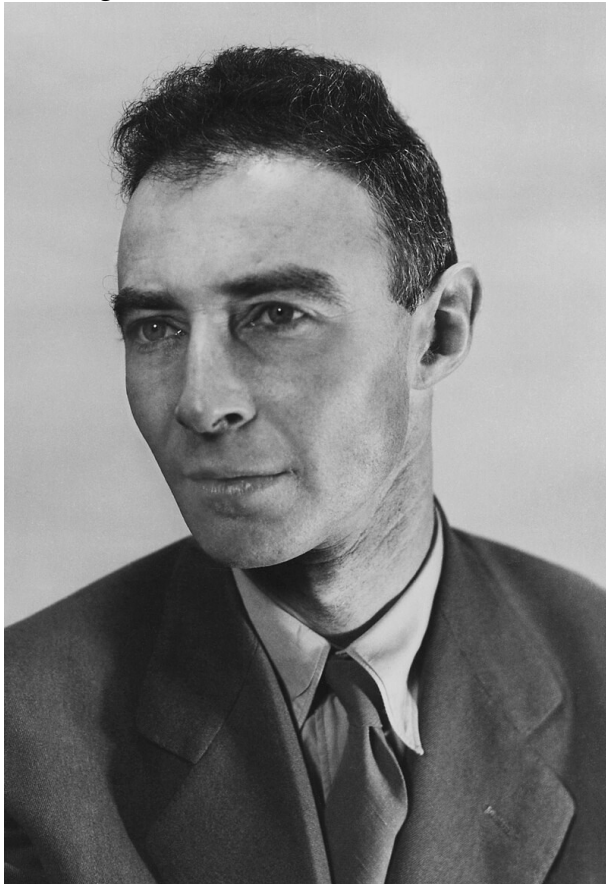
healthy practice in which we can retaste the flavours and episodes of our shared love. It provides the opportunity to add footnotes to those passages where healing is needed and the chance to reveal more openly our love and care.

Rereading the story of our married love is not a process of careful editing and reframing of our past experiences: instead it is about noticing. Our journal of married life is not so much written in the form of a love story; rather, it is a book about love, which is much more complex, exciting and enhancing. Fairy tales tell us that ‘they lived happily ever after’, whereas these living narratives of married love began with the words ‘I do’, the complexity of which are discovered afresh on each and every page.

OPPENHEIMER'S TRAGIC FATE

BY JASON M. BAXTER

8 . 2 . 23



In *Oppenheimer*, director Christopher Nolan has taken the meticulously researched seven-hundred-page book *American Prometheus*, by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin, and rendered it into his best film yet. Bird and Sherwin's Robert J. Oppenheimer, "father of the atomic bomb," is a Wilsonian and a humanitarian with an intellectual interest in the "mystic East." But Nolan's Oppenheimer is something more: He is a dreamer, a man who smokes more than he sleeps because he is neurotically driven to lift the veil and see into the black hole at the centre of being. He is a mystic. But he is also a tragic figure. Driven by an epic desire for knowledge, he brings into the world a tool that is ultimately wrested from him by the greedy and the powerful. In other words, Nolan gives us a story that revives the spirit of the pure tragedy of ancient Greece.

In line with the book, Nolan gives us a cosmopolitan, polyglot, literary, Picasso-viewing Oppenheimer, who quotes Donne, reads *The Wasteland* at night, rides horses through the New Mexican desert, teaches himself Sanskrit, talks international politics, and reads Marx in the original. Bird and Sherwin also provide a judicious portrait of a psychologically complicated man, one whom Cillian Murphy captures well. With his wide-open, vacant blue eyes but wistful mouth, he captures the man of paradox: at times ambitious, vain, brilliant, moody, affectionate, modest, bold,

winning, off-putting, and timid. Oppenheimer was a dynamic leader, but he was also emotionally absent. He could seduce a woman by presenting himself as bold and confident, but was, at the same time, unstable. He needed his friends to remind him to eat, to keep his wiry frame alive, and he needed strong women to tell him what to do. Bird and Sherwin quote Oppenheimer's friend Isidor Rabi: "God knows I'm not the simplest person, but compared to Oppenheimer, I'm very, very simple."

