

A Laugh with the Queen

After Queen Elizabeth II's death in 2022, former Royal Protection Officer Richard Griffin shared a story on *Sky News* that highlighted Her Majesty's sense of humor.

Griffin was with the Queen at a picnic site when two American hikers came towards them. However, the couple didn't recognize her. She began chatting with them about their holiday, prompting one of them to ask her, "And where do you live?"

Good-naturedly, the Queen responded, "I live in London, but I have a holiday home just the other side of the hills." The Americans then asked her if she had ever met the Queen. With her trademark wit, the Queen responded, "Well, I haven't, but Dick here meets her regularly."

The Americans handed their camera to the Queen and asked her to take a picture of them with Griffin. The Queen complied, then Griffin took a picture of the couple with the Queen, still not letting on who she was. After parting ways, the Queen said to Griffin, "I'd love to be a fly on the wall when he shows those photographs to friends in America, and hopefully someone tells him who I am."

**God has brought laughter for me.
(Genesis 21:6)**

May I have a sense of humor about myself, Lord.

Ministering to Patients and Parishioners

“I was basically born to minister to people, either in a white coat or a white alb,” says Deacon Mike Madden regarding his service in the Church and his career as a doctor who cared for people with kidney problems.

After joining the Navy, Deacon Mike chose to become a nephrologist. As reported at *TheCompassNews.org*, it was during dialysis training in Madison, Wisconsin, that he met a nurse named Nancy, whom he later married.

Deacon Mike volunteered at his church and eventually felt called to pursue the diaconate. He sees some overlap in his medical and spiritual work, noting, “Most of the stuff that you do is sit in a room and listen to [patients] and talk to them. I always say, ‘Priests say confessions and give absolutions. I heard a lot of confessions. I just can’t give absolutions.’”

When Nancy died in 2022 after 38 years of marriage, Deacon Mike felt her loss deeply. His faith helped him through that time, and he returned to serving on the altar on Easter Sunday. “It was the greatest thing,” he said. “Talk about replacing some sorrow with joy.”

**I will turn their mourning into joy.
(Jeremiah 31:13)**

Help me find ways to replace my sorrow with joy, Jesus.

Appreciate Your Sanitation Workers

Clio Chang has a new respect for sanitation workers who pick up the trash in New York City. The reason? As a journalist for *Curbed.com*, she spent several days joining recent hires for their training sessions.

New York produces “12,000 tons of trash” every day, and it’s up to the Department of Sanitation’s workers, who drive the city’s fleet of trucks, to pick it all up without injuring themselves. “Trash pickup ranks among OSHA’s list of occupations with the highest fatal work injuries,” Chang noted.

Even something that sounds seemingly simple, such as emptying a corner trash can, can be more difficult than you might think. The can by itself weighs 30 pounds, so of course it’s heavier when full. Lifting and tipping it into the back of the truck for compaction took a lot of muscle. And sanitation workers perform this task 400 times a day.

If you take your city’s sanitation workers—or other service providers—for granted, put yourself in their shoes for a while, and you’ll gain a new appreciation for all they accomplish.

**Respect those who labor among you.
(1 Thessalonians 5:12)**

Remind me to appreciate the hard work of others, Creator.

Still Humble, Even with Success

Sadio Mane is one of the biggest names in African soccer. He earns an eye-popping \$21 million each year playing for the German professional team Bayern Munich, after a successful stint at Liverpool FC, one of the top teams in the world.

Yet the Senegalese star stays humble, using a cracked iPhone, and quietly donating millions to charities. He gave \$618,000 to help construct a public hospital in his hometown of Bambali, Senegal, a village 250 miles from the capital of Dakar. That followed his \$51,000 contribution to help those struck by COVID-19; \$310,000 to build a secondary school in Bambali, and the list goes on. “I prefer that my people receive a little of what life has given me,” the 30-year-old star said. “Why would I want 10 Ferraris, 20 diamond watches, or two planes? What will these objects do for me and for the world?”

“I was hungry, and I had to work in the field; I survived hard times, played football barefooted, I did not have an education and many other things, but today with what I win thanks to football, I can help my people,” he told Ghanaian outlet *nsemwoha.com*.

