

This Issue is Sponsored by:



JANUARY 2024 ISSUE

# EMPTY TOMB PROJECT

THE MAGAZINE

## *The State of Blessings and Marriage*

*Navigating the Latest Church Headlines*



Go to the Desert



Faith is Still Greater  
Than Football



How to be a  
“Good Catholic”?





**Catholic Health**  
St. Francis Heart Center

# **GREATER LIVES HERE**

**The only specialty-designated cardiac center in NY.  
And the only choice for your heart care.**

You only get one heart. And St. Francis Heart Center isn't just the best place to care for it on Long Island — it's one of the best in the nation. Our pioneering technologies and procedures become recognized standards. We receive countless awards and accolades for our work. But those aren't the things that drive us. You are. So, if you need cardiovascular care, you're fortunate to live on Long Island — because Greater Lives Here, too.



**Learn more at [chsli.org/heart](https://chsli.org/heart)**



# ETP: The Magazine

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

### Major Headline:

**The State of Blessings and Marriage — Pages 4-6**

(By Thomas Griffin)

**What Does It Take to be a “Good Catholic”? — Pages 8-9**

(By David G. Bonagura, Jr.)

**Faith is Still Greater Than Football — Pages 11-12**

(By Thomas Griffin)

**Taking the New Year Into the Desert — Pages 13-14**

(By William Conboy)

### What is The Empty Tomb Project?

*Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine* is a non-profit that exists to bring the reality and power of the empty tomb to as many people as possible. We are convinced that if men and women encounter Jesus as a real living person their lives will be radically changed.

We are a Catholic media company that desires to bring relevant cultural and spiritual topics to our readers in an honest and fresh manner. We dive into topics that truly matter to people, themes that are brought up in people's homes as well as in church circles. We desire to bring uniformity in message and an increase in inspiration to Catholics across Long Island (and beyond).

Along with providing the most dynamic content we are committed to producing a product that is beautifully captivating to the eye. To do so we will always rely on the best Catholic designers (Startup Catholic) so that the content can be amplified by the aesthetics of the magazine.

In order to reach as many people as possible with the critically important message of Christ we rely on donors in order to grow the mission and impact of our magazine. This will allow us to remain free and ensure that anyone who desires to meet Jesus today will have that opportunity. If you feel called to support us, please reach out via email: [EmptyTombProject@gmail.com](mailto:EmptyTombProject@gmail.com) and join us in the mission! All donations are tax deductible.



## MAJOR HEADLINE:

# The State of Blessings and Marriage

By Thomas Griffin

Our November 2023 issue included a major headline article entitled “The Church Should Not Change.” I argued that same-sex unions cannot be blessed and that it is impossible to have the ordination of women to the Sacrament of Holy Orders because these are truths given to us by God Himself. Less than a month later, the news across the country (and the world) was that Pope Francis changed marriage in the Catholic Church.

Was I wrong? Is 2,000 years of Church teaching changing? Did the pope say that the Church’s teaching on marriage needs to change? Is this an example of how Francis is reforming the Church and modernizing old-fashioned teachings?

On December 18th the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith published a document called *Fiducia Supplicans* (On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings). Much of it explains and clarifies what blessings are and why they are used. Much of the document also addresses how priests may give a blessing to couples in irregular situations or couples of the same-sex.

In the hours following the release of this document major news outlets and social media posts included some of the following headlines:

- “The Catholic Church Changes its Teaching on Marriage”
- “Pope Francis Approves Blessings for Same-sex Couples”
- “Catholic Church Will Bless Couples Living in Same-sex Relationships”
- “Pope Opens the Door for Same-sex Couples”
- “The Catholic Church is Heading in the Right Direction on Marriage”

There are countless examples of the mainstream media misconstruing something that the pope said or not reading a document that the Vatican published. Here are some important takeaways from the document that we must keep in mind otherwise we will lose ourselves in the headlines and confusion surrounding the document.