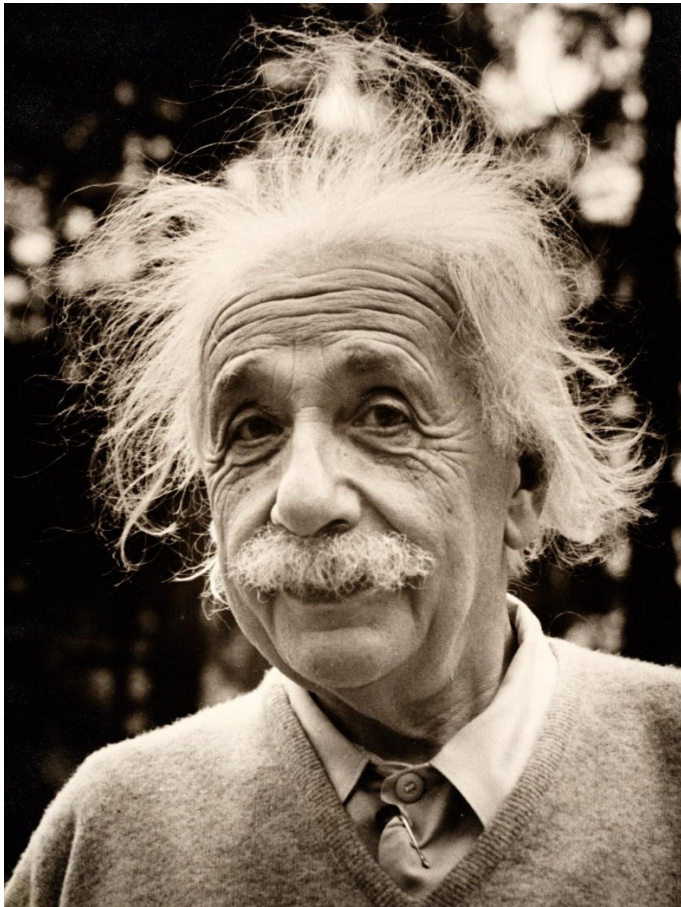
In addition to this complicated psychological portrait, Nolan employs a Terrence Malick–inspired cinematography to great effect. Just after the opening frames of the swirling fire of the explosion from the Trinity test in 1945, the first detonation of a nuclear bomb, we have scenes of rainwater falling on puddles—a recurring image throughout the film. There are wide-angle views of the New Mexican desert; sudden cuts to naturalistic close-ups; imagery of stars melting or dying. Visual techniques that evoke Malick's *Tree of Life* allow us to go "inside" the mind of Oppenheimer, where we "see" the inner life of the atom, and "feel" the pulse of the quantum fields that make up material reality at the most fundamental level. This is one of the great accomplishments of Nolan: All the ingredients are in Bird and Sherwin's work, but only Nolan allows us to view the inner essence of the world through Oppenheimer's visionary eyes and feel what it would be like to be a genius for 180 minutes.

Nolan adds to Bird and Sherwin's narrative a heightened note of prophetic caution. In 1954, during Oppenheimer's four-week security hearing, prompted by concerns that he posed a security risk, the prosecutor aggressively questions him on his apparent inconsistency: How could he not support the development of the hydrogen bomb after he had himself developed the atomic bomb? Where did these new moral scruples come from? Nolan's Oppenheimer responds: "When I realized we would use whatever technology we had." If Bird and Sherwin give us a portrait of a humanitarian who tried to put the genie back in the bottle through international diplomacy, Nolan gives us a darker picture, a picture of technological determinism.

In other words, Nolan's Oppenheimer is larger than life. Like Ahab, he is driven to see the foundations of the world, a mortal entangled in superhuman forces. This is pure tragedy. Oppenheimer is motivated by a mystic impulse, which, nevertheless, culpably lets him turn a blind eye to how his creation would be used and its attendant human cost.

After the vertiginously intense lead-up to the Trinity test countdown, the bomb does indeed go off. The anxious strings in the background music go mute, and we have only the blinding visual images accompanied by the heavy breathing of Murphy. After such an anxious build-up, the silence is deafening. The 10,000-foot column of fire and light is beautiful—like something out of Exodus—and all stare at the numinous epiphany in dazzled admiration. But the scientists and soldiers are unprepared for what

follows: the shockwave that arrives (one hundred seconds later). This windstorm brings debris and noise, knocking over everyone who had been, seconds before, enjoying the light. The scene functions as a visual symbol for the whole film.



Albert Einstein

A second powerful scene depicts the Bacchic celebration of the Los Alamos community after the successful test: screaming, heavy drinking, dancing, kissing. All the hard work paid off. But Nolan undermines the enthusiasm. Oppenheimer must give a speech before a screaming, intoxicated crowd of admirers and utter jingoistic truisms to his flag-waving, ululating fans. He offers a few nationalistic platitudes with great difficulty, suffering an inner agony. The sound mutes, again, and Oppenheimer has a “vision” in which the makeshift gym trembles uneasily, as if it were the target of the bomb; he sees again that pure, piercing light; he catches sight of faces melting off. It's a prophetic vision of what's to come for the citizens of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Oppenheimer has finally woken up from his self-induced, workaholic coma. As Einstein tells him, he will now have to face the consequences of his achievement.

Jason M. Baxter is a Visiting Associate Researcher at Notre Dame's de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture. He is the author, most recently, of [The Medieval Mind of C. S. Lewis](#).

