

A Really Good Prayer Simultaneously Soars to Heaven While It Drills Down Into the Soul

Also: robbing Peter to pay Peter and Paul and other stuff.



Hi again everyone!

In David McCullough's Pulitzer Prize winning book on Harry Truman, the author recalls the day the president was missing. He had a meeting with some diplomat and no one could find him. The Secret Service became increasingly alarmed. Dozens of officers were scouring the White House and its grounds as well as the Blair House. Finally, Bess his wife found the president. He was in the basement of the White House at a sink in some corner washing his socks and underwear.

It seems that his mother told him when he was a boy, "Harry, even if you become president of the United States, you should still wash your own socks and underwear." And he did!

I read that many years ago and followed that same kind of advice. When I lived in rectories of parishes, I always did my own laundry and cleaned my bathroom. Here in Iraq, we have people from India come in and clean the house and they clean the other priests' rooms but I take care of my own room. It doesn't take that much.

Everything is so weird here though and the cleaning products have very strong chemical smells. Most of the smells are a very

pungent odor of something like a hostile flower from outer space: an alien space flower that conquers by paralyzing its victims with a floral intensity that you could just smell through your toes. It suffocates everything else out and leaves no room in you lungs for oxygen.

So I clean my room with vinegar and sometimes bleach. My room smells more like a salad.

But its like a fresh, light summer salad! Its not like a blue cheese or something.



All throughout the Middle East, people from poorer countries come to work in service industries like janitorial work, cab-driving, and hotel work. It is mostly people from the Philippines and India.

Iraq is *similar* to a Third World country but there *is* development and the natural resources here are quite abundant. If the government wasn't so corrupt and misguided, this would be a wealthy country. As it is, I think it is more like a First World nation that has slipped into a long, post-war dystopia. It is a messed up place.

Nevertheless, India is poorer and people come here to work at manual labor jobs. The fact that people actually *come to Iraq* for manual labor jobs, even though the

economy here is absolutely in shambles, is a sign of how poor are the poor around the world.

I talked to a cab-driver in Qatar who is married and has two kids. He drives a cab for six or seven months out of the year. He sends the money home to India and then he goes to live with them for six months out of the year. He told me that he was happy with his life though. When he goes home, he doesn't work. He just spends all his time being with his wife and kids. He said that he didn't envy the rich and thought that too many people put too much emphasis on material wealth. I think that is a mixed-message story but it does tell you something about how other people live.

These people from India who come to work in Iraq — of all places! — inspires gratitude to the Lord for the abundance I've been given. And it further inspires a determination to use what I have to help others. It inspires gratitude and something like a justice-driven generosity.

But I still won't let them clean my summer-salad bathroom.



I hope your summer is off to a good start.

My June began with the ending of the school year here. I wrapped

up grades, organized my office and started working on this project the archbishop assigned to me (more on that in a moment).

On June 9th, I prayed the prayer of consecration to God's mercy by Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. Many of us used a book by Father Michael Gaitley last year, to do this consecration. It was my intention to pray the whole 33 day consecration over again, but I failed to keep up with the daily readings for that. Even so, I asked the Lord to receive my paltry act as a re-consecration to his merciful love.

I chose June 9th because it was the day that Thérèse herself made that consecration. June 9th in 1895 was the Feast of the Holy Trinity, which is very special to me as well.

On the other hand, I sometimes find it difficult to do things like this because I compare myself to others. I think of the tremendous love with which Thérèse consecrated herself to the Lord's mercy and I feel so inadequate in the act of my heart of trying to give myself more to God. It is sometimes frustrating to try to follow in the path of a saint and yet to feel so much less. But I resolve that my assessment of my selfishness will not prevent me from continuing to try. As weak as I feel myself and as painful as that is, I will not be discouraged because I believe in the power of God to help me.

In her "Act of Oblation to Merciful Love", Thérèse prays, "I feel my helplessness and I beg you, O my God! To be Yourself, my Sanctity!" (sic) Thérèse goes on, "I want, O my Beloved, at each beat of my heart to renew this offering to you an infinite number of times..."

I am in awe of the kind of soul that could construct such an ardent act of surrender to God. I am grateful to God for St. Thérèse who offers me the chance to pray in a way that is beyond my own limits.

As powerless as I feel in praying

this prayer, St. Thérèse herself gives *hope* within the act of oblation. She writes, "You [Lord] can...in one instant, prepare me to appear before You."

This act of oblation is truly wonderful because it offers instruction to the soul. It encourages growth in generosity, and it teaches while at the same time, inviting God to pour out his infinitely lavish mercy. In this way, it becomes the best kind of prayer because it soars into Heaven, into the tender heart of God, while drilling down into the conscience and heart of the supplicant.

I have prayed that prayer — which is *more* than just a prayer, but really more a consecration — several times since the 9th.

It is easy to find. For example: www.ewtn.com/therese/readings/reading4.htm



I feel that I would be remiss if I did not tell you about the Feast of the Sacred Heart as well. God gave me a special grace on that day and I simply want to acknowledge his love with thanksgiving.

I cannot describe what happened. It was nothing all that dramatic, though. It was just a simple grace that was given quietly. But it was something I know God wants me to appreciate.