**Those who are generous are blessed.
(Proverbs 22:9)**

May I be willing to share my blessings, Jesus.

When Mercy Precedes Repentance, Part 1

In John 8:3-11, the scribes and Pharisees drag a woman caught in adultery before Jesus to see if He would endorse stoning her, as the law of Moses commanded.

They were hoping to catch Jesus contradicting the religious law so they would have a reason to persecute him, but He was too shrewd for them. Jesus responded, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

That answer turned the tables on the scribes and Pharisees! They all left, leaving Jesus alone with the woman. He asked her, "Has no one condemned you?" She responded, "No one, sir." Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

It's interesting to note that we never hear the woman acknowledge doing anything wrong or asking for mercy. We can presume she doesn't want to be stoned, but we don't know if she was sorry for what she did or just sorry she got caught. Regardless, perhaps Jesus granted her mercy without her asking for it in the hopes that mercy would lead her to repentance.

More tomorrow...

Great is Your mercy, O Lord. (Psalm 119:156)

Grant me a merciful heart, Messiah.

When Mercy Precedes Repentance, Part 2

Another example of mercy preceding repentance occurs in the book/play/movie *Les Miserables*, in which the character Jean Valjean, who has just been released from 19 years in prison for stealing bread to support his family, finds food and shelter with a kindly bishop.

The next morning, the destitute Valjean steals some silverware from the bishop's home, but is soon apprehended by the police, who return him to the bishop for identification. Instead of condemning Valjean for his theft, however, the bishop tells the police he had freely given Valjean the silverware so he could get money to build his new life. And the bishop even gives him a couple of extra silver candlesticks!

Again, we have a guilty person who receives mercy without asking for it. The bishop is insightful enough to know that the crime committed against Valjean by the government was more egregious than the theft of the silverware. And so, the bishop prays that his mercy to Valjean will lead him to a new life—and the story proves out that it does. More tomorrow...

The Lord is patient with them and pours out His mercy upon them. (Sirach 18:11)

May those who receive mercy turn their lives around, Lord.

When Mercy Precedes Repentance, Part 3

As a final example of mercy preceding repentance, Jesus Himself, while dying on the cross, prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Jesus is talking about the same people who supported His crucifixion. By human standards, He should be consumed with anger at them, but His words convey more sadness than rage at how foolish humanity is. And instead of using His final words to share thoughts of vengeance, He asks mercy for those who are responsible for killing Him, even though they had not repented.

The ideal situation, of course, is that when we commit a wrong, we acknowledge it, then ask for forgiveness. But we don’t live in a perfect world, and everybody’s story and psyche are different.

For the woman caught in adultery and for Jean Valjean, maybe they have so little experience being on the receiving end of kindness that they need to experience it before they can find their way to the light. In these cases, mercy can be the motivator for repentance. And practicing that kind of mercy is truly divine.

Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)

Help me practice mercy in a divine way, Jesus.

Renovating Homes for the Disabled

In the summer of 2019, Joel and Carina Ancillas' lives changed when their 16-year-old daughter, Kelly, was diagnosed with a rare illness that left her paralyzed from the waist down. Their home was not built to accommodate the girl's needs, so a nonprofit organization stepped in to help.

Rescuing Families reconstructs houses for those in need across Long Island, New York. Gina Centauro, co-founder of the organization, heard about Kelly's story and told *LIHerald.com*, "Kelly belonged home."

To ensure the Ancillas' home was safe for Kelly to live in, the team of volunteer contractors built a new deck and ramp to allow her wheelchair access, while also widening and reinforcing the hallways, flooring, and doors.

When Kelly returned to her Elmont home, there were "lots of cheers, and all happy tears," said Centauro, who was delighted that she played a role in helping to "make their lives a little bit easier."

**All these people will go to their home in peace.
(Exodus 18:23)**

Jesus, I pray for all those who are disabled and their families. May they find help and hope.

Gold Medalist's Message of Love

As an 11-time Olympic medalist, Allyson Felix has crushed it in her chosen sport of track & field. Her most important achievement, however, is her role as Mom.

Now, through partnering with brand *Athleta* and the nonprofit *♀Mother*, Felix is spearheading a grant program to help provide childcare for female athletes. “No woman should have to choose between her career and her family,” *Athleta's* Chief Brand Officer Kyle Andrew told *Good Morning America*.