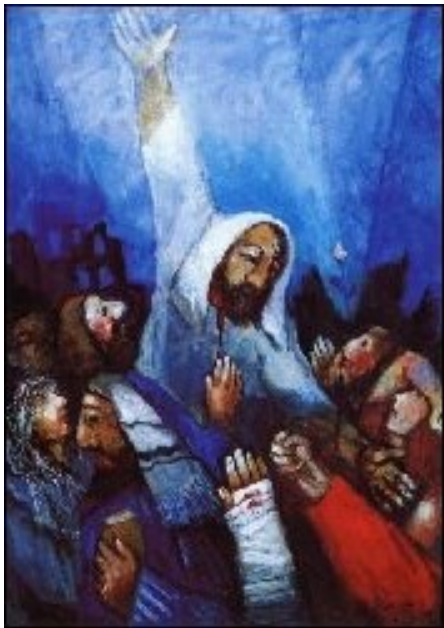
Father Sieger Köder ... priest and painter





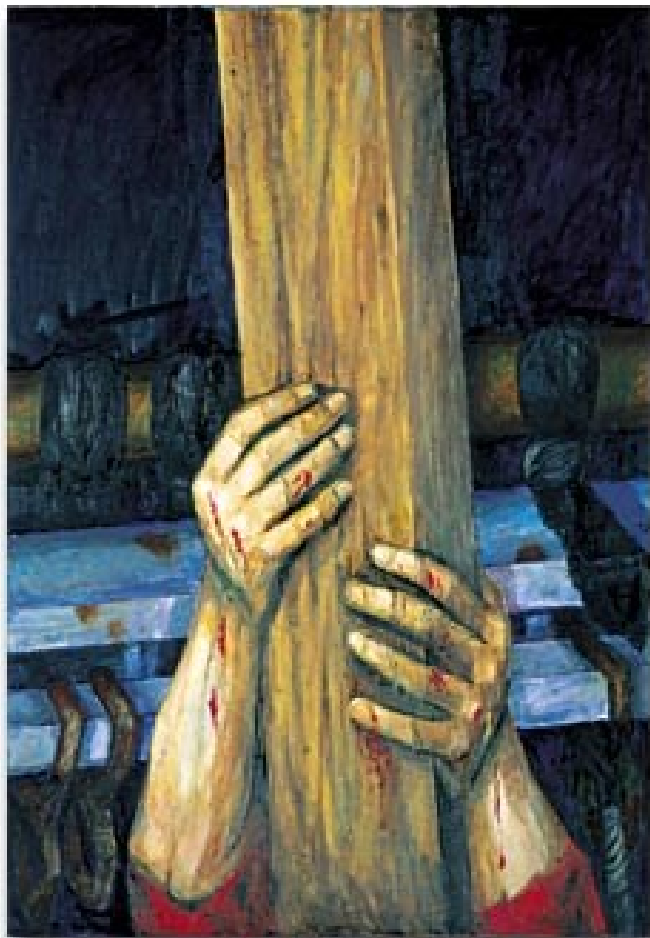
The German priest-painter, Father Sieger Köder, died in Ellwangen, Germany, on 9 February 2015 just after his 90th birthday. He was born in Wasseralfingen in Swabia and was a prisoner of war during World War II. He participated in the Catholic *Neudeutschland* movement, trained as a silversmith and painter and worked as a secondary school art teacher.



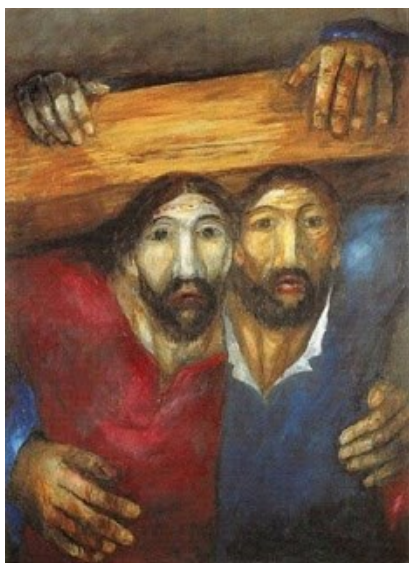


At 41 years old, he studied theology and was ordained in 1971. He combined his vocation as a parish priest with his work as an artist, producing numerous paintings, altarpieces and stained glass windows for churches within and outside Germany. He continued painting long into his retirement.





Father Köder's work was influenced by Chagall, using strong colours and chunky figures. His paintings are an earthy, yet spiritual interpretation of biblical themes. Fr Köder's painting is the visual expression of his priestly ministry.



Fr Sieger Köder's distinctive painting was part of his ministry and revealed his commitment to the social gospel.



A TALE OF TWO WOMEN

by *Richard Cipollas*

Eve and Mary: These two women have played pivotal roles in the destiny of the human race. Their power transcends that of the most powerful men in history. Pharaohs, emperors, kings, Wall Street whizzes, tech giants—none of them compare with these two women.