One thing that encounter with God affirmed for me however, is that for many, many believers, God begins to work in our lives as children.

If there was *something* that happened to you that was a kind of spiritual event that you remember as a child, I encourage you to seek the connection it might have with a deep need you find in your life now. I think God plants little events in children so that later we can "connect the dots" as it were and discover that indeed we have been watched over and loved by him more than we often realize.

This takes some confidence in

God; it takes faith to "see" the circumstances through the lens of God's providence.

Thank you Lord, for your love.



A family who has some acreage not far from Ann Arbor volunteered their home as a possible place to have a get-together of some kind. It would be a time for us to just hang out. I am thinking the first or second week of August would be a possible time-frame. Could you let me know by e-mail if you would like to do that? Maybe a lot of you are planning to be on vacation at that time or have other things going on. But if there is a minimum group of people we can plan a pot-luck type picnic. Maybe even have Mass. I haven't given a lot of thought about this but I am throwing it "out there" to see if there is indeed interest.

Annnyyyywayyyyyyy...I will be available for some kind of event and I hope many of you will be too and if so we will do something. Do send me an email.

Maybe we could even do it on the Feast of the Assumption which is a Holy Day of Obligation and have Mass outside or in their barn structure. I don't know though: that is a Tuesday. Would that be good? It is up to you. When you "vote" by e-mail, let me know what day of the week would be good: Sunday? Wednesday? Whatever... but I won't send individual replies to *this kind* of e-mail, you know that. Ok. Go. Let's do it.



I am supposed to leave for England on Tuesday, 4 July, but I still don't have a plane ticket as I write this

on the morning of the 30th of June!
That's just how we roll here.

The archbishop has commissioned me to begin working on a writing project that gives an account of the last 100 years of Christianity here in Iraq.

This is not my first choice of things to do here, to be quite honest. I made a proposal to do evangelistic projects over the summer and I offered ideas about how they could be done. Nevertheless, there are reasons to do this project for the archbishop. Furthermore, there do seem to be some advantageous elements in play at the moment to begin this work. So this is what I am doing.

There are several places this could be done. Some of the research could be done in Baghdad and I may travel there at some point. Boston and Chicago are also places where research could happen. But we decided to begin in London and Oxford which have broad resources that can be applied to this project.

I have a room reserved to be in Oxford for a number of weeks beginning on 4 July. Then I am planning to come to America for the a wedding and hope to see many of you there.

Those are the *plans*. We reserved a flight route twice but both times we had to let the reservation expire.

The archdiocese has not had enough funds in their travel account cover its portion of the ticket. I am paying for the part of the trip that takes me home and brings me back to the transition point, which I think is the biggest part. I have already given the archdiocese money to cover my trip from London to the United States and back. But the archdiocese is supposed to pay for the Erbil to London and London to Erbil part of the ticket. I am confident it will happen but that is how this place is. We shift around the money to where it is needed at the moment. I expect we will have it sorted out this afternoon.

We are “robbing Peter to pay Paul” to get by on a day to day basis.



We even had to rob Peter to pay Peter and Paul!

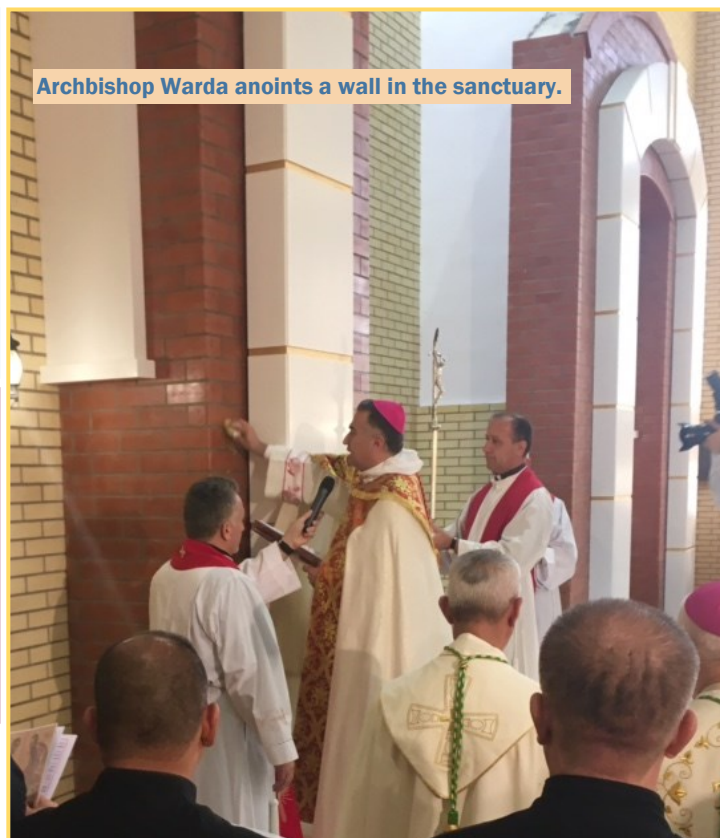
The archdiocese last night consecrated a new parish church. Dedicated on the feast day of the name of its patrons, the parish is called Ss. Peter and Paul. I attended the Mass last night, although I left a bit early because I had another obligation.