*Fiducia Supplicans* begins by quoting Pope Francis who said, “The great blessing of God is Jesus Christ. He is the great gift of God, his own Son. He is a blessing for all humanity, a blessing that has saved us all. He is the Eternal Word, with whom the Father blessed us ‘while we were still sinners’ (Rom. 5:8), as St. Paul says. He is the Word made flesh, offered for us on the cross” (FS, 1). When a priest imparts a blessing to someone they are imploring Christ’s presence to come raining down on them and their lives.

Then the document goes on to reinforce and restate that marriage is a sacrament that is between one man and one woman for life. This truth of marriage is not changing. Marriage is



the “exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children” (FS, 4). Furthermore, the document notes:

“For this reason, since the Church has always considered only those sexual relations that are lived out within marriage to be morally licit [acceptable], the Church does not have the power to confer its liturgical blessing when that would somehow offer a form of moral legitimacy to a union that presumes to be a marriage or to an extra-marital sexual practice” (FS, 11).

Marriage cannot change because it is created by God and woven in the nature of the human person.

*Fiducia Supplicans* also notes that when someone asks for a blessing they are asking for God’s help and assistance. For this reason, blessings can be offered to those that are imperfect in following Christ. It is those that are in need of God that most need blessings. “God never turns away anyone who approaches him! Ultimately, a blessing offers people a means to increase their trust in God” (FS, 33).

Couples in irregular situations and couples of the same sex can be blessed but it cannot be done inside of a Church or a liturgical rite. “This blessing,” the document continues “should never be imparted in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them. Nor can it be performed with any clothing, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding” (FS, 39). The blessing cannot appear to be a wedding and cannot bring about confusion that what is being blessed is a marriage.

The only occurrence for such a blessing would be a random instance outside of a church where it is clear that the priest is not condoning same-sex behavior but calling to mind the need for God’s help in following His commands.

While *Fiducia Supplicans* stated that it would not give any more directives on the matter (FS, 41), on January 4th a clarification statement was issued by Cardinal Fernandez who is responsible for the Dicastery on Doctrine. So much confusion came from the document that it was necessary to reiterate that the Church’s teaching was not changing and that these blessings needed to be in line with the truth of marriage.

Fernandez gave the following as an example for how these “pastoral blessings” can take place, in concrete terms. The priest can recite a simple prayer like this:

“Lord, look at these children of yours, grant them health, work, peace and mutual help. Free them from everything that contradicts your Gospel and allow them to live according to your will. Amen”. Then it concludes with the sign of the cross on each of the two persons.



At first glance, *Fiducia Supplicans* confused me. Was the Church blessing couples to strengthen them in their sin or were they simply trying to sound more inclusive? The clarification statement from January 4th seems to make things a little more clear: same-sex couples are being blessed so that they do not choose to live in sin anymore. Fernandez also says that these blessings should be done in private in order to avoid confusion. The point of the blessing is for them to grow closer to Jesus, who calls us to repentance and ongoing conversion.

The fact of the matter is that the media got the document wrong because they did not actually read it. The other possibility is that they read it but only focused on the part that they thought aligned with their narrative that the pope is changing the Catholic Church. However, another valid question is whether or not such a document was prudent to publish in the first place. Regardless, it was released and it needs to be navigated. It further confirms, in my mind, that in a time when we can view the pope's words instantaneously it is critical that we read the documents as printed on the Vatican website before we read them online or on social media.

We must also state the obvious: many Catholics disagree with the Church on marriage. Even if they do not outright stand for a change to the teaching, many claim that it is not charitable to tell people they cannot marry a person they are in love with. "Jesus loves everyone and would not treat people like that," they claim.

Christ did love everyone, that is why he was born and that is why he sacrificed his life. However, love is not a feeling. Love does not allow for people to do whatever they want. Love must rest in truth. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. So, abiding by his commands and teachings (including those on marriage) will lead to human flourishing and happiness. Rejecting God's teachings would mean that we think we know better than Him.