Our lives, our futures, depend on these two women. The first, Eve, has been consigned to the realm of myth, out of the reach of the real. But to know how very real this woman was and how very real her stamp on the whole human race, one should go to the church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence and look at the Masaccio frescoes there. There, in an unforgettable depiction, is this woman. Her face, once seen, is never forgotten. Her eyes are empty sockets; they are black. And on her face is a grief as deep as the universe. Compared to this grief, the grief of the great tragic heroines—Medea, Antigone, Clytemnestra, Iocasta—is nothing. This woman's grief envelops all of creation, for it is her act of disobedience that banished her and the man, he who fell no less easily, he who Masaccio shows walking beside her in dazed apprehension of what lies beyond the paradise of Eden. What leaps out of Masaccio's fresco is Eve's horror at the darkness before her. For what Eve saw in the blackness of her sight was not only pain and anxiety and loneliness and division—she saw death. And she wept the tears of all creation.

As for the second woman, one of the most powerful depictions of her is Titian's painting in the church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice. You enter the church by the side, one of the transepts. You advance to the opening in the choir screen that separates the nave from the choir of the friars and the sanctuary and high altar. But you pause, and you must pause. For what is seen in that opening cannot be approached casually, cannot be looked at as if you were looking at just one painting over the high altar in an Italian church. And so you walk slowly, and through the opening in the screen you see a painting that will always knock the breath out of you, no matter how many times you see it. While there was darkness in the Masaccio fresco, and unending grief, here there is light, a light that seems to come out of the painting itself. In it we see Mary's Assumption into heaven.

The light comes from above. The Masaccio fresco showed no light source from the sky, but here the light is intense, and it envelops the woman. There are the little angels, the *putti*, gently guiding the woman in her ascent to the light, in the light. The apostles look up, amazed and yet not surprised, for what else could be expected for the one who as an immaculate virgin bore God in the flesh—what else could be expected than that she would be borne into heaven in her totality as a woman. No disembodied soul this. No, this is the woman, clothed in a red so distinctive, so compelling, that it bears the name of its creator, Titian red. As she looks up, she is anticipating the fullness of life, for she knows the love of her son, the love of God that draws her up. There is no false, sentimental piety here. Her face is open to the light that suffuses her, the light that came into the world though the world knew it not—for the world sees with the eyes of the first woman, with eye sockets that are black, void.

It is in this woman full of grace that we see the destiny of those who do see this light. For as the first woman caused the gates of heaven to be shut, so this woman not only opens those gates, but makes the possibility of heaven real for all who are flesh and blood.

While it is true that Mary's Assumption into heaven is a singular privilege, her being in heaven body and soul is what we hope for ourselves. For we look forward to the resurrection of the body on the last day, the fruit of our redemption in Jesus Christ who died on the cross and who rose again on the third day not as a ghost, but as the person of Jesus Christ, whose body was no longer subject to the corruption of death but destined to live forever in the glory of God. What Mary is today in heaven is what is our sure hope for ourselves, a sure hope founded on faith in Jesus Christ, whose will is that all shall live.

Richard Cipolla is a priest of the Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut.

WHERE THERE IS PAIN, THERE IS GOD

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.”

John 14:1



Rescued migrants

Human beings will never understand why suffering exists. But even in the midst of our pain, there is God. We all know what it is to feel pain and loss. Whether from the loss of a loved one, a cancer diagnosis, or a natural disaster, everyone experiences suffering.

According to Robin Ryan, an associate professor of systematic theology at Catholic Theological Union and a Passionist priest, the presence of suffering is the one thing that most challenges our faith. “Suffering isn’t an elective course,” he says. “It’s not optional. Even if a person lives in a mansion and has a great job, suffering touches everybody and affects everybody’s faith.”

Because suffering is so common and yet so difficult to talk about, Ryan says that it’s easy to rely on platitudes like “It’s all part of God’s plan” or “God never gives you a

bigger cross than you can endure.” The problem with these, Ryan says, is “they sound like God is busy doling out crosses in people’s lives. That can turn people off.”



Rescued Afghan refugees

For Fr Ryan, the solution is for Catholics to articulate their personal beliefs about suffering through ongoing conversation with others.

As such, his book, *God and the Mystery of Human Suffering: A Theological Conversation Across the Ages*, offers no definitive answer to the questions of suffering, but instead shares the wisdom of thinkers ranging from Thomas Aquinas to Elizabeth Johnson. The goal is for readers to refine and enrich their own personal views on suffering and God’s presence in the midst of pain.

You titled your book God and the Mystery of Human Suffering. What’s so mysterious about suffering?

There are two mysteries there—the mystery of God and the mystery of human suffering. You can’t completely wrap your mind around either one. Even the best rational explanations of why suffering exists and how it fits into the whole order of things fall short.

A problem is something that’s solvable, at least eventually, but a mystery is not something you can solve. It’s something you encounter that you have to grapple with and learn to live with and try to make sense of the best you can, but there is no overarching explanation that can put a mystery into some nice, rational box.

You know suffering when you see or feel it, but it’s hard to define. The dictionary definition says something like, “the bearing of affliction and pain and loss,” but suffering is more multilayered.