Although the church is under Archbishop Bashar Warda here in Erbil (Ankawa), the Mass was led by the Patriarch Louis Sako and attended by the papal nuncio of Iraq Alberto Ortega Martin, as well as many other bishops and of course many religious. The church was full last night and I found the ceremony to be very much like the ritual of the Latin rite for the dedication of a church. One of the parts of the rite include anointing the walls with oil. It is a great ceremony!

The church is still not finished. A photo of the outside tower shows this but even inside there was still significant work to do. In the sanctuary where those little lights are, will eventually be a mosaic or statues either of Peter and Paul or Jesus and Mary.



The church was packed. I took this photo from the choir loft but many more people filled the aisles as the service proceeded in its first few minutes.



Archbishop Warda anoints a wall in the sanctuary.

This church was supposed to have been completed more than six months ago and it is still not really done.

There is no way a facility like that would have been allowed to have been opened in the United States. For example, the choir loft, which has a significant elevation, has no banister or any kind of barrier on the staircase; it is just an open drop if there is a misstep. When I went up the stairs to take the photo you see on the previous page, there were crowds of people going up and down including lots of children! That is just one example of the huge differences in ...let's say quality of life issues here. Ha!

This new church was necessary to be able to provide a home parish for the refugees who came into Erbil/Ankawa. This church will relieve some of the scheduling congestion. More importantly, it gives a spiritual home to many people.



When Steve Rasche returned from the United States, I helped him with the provisions he needed to settle back in here.

That evening we ended up at his house. We sat on his front porch and had a bit of bourbon. John Neil came by and we opened a bottle of wine. John is a former BBC executive who has volunteered here through the organization Aid to the Church in Need. He has been helping with remedial English at the university. John is leaving here for good on Monday after being here for almost ten months.

Steve was having a water problem in the house. It so happens that Steve rents his "house" from the chief of security for Ankawa. Nassar dropped by to handle the water issue and he joined us in a drink.

The conversation turned toward the future of Iraq after Mosul is completely taken. The Iraqi Prime Minister announced last night that ISIS was completely defeated but there is, tragically, still fighting to do in Mosul.

I asked the papal nuncio if the pope had an interest in maintaining a Christian presence in Iraq...

Nassar and many others (like the archbishop...) think that the Fall will be a turning point for this part of Iraq for many reasons.

The Kurds announced that they were going to have a referendum on creating an independent state.

The vote here is on 25 September. Obviously, the government of Iraq does not want that nor does Turkey or Iran.

Even more of a concern to many of the political entities who have been at work in this region, however, are sleeper cells. Nassar said that the government is aware of jihadist sleeper cells in Ankawa and in Erbil.

There is a tendency toward pessimism here which is understandable. But the bleak scenarios that are sometimes proffered do not always materialize. Still, when we talk this way, I think of the people I know here. My students at the school. The families and elderly I see. I think of what will happen to them.

Envisioning the future becomes really complicated when one steps back to consider all the international players and especially the role of Iran. Iran wants to be able to control Iraq and has forged political and economic ties to ensure its influence. But there are other players in the region who oppose Iran, such as Saudi Arabia, and have used Iraq as a strategic lever against Iran.

It was one of those really interesting discussions about the broad realities of things because we

talked about the place of Christians in the society of the Middle East.

While at dinner before the dedication of Ss. Peter and Paul, I asked the papal nuncio if the pope had an interest in keeping a Christian presence in Iraq. Bishop Ortega Martin answered emphatically yes. The pope thinks it is very important.

Sure, *even there* it is possible his answer is tainted by politics; that maybe he was just being diplomatic. But I think *any* Christian would want there to be a Christian presence here. Not just because of the Church's ancient roots here but also so that the life of Christ can be lived here as it should be lived out everywhere.



Here is something just a little amusing. Many people in Michigan dread the winters because they are cold and grey. I notice a direct parallel in attitudes toward summer here. It is so hot and the sun is so intense, they find being outdoors unbearable here in the summer. And by the way, last time I wrote I said it seemed like 104, 105 was not that much of a problem. But believe me, I cross a threshold at 111, 112, 113... and I certainly do break a sweat at *those* temperatures! We had several days in a row at 115 this week. That kind of heat will get your attention!



So that's it for now. I wanted to get off at least a quick note to you because it has been three weeks or so since the last one and also because you knew I was going to be going somewhere to work on this writing project and I wanted to give you an update.

You are very much alive to me in my heart. Thanks for all your prayers and patience with me. I am praying for you earnestly. *Peace.*

I had to squeeze this in. Remember earlier this month I told you how the whole time I am here, I obsess over the thought of a good hamburger and a milk shake which is nowhere to be found in this whole sovereign nation? As I get closer to leaving here to come to a more developed society, I count the minutes until I can achieve hamburger heaven. I am SO pathetic!

But I saw this meme, that I thought you might enjoy as well...

since when
is this more attractive **than this?**



End the impossible standards set by the media. All burgers are beautiful.

real burgers | real beauty