Lastly, it is absolutely critical that we remember that our individual call to holiness and daily intimate contact with Jesus Christ in prayer is more important than reading any church headlines. Union with God must be the driving force and fascination of our lives. In a world that is consumed by pride and ego, choose to allow Jesus to rule your life. Only then will we see that our relationship with him is the most important thing in the world. Only then we will discover that the Church cannot and will not ever change the truth. Her entire mission is to protect it - may we protect it as well.

*Thomas Griffin is the chairperson of the Religion Department at a Catholic High School on Long Island where he lives with his wife and two sons. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine.*





# CATHOLIC CEMETERIES OF LONG ISLAND

*Serving the Catholic community across Long Island since 1856*

**Catholic Cemeteries of Long Island** exists to meet the needs of individuals and parishes across Long Island in preparation for, at the time of, and following the death of a loved one. We attempt to maintain beautiful and comforting settings where families can come to remember and memorialize their loved ones at each of our four cemeteries:

**Cemetery of the Holy Rood**, Westbury

**Queen of All Saints Cemetery**, Central Islip

**Queen of Peace Cemetery**, Old Westbury

**Holy Sepulchre Cemetery**, Coram

We attend to both the spiritual and physical needs of the families we serve, from the physical burial of the dead to emotional support for the difficult loss of separation. Our staff is dedicated to caring for your loved ones, from our field personnel who assist with burials and maintain the grounds, to our Deacons who offer prayers at each committal service, to our office staff who work tirelessly with families and funeral directors to ensure that family purchases and service matters are addressed in a timely and comforting manner.

Catholic Cemeteries of Long Island offers various alternatives designed to meet the preferences and budgets of families, including those to address the desire for in-ground burial, above-ground entombment, and cremation inurnment options:

- **In-Ground Casket Burials:** Traditional Graves and Lawn Crypts
- **Above-Ground Entombments:** Crypts in Interior and Garden Community Mausoleums
- **Cremation Inurnment Options:** Niches (stone front and glass front options) in Interior and Garden Community Mausoleums, Cremation Graves, Niches in Outdoor Columbaria

Please visit [CCLongIsland.org](http://CCLongIsland.org) for more information, or email [info@CCLongIsland.org](mailto:info@CCLongIsland.org) to set up an appointment to review available options in our cemeteries on an at-need or pre-need basis.



**CEMETERY OF THE HOLY ROOD**  
111 OLD COUNTRY ROAD  
WESTBURY  
**(516) 334-7990**

**QUEEN OF PEACE CEMETERY**  
321 JERICHO TURNPIKE  
OLD WESTBURY  
**(516) 434-2439**

**QUEEN OF ALL SAINTS CEMETERY**  
115 WHEELER ROAD  
CENTRAL ISLIP  
**(631) 234-8297**

**HOLY SEPULCHRE CEMETERY**  
3442 ROUTE 112  
CORAM  
**(631) 732-3460**

WEBSITE:

[CCLONGISLAND.ORG](http://CCLONGISLAND.ORG)



EMAIL:

[INFO@CCLONGISLAND.ORG](mailto:INFO@CCLONGISLAND.ORG)





# What Does It Take to be a “Good Catholic”?

By David G. Bonagura, Jr.

What does it take to be a “good Catholic”? Going to Mass on Sunday and praying daily? Not killing or robbing anyone? Being nice to others?

What if there were a way, short and to the point, through which we could not only learn how to be a good Catholic, but we could become one at the same time?

St. Francis de Sales can help.

Born in France in 1567, St. Francis de Sales was the bishop of Geneva and was considered one of the greatest spiritual directors of his time. Through his short book *An Introduction to the Devout Life*, he remains a piercing spiritual director in our times. For in this book, we learn everything it takes to be a “good Catholic.”

St. Francis calls “being a good Catholic” living “the devout life,” that is, a life devoted to “a true love of God.” Devotion “is spiritual agility and vivacity, by means of which charity works in us” as we exercise love of God and love of neighbor.