Phil Zylla, a Canadian theologian, talks about the different dimensions of suffering: the physical, the psychological, the social, and the spiritual.

The physical refers to the bearing of pain, while psychological is a sense of loss or, sometimes, trauma. Social suffering refers to becoming a social outcast, social degradation, or shame. Finally, spiritual suffering can lead to despondency. The more of those elements that are part of an experience of suffering, the deeper it is.

I was at the dentist last week for a procedure, not my favorite experience. Is that suffering? I suppose I suffered physical pain a little bit. But I knew my dentist was trying to help me, and everything was going to work out fine.

That's different from losing your spouse or the experience of the people in Paris who were attacked by those gunmen. That suffering encompasses the spiritual, the mental, and the social.

Can you rank types of suffering?

There are kinds of suffering that crush the soul, that crush humans in spirit. There is long torture or

terrible trauma that people can't grapple with. That kind of suffering is maybe worse, in some sense, than others.

Sometimes psychologists talk about social comparison: "I was in a car wreck, but it could be worse . . . I could be like the people in Paris who got killed," as if somehow, that makes you feel better.

I suppose that's valid. It helps you withstand something when you realize that there are other people going through the same thing or something even worse. But generally speaking, I don't think you should rank suffering, because it's so personal.

If God is all-powerful and all-good, why do bad things happen?

That question is the basis of what is known as "theodicy," or the rational attempt to explain how God can be omnipotent and all-good and yet allow suffering and evil to exist. Again, we're standing before mystery. There is no way to wrap your mind around suffering and no explanation that will leave the mind at rest.

Theologians today say that suffering is a scandal. And we have to allow ourselves to be scandalized by it again and again.

Jürgen Moltmann is a German theologian who was a POW after World War II. He was conscripted as a teenager into the German Nazi Air Force and almost died in the bombing of Hamburg. Afterward, at 18 or 19 years old, he was put into a POW camp for three years.

In the camp, an American chaplain gave him a Bible. He came across the psalms of lament first, and then Mark's account of Jesus' passion.

He said something along the lines of, "When I read Jesus' death cry, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' I realized this is someone who understands me, and I came to understand him."

Moltmann says the "why" question that theodicy tries to answer is like an open wound that you have to learn to live with. It's one of the most important questions of

human history, and yet it exists like an open wound that you can't cure. But sometimes faith enables you to live with that open wound.

So rather than trying to answer the question of why, theologians today say that the more important question for us is where: "Where do I find God in suffering?" And it's here that the Christian story of the cross and resurrection has something to say.



What can suffering people learn from the cross and resurrection?

Well, the cross has been used in many ways for suffering people. Sometimes these ways are helpful, sometimes not. The cross has been used to say, "Well, Jesus suffered so you should suffer, too," almost conveying that the more we suffer, the closer we are to God.

But the incarnation tells us that God chose to save us by punching into this world – with all of its beauty and its tragedy – to save from within, rather than sending heavenly armies marching in. In Christ, God knew exactly what suffering was: Christ truly entered into suffering. God, in some ways, is forever different because of humanity.

This isn't an answer to any question about suffering, but it's an assurance of God's compassion and God's presence with the suffering person. The resurrection assures us that God can be found in the one who is suffering, even when it seems like a Godless situation.

Does God suffer with us?

Does God suffer? The traditional answer is no, because God is immutable and impassible, and to suffer is to change or to be changed.

Because of the incarnation, the Son of God suffered on the cross, though in his human nature, not God's divine nature. So even though the person of God suffered in a way, that suffering was kept separate from God's divine nature. Traditional theology brought suffering as close as possible to God, but didn't quite let it touch God.

But modern theologians, including feminist theologians, say that God is impinged upon by our sufferings. And this isn't a bad thing. The ability to freely enter into the suffering of another is an excellence, not an imperfection.

The best analogy we have for God's love is the love between two adults. That love always involves a sense of mutuality, reciprocity, of being vulnerable to the hurts of the other.

If that's the case, if that's the most perfect kind of love we can think of (even though we realize it's limited), don't we want to ascribe that to God? It so much depends on how you understand perfection. If you understand perfection in a way that includes the ability to make oneself vulnerable to another out of love, then many theologians today would say we want to ascribe that to God, even though we don't know exactly what it means for God to suffer.

Did Jesus have to suffer on the cross to save humanity?

Some modern theologians have criticized the Christian tradition for glorifying the cross in a way that didn't acknowledge the terrible thing that it was—a cruel form of execution.

It's important to see Jesus' death on the cross as the outcome of his public ministry. If you just isolate the cross and say, "Jesus came to die for us," it sounds like what he did before his crucifixion was just a prelude or something not really important.

But Jesus came to offer salvation and to proclaim the nearness of God's kingdom. He made that reign of God present in his words and his deeds: touching the leper, dining with sinners, etc.