The Child Care Grants are a “game changer” for female athletes who lack the financial support of a sponsor. Through this partnership, Felix says they have helped 23 athletes thus far through a \$200,000 grant program to cover child care costs for professional mom-athletes traveling to competitions.

Felix believes that number is going to keep on growing: “I’m racing this season for a better future for women and girls, and the legacy we are building around supporting women on and off the track.”

Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us. (Hebrews 12:1)

Father, I pray for a more equitable future for families.

Unlocking the Key to Happiness

Is there a formula for happiness? Boston-area psychiatrist Robert Waldinger believes there is. “Happiness falls into two main categories,” he told *CBS News*. “One is that experience of being happy right now...Then, there is a more enduring kind of happiness, basically the feeling that life is meaningful, that life is worthwhile.”

Waldinger, whose happiness TED Talk has been viewed some 44 million times, heads up the Harvard Study of Adult Development. It began in 1938, and its questions cover everything from sleep to coffee consumption to happiness. And the results are in! Happiness comes not from money, looks or fame, but from forming meaningful human relationships.

Helen Chardack, who takes a ceramics class in Manhattan, reinforces this truth. In describing why she attends the class, she notes, “You get a sense of belonging. And in the belonging, there’s a security, there’s intimacy, there are shared experiences.”

So, never underestimate the power of social connections in unlocking your own happiness.

Bring their lives to fulfillment in happiness and mercy. (Tobit 8:17)

Lord, guide me towards meaningful friendships.

Pitcher Returns to Mound After Cancer

Chicago White Sox reliever Liam Hendriks made a remarkable comeback in 2023, pitching in his first game since recovering from non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. The 34-year-old had completed chemotherapy only 45 days prior. Though he allowed two runs against the Los Angeles Angels, it was an emotional and inspiring moment for both him and the fans.

ESPN.com reported that before Hendriks even stepped onto the mound, he received several standing ovations from the crowd at Guaranteed Rate Field. The support was overwhelming, with people wearing his shirts, waving signs, and chanting his name. Both teams joined in applauding his return. Home plate umpire John Libka and Angels lead-off man Matt Thaiss gave Hendriks a moment to absorb the atmosphere before he began pitching in the top of the eighth inning.

Hendriks cherished the ball from his first pitch back as a keepsake, symbolizing his triumphant return. His determination and resilience have touched the hearts of fans and inspired many who face similar challenges.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. (Romans 12:12)

May those facing cancer find strength and hope, Paraclete.

A Cut Above the Rest

Vernon Jackson, a licensed cosmetologist, would sometimes get customers in his Noble Barber and Beauty shop who needed extra accommodations. Specifically, children with autism, Down syndrome, or other medical conditions needed additional care and attention. His dream was to donate haircuts to children with disabilities.

A social media campaign got his program, “The Gifted Event,” off the ground. As reported by *Good Morning America*, Jackson now provides free haircuts and more to youngsters with various medical conditions at his Cincinnati, Ohio shop.

One grateful mom said she used to have to sit with her son, who has Down syndrome, and hold him so he didn’t “swat the scissors” out of the stylist’s hand. But at Noble Barber and Beauty, Jackson builds trust with his young customers. He creates a warm, welcoming, safe, and secure atmosphere.

Another parent said it’s nice to go to a shop where her family doesn’t feel judged.

Whoever welcomes one such child in My name welcomes Me. (Matthew 18:5)

Prince of Peace, teach me to be warm and welcoming to all.

A Marathoner's Miracle

Having a goal or something to look forward to can often aid people recovering from serious medical problems. This was the case with Rachel Foster from Edmond, Oklahoma.

In November 2022, the 35-year-old chef fell off an electric scooter and suffered 17 broken bones and a traumatic brain injury that left her on life support. In a coma for 10 days, her prognosis appeared grim.

Shortly before her husband John was ready to remove her from life support, Rachel awoke and “was both physically and cognitively responsive,” reported the *Edmond Outlook*.

As she endured intense rehabilitation to learn to walk and talk again, Rachel stayed focused on running the Boston Marathon. Meanwhile, friends would send her and John text messages of Jesus quotes, such as, “Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole” (Luke 8:50).