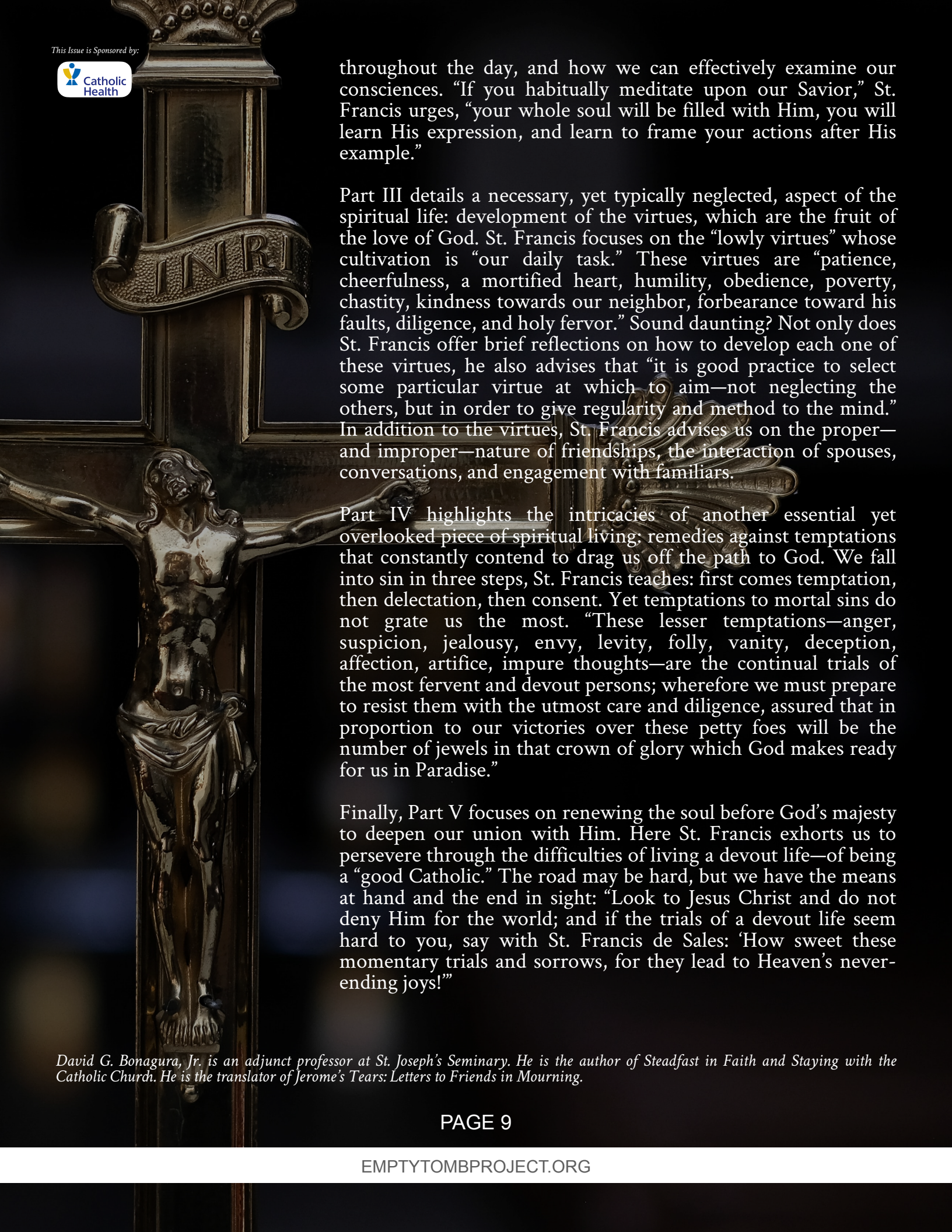
*Introduction to the Devout Life* is a step-by-step guide to developing devotion from square one. Whether we have practiced the faith all our lives or whether we have no prior knowledge of Catholicism, we can reach true devotion—we can become a “good Catholic”—with this book.