His suffering was a result of living that ministry in a world where people reject God's visitations. The suffering needs to be seen as an outcome; he got himself in trouble by the way he lived.

We do believe that Christ's suffering on the cross is redemptive. But it's redemptive because it's full of love, not because it's full of pain.

Do these big theological ideas help us with our own concrete experiences of suffering?

Author and Shoah survivor Elie Wiesel writes about the hanging of a young boy while he's in the concentration camp. Two men and a boy are arrested. All the prisoners are forced to watch them be hanged. The young boy hangs on longer because he's so light. It takes him a long time to die.

Someone beside Wiesel says, "Where is God? Where is God now?" Eventually, Wiesel says, "I heard a voice inside of me saying, 'There he is. He's hanging there on the gallows.' "

Wiesel never really explains what he means by that passage, but I think a Christian can read that and understand that God is in the suffering one. That's where we find God – not in some figure who's behind the scenes and directing the script or something.

Seeing God in the suffering means you approach them with reverence. They aren't always attractive. Sometimes you'd rather not be around them.

Sometimes we get frustrated with people who are suffering, because we think they're not helping themselves enough, or they could do more to help themselves. But you have to realize that this is especially sacred ground. You have to tread lightly.



Does the church ever fall short when it comes to caring for suffering people?

Pastoral workers, whether priests or lay people, are human beings. Sometimes pastors want to have quick answers for people, rather than sit with them. Even in preaching, we want to sound convincing and like we know something. Otherwise, why are we up there? But sometimes you have to let your own vulnerability come out, whether at a funeral or where a child is dying.

It's harder to say "this was a terrible tragedy and I don't have an explanation." But we fall short when we resort to prefabricated packaged answers, bumper sticker slogans that we use in our encounters with other people, or even in preaching. We need to reflect on what our words convey about who God is. What kind of image of God is underneath what I am saying? Take, for example, the old adage we tell people after a child dies that says something like, "God wanted another angel in heaven." It makes God into a celestial kidnapper.

Or take what we say about someone's death or another tragedy being "God's plan." When people use this language, I think they're trying to express that God is at work in our lives, that God guides us and is present to us and is leading us along the way. Unfortunately, this language can also make it seem like God is the master chess player who's looking down on the chess board, moving all the pieces around, knocking a few over in the process. Or that God is a master software programmer. He knows all the on and off switches and exactly what circuits to use. It makes it sound like God gives you this suffering as part of your trip through the maze to get home.

How do you say the Shoah fits into God's plan or what happened in Paris or 9/11? Can you really label all of those things as part of God's master plan? What is your pastoral response to people who are suffering?

I encourage people to cry out to God, echoing the psalms of lament. It's okay to be angry at God; people should speak as honestly as they can. When it's appropriate, I encourage those to whom I minister to trust that God is with them and to hold on to God's hand through the suffering. If someone asks me "Why did this happen?" I just say I don't know why. I don't have any answers. I believe God is present with us and works to bring some good out of pain, and I believe that it's still important for people to hear that. But I don't tell people that right away. I let people pour out their pain first.

Does your response to a huge tragedy—like terrorist attacks or a natural disaster—differ from your response to personal suffering?

In either situation—personal suffering or a huge tragedy—what I try to do as a pastor and a Passionist is to be present. Job's friends came from afar. When they saw him, they could hardly recognize him. They sat with him for seven days and didn't say anything. It's when they started talking that the problems came and they got themselves in trouble.

I think the best thing is to try to be Christ to that person. Don't just come up with answers but be Christ's presence. That's the best thing you can give someone in that situation. In the case of larger tragedies like the terrorist attack on Paris, we find ways to express solidarity. Whether it's a prayer service here at our own church or in Paris. Or when thinking about those suffering from famine in Africa, for example, we can try to reach out with spiritual and material assistance. Solidarity can be a cheap word. There's a superficial feeling of, "Well, I feel bad about those people." But there are other ways to express your solidarity that are deeper and stronger, and that's the most important thing.



This article appeared in the March 2016 issue of U.S. Catholic (Vol. 81, No. 3, pages 20–23).

Why do I have to fast one hour before Mass?



The discipline of fasting before Mass highlights our need to be hungry for the Eucharistic bread we eat.

Many Catholics from an older generation will remember the “midnight fast.” It meant that one could not eat before Mass starting from the midnight before. For this reason Masses were generally celebrated at dawn and Masses in the evening were extremely rare. Few people wanted to fast all day long before attending Mass and receiving Holy Communion.

This practice of fasting before Mass is an ancient discipline, present as early as the 2nd century. It remained in place until Pope Pius XII reduced the fast to three hours in 1957. The fast was further shortened in 1964 when Pope Paul VI lowered it to one hour before reception of Communion.

The current *Code of Canon Law* reflects this change and states, “A person who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain for at least one hour before holy

communion from any food and drink, except for only water and medicine” (Canon 919 §1).