Defying all odds, Rachel ran the Boston Marathon on April 17, 2023, a mere six months after she almost died. She told *Boston 25 News*, “It really was a miracle.”

**I will strengthen you, I will help you.
(Isaiah 41:10)**

Bring hope and healing to all those struggling through injuries, Divine Healer.

The Legacy of Father Ed, Part 1

Many people know the story of Alcoholics Anonymous founder Bill Wilson, who laid the groundwork for those struggling through alcoholism to move toward recovery. Much less is known about the Catholic priest who served as Bill W.'s spiritual sponsor, Father Ed Dowling.

In the early-to-mid 20th century, Father Ed embodied the love of Christ not only to alcoholics, but to anyone who was suffering or marginalized: from African Americans, to those with mental health issues, to married couples in need of counseling.

Author Dawn Eden Goldstein has now done a deep-dive into Father Ed's life to explore the personal suffering which grew his compassion—and the deep faith that motivated his work.

Her Christopher Award-winning book is called *Father Ed: The Story of Bill W.'s Spiritual Sponsor*. It is helping a new generation find healing and inspiration in this dedicated priest's work. More of Father Ed's story tomorrow...

**Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.
(Matthew 6:20)**

Blessed Redeemer, send loving and understanding mentors to the marginalized and those struggling through addiction.

The Legacy of Father Ed, Part 2

When Father Ed Dowling was 19 years old, before he studied for the priesthood, his younger brother, James, died because of the 1918 flu pandemic. To make matters worse, Father Ed suspected he might have given the disease to his brother, with whom he shared an especially close bond.

Dawn Eden Goldstein, author of the Christopher Award-winning biography *Father Ed*, said, “When you have a wound like that...it can make you question, ‘Does God exist? Does God care about me?’”

As Father Ed’s faith grew deeper over the years through saying daily Mass and meditating in front of a crucifix, he believed that Jesus brought him a level of healing from his emotional wound. He also came to see the “suffering Christ in his suffering brothers and sisters” and made it a key part of his mission to reach out to them.

“I think that anytime someone suffers,” Dawn explained, “they have a choice to fold in upon themselves and be wrapped up in their suffering—or to turn outward. Father Dowling’s philosophy was that suffering should turn a person outward.”

**The Lord is near to the brokenhearted.
(Psalm 34:18)**

May my sufferings turn me outward, Jesus.

The Legacy of Father Ed, Part 3

When Father Ed Dowling first encountered the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, he felt drawn to the philosophy behind them, despite not being an alcoholic himself.

The 12 Steps were based on Bill Wilson's achievement of sobriety after having a spiritual experience. He devised these Steps so that alcoholics could recognize "that they're powerless over alcohol and that only a higher power can relieve them of this great thirst for alcohol."

What Bill came to discover—and what he put into the 12 Steps—was that helping other alcoholics allowed him to maintain his own sobriety.

"I think Father Dowling must have recognized that this is also a very Christian idea: the idea that our salvation is not meant only for ourselves," explained *Father Ed* author Dawn Eden Goldstein. "Every Christian has a mission. This is part of the message of the Second Vatican Council. We have a mission to be Christ among others and to spread that fragrance of Christ wherever we go."

We are the aroma of Christ. (2 Corinthians 2:15)

Jesus, teach me to love as selflessly as You do.

The Legacy of Father Ed, Part 4

One aspect of Alcoholics Anonymous that appealed to Father Ed Dowling, SJ, who was not an alcoholic himself, was the members of the group supporting each other. This reflected his belief in the power of lay people to bring about the Kingdom of God in this world, a belief that was not widespread in the 1940s and 50s.

Dawn Eden Goldstein, author of the Christopher Award-winning biography *Father Ed*, explained, “[Father Ed] emphasized that a layperson could be just as holy as a religious person. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, I won’t say that teaching was absent from Catholic theology, but it certainly was hard to find.”

“It was only with the Second Vatican Council, when it spoke about the universal call to holiness, that we emphasized in the Church this understanding...A lay person can be as holy or holier than someone in religious life or the priesthood. Father Ed understood that early on, and he incorporated it into all his work with lay people, as a priest, and in the recovery movement.”