The key is that we do not merely read this book. We ought to pray this book, which is designed perfectly for us to do so: it is divided into five parts, each of which possesses chapters of two-to-three pages that are tightly focused and filled with practical examples. In ten-to-fifteen minutes a day, we can read a single chapter, and then pray about how we can live what St. Francis describes. After a few months, we will be well on our way to being a “good Catholic,” one who loves God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, and loves his neighbor as himself.

St. Francis proposes five steps into the devout life. Part I concerns the beginnings of the spiritual life, from the “first desire after a devout life unto a full resolution of pursuing the same.” The first step in the spiritual life, as we see when Jesus calls Peter, Matthew, Zacchaeus, and others, is to repent of our sin—to undergo purification of sin, as St. Francis calls it, by God’s grace. For that we need the sacrament of reconciliation so that we may be forgiven of our sins and be restored to the filial union with God that was established at our baptisms.

In Part II, St. Francis teaches us to pray, which is the means of communing with God and His love. St. Francis walks us through all the steps of meditation, or mental prayer, which is sustained conversation with God in our hearts. He also counsels how we can pray at Mass, offer “quick prayers”





throughout the day, and how we can effectively examine our consciences. “If you habitually meditate upon our Savior,” St. Francis urges, “your whole soul will be filled with Him, you will learn His expression, and learn to frame your actions after His example.”

Part III details a necessary, yet typically neglected, aspect of the spiritual life: development of the virtues, which are the fruit of the love of God. St. Francis focuses on the “lowly virtues” whose cultivation is “our daily task.” These virtues are “patience, cheerfulness, a mortified heart, humility, obedience, poverty, chastity, kindness towards our neighbor, forbearance toward his faults, diligence, and holy fervor.” Sound daunting? Not only does St. Francis offer brief reflections on how to develop each one of these virtues, he also advises that “it is good practice to select some particular virtue at which to aim—not neglecting the others, but in order to give regularity and method to the mind.” In addition to the virtues, St. Francis advises us on the proper—and improper—nature of friendships, the interaction of spouses, conversations, and engagement with familiars.

Part IV highlights the intricacies of another essential yet overlooked piece of spiritual living: remedies against temptations that constantly contend to drag us off the path to God. We fall into sin in three steps, St. Francis teaches: first comes temptation, then delectation, then consent. Yet temptations to mortal sins do not grate us the most. “These lesser temptations—anger, suspicion, jealousy, envy, levity, folly, vanity, deception, affection, artifice, impure thoughts—are the continual trials of the most fervent and devout persons; wherefore we must prepare to resist them with the utmost care and diligence, assured that in proportion to our victories over these petty foes will be the number of jewels in that crown of glory which God makes ready for us in Paradise.”

Finally, Part V focuses on renewing the soul before God’s majesty to deepen our union with Him. Here St. Francis exhorts us to persevere through the difficulties of living a devout life—of being a “good Catholic.” The road may be hard, but we have the means at hand and the end in sight: “Look to Jesus Christ and do not deny Him for the world; and if the trials of a devout life seem hard to you, say with St. Francis de Sales: ‘How sweet these momentary trials and sorrows, for they lead to Heaven’s never-ending joys!’”

*David G. Bonagura, Jr. is an adjunct professor at St. Joseph’s Seminary. He is the author of *Steadfast in Faith and Staying with the Catholic Church*. He is the translator of *Jerome’s Tears: Letters to Friends in Mourning*.*



**Ready. Set. Joe's®**  
Brooklyn • Long Island • Online

# Impact Ready

St. Joseph's University, New York is ready to help you continue your education with tuition that is among the lowest of private colleges in this area. With campuses in Patchogue, Brooklyn and Online, St. Joseph's delivers an affordable, values oriented education so you're ready for an exciting career and an authentic life.

**ATTEND AN  
UPCOMING EVENT**

Learn more at [sjny.edu/lievents](https://sjny.edu/lievents)

**St. Joseph's  
University**  
NEW YORK





# Faith is Still Greater Than Football

By Thomas Griffin

Faith. Family. Football.