However, in some cases those rules do not apply. “The elderly, the infirm, and those who care for them can receive the Most Holy Eucharist even if they have eaten something within the preceding hour” (Canon 919 §3).

But why? What does it matter if I ate a cheeseburger right before I walked into church on a day I intend to receive the Holy Eucharist?

Pope Paul VI wrote concerning the power of spiritual discipline in his apostolic constitution *Paenitemini*: “Mortification aims at the liberation of man, who often finds himself, because of concupiscence, almost chained by his own senses. Through ‘corporal fasting’ man regains strength, and the wound inflicted on the dignity of our nature by intemperance is cured by the medicine of a salutary abstinence.”

Jesus knew the [power of fasting](#) and went into the desert without food for 40 days before setting out on his public ministry. Furthermore, he taught his disciples that, “This kind [of demon] cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29).

Fasting builds up our spiritual strength, and the Church asks us to complete this simple task every time we receive Holy Communion for our own benefit. Just like any athlete we need to exercise discipline and fasting is great for building those spiritual muscles. Without fasting we are weak and our passions drive us to wherever the wind blows.

Additionally, Pope John Paul II lamented in *Dominicae Cena* how modern Catholics possess a “lack of Eucharistic ‘hunger’ and ‘thirst,’ which is also a sign of lack of adequate sensitivity towards the great sacrament of love and a lack of understanding of its nature.” We need to “hunger” and yearn for the Eucharistic before we can properly receive it.

Our reception of Holy Communion needs to correspond to an inner hunger that is indicative of a soul that thirsts for God’s love. If we don’t have this hunger (brought to mind by our physical hunger during fasting), we might think of Holy Communion as something ordinary, not needing any preparation beforehand.

Colin gets a try out for the church cleaning team...



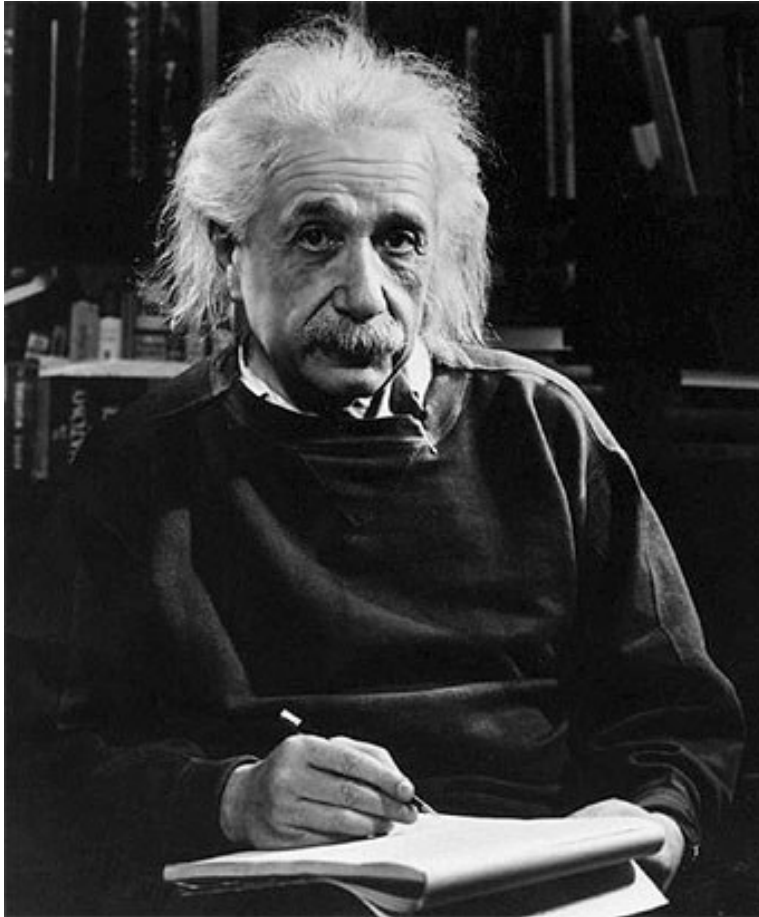
COLIN AND BROOM

Harefield farmer and long-term St Paul's parishioner, Colin Mitchell, has had a trial run for the parish cleaning team. On behalf of the church cleaning team Marjorie Ward has said, "This is a trial run for Colin. He's on a probationary period. We shall see how things go."