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people. (1 Peter 2:9)

Inspire holy lay people to do Your will, Jesus.

The Legacy of Father Ed, Part 5

As he got older, Father Ed Dowling experienced an ever-worsening arthritis that was turning his body to stone, as others used to describe it. Getting around became quite painful for him, yet he always exuded joy amidst his suffering.

In writing the biography *Father Ed*, Dawn Eden Goldstein interviewed people who spent time with the priest, and their recollections confirmed this point. During an interview with The Christophers, Dawn said, “What I picked up from them was that Father Ed, even though he suffered—including from his own experiences of depression and anxiety—he so loved people that he could not be unhappy when other people were around because he was interested in their lives.

“Even when they were going through difficult times and he was suffering with them, he felt so honored that they were sharing their lives with him...He felt joy in their presence, and this joy made them feel important. Every person he encountered, whether it was the drunk just off the street or the high society person, they each felt that they were the most important person who Father Dowling saw that day.”

**The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy.
(Galatians 5:22)**

*May I find joy in connecting with others,
Creator.*

The Legacy of Father Ed, Part 6

One story that stands out in Dawn Eden Goldstein's Christopher Award-winning biography about Father Ed Dowling, SJ, involved his friend Ed Lahey, a recovering alcoholic. Shortly before Father Ed's death in 1960, he visited Washington, D.C. and contacted Lahey to see if they could get together.

Soon after, Lahey learned his daughter had been in a serious car accident while vacationing in Italy, and they didn't know if she would live. Though Father Ed had recently gotten out of the hospital himself, he remained with Lahey all night to make sure he wouldn't start drinking again to calm his anxiety. According to Lahey's daughter, who survived the accident, her father credited Father Ed with keeping him sober that night.

In closing, Dawn holds these hopes for people who read *Father Ed*: "I want people to open this book and to have Father Ed come alive for them...because I knew that if I could ensure that they encountered Father Ed, then...they would encounter Christ through him and Christ's healing."

Make every effort to support your faith with goodness. (2 Peter 1:5)

Inspire me to love others selflessly, Christ.

An Intimidating Sacrament

Effie Caldarola of *OSV News* recalled a boy in her family making his First Reconciliation. Since there were a lot of children in his class, chairs were set up around the church where priests could hear everyone's Confessions.

This can be a nerve-wracking experience for adults, never mind for kids who have never done it before. So, what happened? The boy threw up on the priest's shoes.

The story is comical in retrospect, but Caldarola says it speaks to how "intimidating" the sacrament of Reconciliation can be to people of all ages. This is especially true for those who can't accept themselves or mistakes they've made in the past.

Caldarola hopes everyone learns to take advantage of this special sacrament, however, because it can be freeing. She writes, "It's all about mercy, about experiencing the abundant love of God. It's about facing the truth of yourself: acknowledging that you sometimes do things that are wrong. But then facing the overwhelming truth of our faith: God loves you unconditionally and is waiting to let you know forgiveness."

If we confess our sins, He who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins. (1 John 1:9)

*Help me be brave enough to confess my sins,
Father.*

Lost in the Desert

Ashley McKinless and her friend were lost in the desert with no map, little water, and a quickly dying phone battery. How did this happen? While Ashley was visiting her friend in Amman, Jordan, they decided to go to the ancient city of Petra, made famous in the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Only instead of taking the straightforward, touristy path, they went a back way and found themselves in dire straits.

Suddenly, wrote Ashley in *America* magazine, they spotted a Bedouin shepherd leading sheep and goats in the distance. Ashley and her friend explained their predicament, so the shepherd walked them to Petra, going one hour out of his way.

Ashley couldn't help but relate this experience to her Catholic faith. She was, after all, a lost sheep saved by a shepherd: "Experiencing our vulnerability can shake us out of... complacency and help us hear the Gospels how they would have been heard 2,000 years ago. The image of God as a merciful shepherd is a comforting one. Remembering that we are at times the lost, helpless sheep? Harder to sit with but just as true."

The Lord is my shepherd. (Psalm 23:1)

Help me admit my reliance on You, Good Shepherd.

Step Out of Clutter

If you've been putting off clearing out the clutter in your home, here are some ideas from time management expert Sybil Stanton.