Americans are familiar with this slogan from t-shirts and television shows. Throughout the ordinary experience of most people, however, football can become a god. From September through the middle of February it consumes Sunday's and much of the week leading up to the day. At the same time, there have been shining moments this year in the league where the first word in that slogan proves to be most important.

Back on January 2, 2023, Damar Hamlin of the Buffalo Bills collapsed on the football field and his life appeared to hang in the balance. That injury sent players and coaches to their knees in prayer and several other teams continued the trend in the games to follow across the league. The current NFL season has, thankfully, seen no injury like Hamlin's. It was the nature and appearance of his injury that made such a large impact.

One could have easily thought that Hamlin was going to die or even was dead on the field. Sports analysts from all over the country as well as teammates and other players publicly turned to God. When everything was at stake and on the line - faith was clearly the most important reality. Other players this season have championed the same truth.

Some have been seen by the cameras on national television, but most have been individuals proclaiming the importance and power of faith. During Week Six of the current season, the Kansas City Chiefs and many other teams took a moment of silence before games to remember the people in Israel experiencing tragic losses.

Following a game in September, Demario Davis of the New Orleans Saints took over his post-game interview by referencing Scripture and his faith. The day before, Davis had to bring his daughter to the hospital because of her seizures. His words were sobering: "Since so many of us didn't get to go to church today, I have a word I want to share." He then went on to talk about how Jesus knocks at your door each day, our job is to answer it.

Davis stood, nicely dressed and powerfully speaking as a man of faith who was a human being referencing his family struggles. The money, fame and attention that he might receive for his on the field play took the backseat to the fact that football is just a game and faith is necessary for us to endure life. Despite the worship of the game, there are examples like Davis who still worship God.

Brock Purdy has become a sensational quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers. No one could have guessed that he would be playing the way he is when he was a third string quarterback.





Recently, Purdy said that the invitation by Jesus to lose your life if you desire to find it has really stuck with him. He said that since he has a starting job in the NFL the temptation can be to say to yourself, "I cannot lose this, no way I can lose this." Purdy said the words of Christ showed him that one day everything will be taken from us. That message and truth grounds the way he plays and lives his life.

At the end of October, Kirk Cousins of the Minnesota Vikings experienced a season ending injury to his achilles. Speaking after his injury he said, "I'm excited to kind of write the next chapter and see what God wants to do with it, whatever it may be. And just kind of be reminded, again, that you know, I've kind of got my career. It's not my career. You know, it's kind of His career that I steward. And I just got to surrender myself and let Him lead where He wants to go."

Cousins has also been known to say, "Thank God my life is not built on football because that is not a stable foundation." It sounds like, following his injury he is living by those words. Entering the last month of the football season, this is something that all of us can ask ourselves. What is your life built on? Make it built on what matters most: faith and family. Football must be third.

Davis, Cousins and Purdy are all well known players in the league. Hamlin is as well. While they all have accomplishments on the field they are known for something more than catching and throwing the pigskin. So, leading up to the end of the season let's enjoy the game and let's cheer for our team. Even more importantly though, let us be rooted in faith - the reality that is unchanging and what our country is most in need of.



*Thomas Griffin is the chairperson of the Religion Department at a Catholic High School on Long Island where he lives with his wife and two sons. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine.*



# Taking the New Year into the Desert

By William Conboy

It is a popular custom to start off the New Year with resolutions. Most people implicitly realize the need to change one thing or another about themselves and New Year's is seen as the perfect fresh start. Often, these resolutions for change will be in the health category. People might be seeking a weight loss goal or may want to simply become stronger. These are good resolutions to have; health is important. However, resolutions often are given up after a month or so. Everyone has heard the joke that gyms are packed full in January and empty by February. If we truly resolve to do something, we should make it a plan and habit of life so that we can stick to it. But when trying to form new habits should we really start with the physical?

If our goal is the improvement of the exterior life, we need to first achieve discipline in our interior lives. If we desire to truly change something in the physical order, we need to start by building a foundation in the spiritual order. St. Anthony of the Desert, whose feast we celebrate on January 17th, was a great exemplar of this truth. But who was he, and how can we follow his example today?