THE POWER OF THE SPOKEN OR WRITTEN WORD

Something I have listened to, read,
appreciated and remembered

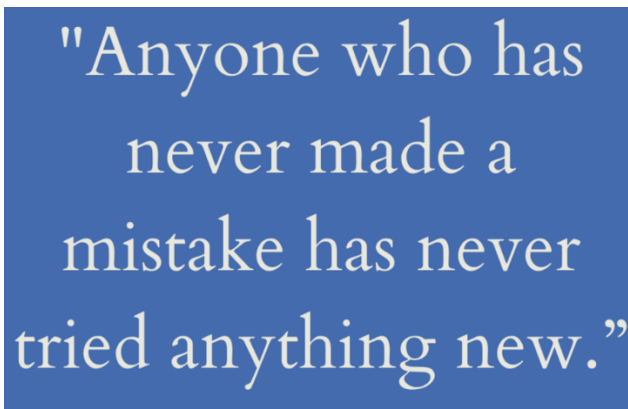
This month the featured contribution is by Fr Jim. Fifty quotes from Albert Einstein:



Fifty Albert Einstein Quotes

"There are only two ways to
live your life. One is as
though nothing is a miracle.
The other is as though
everything is a miracle."

1. "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."
2. "If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales."
3. "Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving."
4. "Try not to become a man of success. Rather become a man of value."
5. "The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of true art and true science."
6. "Gravitation is not responsible for people falling in love."
7. "Never memorize something that you can look up."
8. "Creativity is intelligence having fun."
9. "Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters."
10. "Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds."



"Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new."

11. "Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new."
12. "It would be possible to describe everything scientifically, but it would make no sense; it would be without meaning, as if you described a Beethoven symphony as a variation of wave pressure."
13. "A question that sometimes drives me hazy: am I or are the others crazy?"
14. "Blind belief in authority is the greatest enemy of truth."
15. "Logic will get you from A to Z; imagination will get you everywhere."

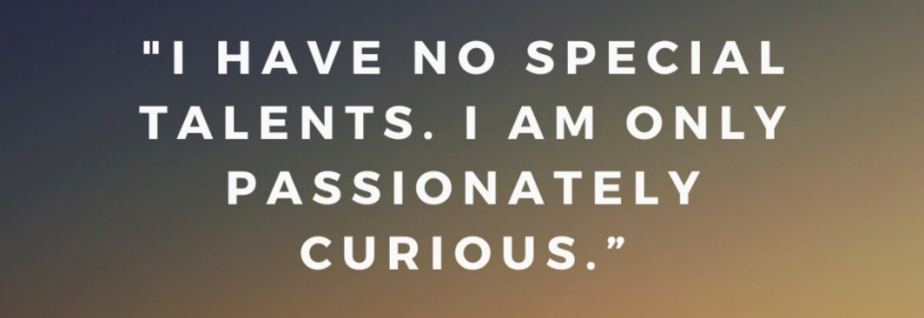
16. "The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it."

17. "We all know that light travels faster than sound. That's why certain people appear bright until you hear them speak."

18. "If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?"

19. "I must be willing to give up what I am in order to become what I will be."

20. "Everything must be made as simple as possible. But not simpler."



**"I HAVE NO SPECIAL
TALENTS. I AM ONLY
PASSIONATELY
CURIOUS."**

21. "I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious."

22. "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery each day."

23. "Love is a better master than duty."

24. "The measure of intelligence is the ability to change."

25. "Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one."

26. "What is right is not always popular and what is popular is not always right."

27. "It is not that I'm so smart. But I stay with the [questions](#) much longer."

28. "The pursuit of truth and beauty is a sphere of activity in which we are permitted to remain children all our lives."

29. "Once you can accept the universe as matter expanding into nothing that is something, wearing stripes with plaid comes easy."

30. "You never fail until you stop trying."

"I am enough of an
artist to draw freely
upon my imagination.
Imagination is more
important than
knowledge.
Knowledge is limited.
Imagination encircles
the world."

31. "I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world."

32. "A clever person solves a problem. A wise person avoids it."

33. "If I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician. I often think in [music](#). I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music."

34. "Genius is 1% talent and 99% percent hard work..."

35. "A human being is a part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of [nature](#) in its beauty."

36. "Black holes are where God divided by zero."

37. "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."

38. "If A is a success in life, then A equals x plus y plus z. Work is x; y is play; and z is keeping your mouth shut."

39. "Time is an illusion."

40. "Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions."

"If you can't explain
it to a six year old,
you don't
understand it
yourself."

41. "If you can't explain it to a six year old, you don't understand it yourself."
42. "The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking."
43. "When you trip over love, it is easy to get up. But when you fall in love, it is impossible to stand again."
44. "Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe."
45. "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding."
46. "The best way to cheer yourself is to cheer somebody else up."
47. "Any fool can know. The point is to understand."
48. "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."
49. "When you are courting a nice girl an hour seems like a second. When you sit on a red-hot cinder a second seems like an hour. That's relativity."
50. "I speak to everyone in the same way, whether he is the garbage man or the president of the university."

ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

HOLY HOWLERS

Typos, misprints, inadvertent double entendre and all manner of infelicitous error published in church notices, bulletins and newsletters

Thursday at 5pm there will be a meeting of the Little Mothers Club.
All wishing to become Little Mothers,
please see the minister in his private study.

Please place your donation in the envelope
along with the deceased person(s) you want remembered.

The choir will meet at the Larsen house for fun and sinning.



"Check out Mr. Holier-than-thou!"