Get some big cardboard boxes and label them:

- **Trash:** for those things of no use to you or anybody else.
- **Charity:** for items useful to others.
- **Posterity:** for sentimental items.
- **Transition:** for those things that you or the rest of the family need to sort through carefully.

Then, go to work, one room at a time—or even one drawer at a time. Approaching any goal just one step at a time rather than worrying about doing everything completely and perfectly is a sound idea.

Add persistence to a well thought out plan, and you may accomplish more than you thought possible. And while you're at it, purge negative thoughts or emotions from your mind and heart to achieve a level of spiritual cleanliness as well.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10)

Jesus, enable me to unclutter my life, not just my home, so that my reverence for You may be my chief treasure.

Personal Touch Across the Miles

There's nothing like a personal touch. Consider how Yehuda Kovacs, a champion Israeli fencer, chose Notre Dame University for college after writing to a dozen or more American schools back in the 1980s.

In his letters, Kovacs inquired about each school's fencing program, about possible financial help, and about Jewish religious life at each. Kovacs chose Notre Dame because he received a reply from an Orthodox rabbi in South Bend.

Notre Dame admissions officials had shown the letter to Rabbi Yisrael Gettinger. Rabbi Gettinger involved members of his congregation, and they invited Kovacs to worship with them. They also promised to provide some tuition help.

That's how Kovacs became one of only 18 Jewish people on a campus of 7,500 students at the time. It was all because a school and a community cared enough to welcome him.

These people and all in the countryside welcomed him with garlands and dances and tambourines. (Judith 3:7)

May I be a welcoming person to both friends and strangers, Creator, recognizing we are all Your children.

Miracle Messages

Elizabeth Softky was out of a job, out of a home, and almost out of hope. A bilingual teacher and founder of the nonprofit Jump into Writing, she could no longer work after receiving a grim cancer diagnosis in July 2019. She spent her savings on chemo and got evicted from her home.

Enter Joan, a volunteer for Miracle Messages, a nonprofit that reunites families separated by homelessness. During the COVID lockdown, Miracle Messages expanded to include programs like Miracle Friends, which matches individuals temporarily displaced into hotels with a friend who calls to check on them every week. Joan became Elizabeth's "Miracle Friend."

In addition, Elizabeth was selected to be part of the Miracle Money program, which gifted her with a monthly allotment of \$500 for six months. Joan's friendship not only saw Elizabeth through a tough time, but also helped her find a new apartment. Today, Elizabeth remains a staunch "advocate" for the homeless. "The Miracle Messages family has been a miracle for me," Elizabeth concluded, as quoted in *The Good News Network*.

**Faithful friends are life-saving medicine.
(Sirach 6:16)**

Abba, help me to be someone's miracle today.

Mr. Herman's Kids Corner

“It started as a means of killing time until dismissal,” Middle Township Elementary School bus driver Herman Cruse told *Today's* Jenna Bush-Hager. “I overheard a student interacting with his teacher about a reading assignment, and that he didn't get it done. I said, ‘You know what? I can help him...’ It started with one.”

Fast forward two years later, and Cruse holds “one-on-one” reading sessions three days a week, tutoring students who vary in age from kindergarten to second grade. A father of five and bus driver for more than 30 years, Cruse is thrilled to share his love of the written word, having always been a “voracious reader.”

“[Reading] expands your mind,” he explained. “And I just impart that gift to the kids...It's like unlocking a door. I can see the lights on in their eyes...I love them. I love the kids.”

In appreciation for all Cruse has done, Bush-Hager gifted him with a frame that reads “Mr. Herman's Kids Corner.” It adorns an area in the school where he holds his reading lessons. In addition, Scholastic donated 1,000 new books to the school.

**The unfolding of Your words gives light.
(Psalm 119:130)**

Father, may we appreciate the value of the written word.

Prompted to Be the Best

For three decades, Philip Eisenberg worked as a prompter for the San Francisco Opera. Hidden from the audience in a box below center stage, he cued the performers quietly. But sometimes, when a performer missed a cue or was late getting on stage, Eisenberg had to sing a line or two for them.