St. Anthony was an Egyptian born in the middle of the third century. Despite this being early in the Church's long history, we have a good record of his life thanks to a biography written by St. Athanasius, alongside some other works. When his parents died, St. Anthony inherited their significant wealth at the age of 20. However, one day while at church Anthony heard "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions," and felt the Lord calling him to the life of poverty (Matthew 19:21).

He sold off all he owned, and devoted himself entirely to religious life. In Anthony's day, when people took on this life, they would often stay at home or near their village. Anthony started out living in a tomb near his hometown, but after 15 years, he decided to journey away from his home to an abandoned Roman fort. Once there, he shut himself inside to live in solitude for 20 years, only receiving food after it had been thrown over the wall.

Soon, a community of pilgrims was built up around his residence despite the fact that he refused to see them! These people began living the religious life as well and begged Anthony to come out and guide them. Eventually, he relented, and left the solitude of the fort. To the surprise of many, he was still strong in mind and body. After instructing this community, he moved to another location where a monastery bearing his name still stands. This time he freely took visitors and he even went into the city of Alexandria to preach during a persecution and against the Arian heresy.

Anthony lived a life of prayer, poverty and fasting. In the biography of his life it is described how he was attacked by demonic manifestations and yet remained firm. His willpower did not come from modern concepts like self-help, but from subjecting himself and his will to God. By yielding his soul to God, Anthony was able to become St. Anthony.





His resolution was firm because it began with his soul; he sought after God first with his soul and the physical order followed. When God prompted him to sell what he had, he did. He did not wither away when called to enter the desert because his soul was God's, and thus, the body was too. Even after 20 years of solitude, he emerged full of vigor.

This all serves to show us that, when we make resolutions, we need to start with a strong foundation. That foundation is not self-help or any mere philosophy. Even pagan and secular philosophers might agree that the interior self needs to be disciplined to change the exterior self. As Christians, however, we recognize the true beginning to building a fully virtuous life needs to be God. It is by being subject to the will of God that we go beyond what is natural discipline towards supernatural virtue. So, as we start another year and consider some resolutions for our bodies, we need to first consider some for our souls.

St. Anthony and the Desert Fathers who followed after him can be our examples in this way. Though they lived extreme lives of poverty and penances, there is still plenty of room for imitation. Perhaps make the sacrifice of foregoing dessert or sugar in your coffee and offer this slight inconvenience for those who most need God's help. Consider praying as they prayed by going into the wilderness on a hike and marveling at God's creation as you speak with Him. But above all, the best way to imitate them is by fighting strongly against whatever particular temptations you suffer from. By doing these things your soul will be strengthened and the body shall follow the soul because the desert leads to new life.

*William Conboy is a Long Island native and lifelong Catholic. He worked as a catedist during high school and is currently in undergraduate studies for a degree in journalism.*



# Discover the leader in



With over 70 undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degree programs, we combine academic excellence and leadership with personal mentoring.

Here, you'll think about your future in a whole new way.



**MOLLOY  
UNIVERSITY**



molloy.edu



*John & Laurie Murray  
Mulcahy's of Wantagh*

mul.com



## Our Students are Thriving!

School Tours & Open Houses Happening During Catholic Schools Week, January 28 – February 3

Find Open House times & more on each school profile on [lischools.org](http://lischools.org)



[www.lischools.org](http://www.lischools.org)

35 schools • Early Childhood • K-8



This Issue is Sponsored by:



# *The Catholic Magazine of Long Island*

*34 Churches  
Over 11,000 Copies Printed  
Over 9,000 Copies Downloaded Online*

TAKE A PICTURE TO  
CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE



TAKE A PICTURE/SUBSCRIBE  
TO RECEIVE EMAIL UPDATES &  
ALL ONLINE ARTICLES AND VIDEOS



Make a donation or promote your business  
by contacting us at:  
[EmptyTombProject@gmail.com](mailto:EmptyTombProject@gmail.com)