Once, he was asked why he never became a conductor. He replied, “It’s better for me to be good at what I do—or the best at what I do—than be one of many conductors.”

That’s an important point. Success in any field lies not in public acclaim, but in becoming good at what you do.

Your work may be hidden, but it is work you can do conscientiously. In a real sense, society depends on how well you perform your work.

This work is being done diligently and prospers in their hands. (Ezra 5:8)

Holy Spirit, guide me in developing my talents and doing my job to the best of my abilities.

Singer's Faith Leads to Beauty, Part 1

In her career, Sarah Hart has written and recorded thousands of songs for worship, for liturgy, and for Christian music stars such as Amy Grant and Matt Maher.

Her work and her worldview are so imbued with the spirit of God that she relates most to St. Catherine of Siena who, at the age of seven, walked into her kitchen and told her mother, “I see God in all things and all things in God.”

The seeds of Sarah's faith were planted during her childhood. During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, she recalled, “I had the most beautiful hippie-dippy childhood in the 70s. Vatican II was new, and there was folk mass and community.

“I grew up in southeastern Ohio, and there were potlucks and people who gathered to sing and to pray, so I grew up a very free spirit in the church. My experience of faith as a child was that I was deeply loved and that there was freedom in faith and beauty in faith. I feel very blessed that that was my experience.”

The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

(2 Corinthians 3:17)

Jesus, help me experience Your divine love and freedom in my church community.

Singer's Faith Leads to Beauty, Part 2

Even the best church experiences don't prevent someone from wandering as they get older. When Sarah Hart went to college, she wanted nothing more to do with "church," until she found a non-denominational fellowship where she met the man who would become her husband.

A few years into their marriage, Sarah felt called back to the Catholic Church and has chosen to serve God through her music. She doesn't regret her time away from the Church, however. In fact, she thinks God used it to make her better.

Sarah observed, "My Catholic faith has always informed me, and that time away from the Church informed me as well in a beautiful way, in a necessary way. That was God trying to expand my horizon, help me fall in love with Scripture, help me recognize a couple of things that I hadn't as a cradle Catholic."

"There are things that all of us have to learn from other faiths, other cultures, and other peoples. So, I really bless that time because I learned so much, and it made me embrace my faith all the more when I came back."

All things work together for good for those who love God. (Romans 8:28)

Wherever I wander, Jesus, guide my path back to You.

Singer's Faith Leads to Beauty, Part 3

One of Sarah Hart's strong points is that she doesn't view the sacred and the secular as separate. She sees God in all things and all things in God. Sarah also cites Thomas Merton's experience on a street corner in Louisville when he suddenly saw clearly "the face of Christ in all people, and how all things are interconnected."

In our polarized world, Sarah hopes more people have this kind of revelation, and she hopes her music can enlighten others in this respect. During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, she said, "Everybody has this universal sense of sadness, of happiness, of joy, of sorrow, of everything in between. Everybody has these universal themes. To write about the darkness leaning into the light is something that comes naturally to me."

"All I really want to do is put beauty in the world. I feel like that's what I'm built for...And that is how we all can help God...Whatever we choose to do in our lives, we can choose beauty and goodness and kindness and light and mercy. To do anything less, I think, is to do a disservice to the Lord."

**Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.
(Colossians 3:12)**

Help me add beauty to the world, Creator.

A Hard-Fought Peace

The year 2023 marked the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War, so veterans commemorated the occasion with a special ceremony onboard the USS Midway. The aircraft carrier served as a fitting vessel for the event, as it had been involved in many aspects of the conflict.

Speaking to San Diego's *ABC 10 News*, Robert Werner, who served as a Marine corpsman during the war, said, "I left Vietnam in 1968. It's as fresh in my mind as if it happened last week."

Today, Werner works as a veteran volunteer aboard the ship, giving tours and sharing history and stories from that era. In a way, the interactions help heal the wounds from a divisive and difficult time.

"We were not greeted very well when we came back," he said. "I personally was spat on and was called some very nasty names when I landed after coming back from Vietnam. It's wonderful that finally, 50 years later, we're starting to recognize the sacrifices that we all made."

He shall judge between the nations...They shall beat their swords into plowshares. (Isaiah 2:4)

Let me heal old wounds, Lord, and help the cause of peace.