The Supper at Emmaus by Diego Veláquez (1599 – 1660)

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CHRIST THE LORD IS Risen Today, Alleluia! Earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia! Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia! Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!”

WE HAVE WALKED WITH JESUS during the forty days of Lent and lamented his cruel agony and crucifixion. Now the Easter hymns call us to rejoice in the glory of his Resurrection, to share in the eternal life of the Lord.

Our challenge is to bring the power of the Resurrection into our daily lives, allowing our minds and hearts to be inundated with the grace of God. Our communal celebration of the Resurrection displays to all we know and meet that we are children of God, made in the image of Christ, and destined to rise with Christ in glory.

Christ’s Resurrection gives us the power to hope, to believe that our destiny is the same as his. We are Jesus brothers and sisters who will live with him for all eternity. We rejoice in this belief and allow our joy to be a sign of our trust in Jesus.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)
This excerpt on the Easter Alleluia from St. Augustine is a wonderful explanation of the joy of the Easter Season. Just as Lent was a season of penance, so the fifty days of Easter is a season of praise and song, an anticipation for the age to come in heavenly glory.

Our thoughts in this present life should turn on the praise of God, because it is in praising God that we shall rejoice for ever in the life to come; and no one can be ready for the next life unless he trains himself for it now. So we praise God during our earthly life, and at the same time we make our petitions to him. Our praise is expressed with joy, our petitions with yearning.

We have been promised something we do not yet possess, and because the promise was made by one who keeps his word, we trust him and are glad; but insofar as possession is delayed, we can only long and yearn for it. It is good for us to persevere in longing until we receive what was promised, and yearning is over; then praise alone will remain.

Because there are these two periods of time – the one that now is, beset with the trials and troubles of this life, and the other yet to come, a life of everlasting serenity and joy – we are given two liturgical seasons, one before Easter and the other after.

The season before Easter signifies the troubles in which we live here and now, while the time after
Easter, which we are celebrating at present, signifies the happiness that will be ours in the future. What we commemorate before Easter is what we experience in this life; what we celebrate after Easter points to something we do not yet possess.

This is why we keep the first season with fasting and prayer; but now the fast is over and we devote the present season to praise. Such is the meaning of the Alleluia we sing.

**The White Angel of Serbia**

This fresco of the Archangel Gabriel depicts him dressed in a white garment (chiton) with his wings spread wide, sitting on a stone. He was showing myrrh bearers – the women who carried myrrh and were supposed to anoint the body of Christ – the empty tomb, indicating Christ’s resurrection.
A story is told of a pilgrim making his way across Ireland when he came upon a spiritual teacher and asked: “Can you explain to me the meaning of the phrase ‘thin places’? It is referred to often in these parts.” Pausing before he spoke, the spiritual teacher explained:

“There is a Celtic saying that heaven and earth are only three feet apart, but in the thin places that distance is even smaller. It is in the thin places where the veil separating the divine from the human is lifted. A thin place is any place where our world and the divine world become so thin that we can experience directly a glimpse of the glory, majesty and love of God.”

Evelyn Underhill

One who was exceptionally skillful at empowering people to recognize and respond to those “thin places” was the gifted British writer Evelyn Under-
Evelyn Underhill: Practical Mystic

hill. She emerged as the leading spiritual writer and teacher of her era, writing books and articles, lecturing, and leading retreats. The majority who benefited from her spiritual wisdom were, like herself, lay people who appreciated her “user-friendly” explanations of spiritual living.

Born in 1875, she was the only child of Arthur and Lucy Underhill. Her father’s profession as an attorney permitted the family to enjoy a comfortable standard of living. Though her parents were not active Christians, they did have Evelyn baptized and confirmed in the Church of England. Like her parents, neither religion nor the spiritual life were of major importance in her early years. However, a diary entry on December 5th, 1892, when Underhill turned 17, reveals spiritual seeds which would grow and flourish later in her life. She begins the diary entry by explaining she wanted “to write down this short account of my own feelings and opinions.”

The link between a spiritual life and practical living can be seen even at that young age and long before she embraced a personal faith. She writes that the “ideal man” is one who is “true, strong, intellectual and considerate,...always ready to help the poor and oppressed.” Religious leaders she admired were the prophet Mohammed “because he was sincere” and Jesus Christ because “he always
thought of the weak ones first.” Politically, she defined herself as a “socialist,” saying, “I think it is the only fair form of government, and it gives every class an equal status.” Her 17-year-old thoughts about religion reveal the starting point in her spiritual journey:

“As to religion, I don’t quite know, except that I believe in a God, and think it is better to love and help the poor people round me than to go on saying that I love an abstract Spirit whom I have never seen. If I can do both, all the better, but it is best to begin with the nearest. I do not think anything is gained by being orthodox, and a great deal of the beauty and sweetness of things is lost by being bigoted and dogmatic. If we are to see God at all it must be through nature and our fellow men....

I don’t believe in worrying God with prayers for things we want. If he is omnipotent, He knows we want them, and if He isn’t, He can’t give them to us. I think it is an insult to Him to repeat the same prayers every day. It is as much as to say He is deaf, or very slow of comprehension.”

**Early Years**

In 1897, Underhill enrolled in King’s College, London, where she studied history and botany. Religious studies were of little interest to her at that time. However, curiosity about religion began to
emerge when she traveled with her mother to Italy and France. Together they made sixteen trips, and Underhill became intrigued with the art and architecture of the Christian middle ages. She began to ponder the people and the faith that produced such magnificent beauty. This new interest prompted her to accept an invitation to join her best friend for a retreat at a Franciscan convent. The impact upon Underhill was so powerful that she left the retreat early in order to avoid a hasty conversion to Roman Catholicism. She discussed her spiritual feelings with her family and especially her fiancé.

Underhill had recently become engaged to Hubert Stewart Moore, who, like her own family, was not religious. It was Moore who expressed strong reservations about a conversion to Catholicism. So Underhill continued to reflect on her retreat experience, attended Catholic worship, and received religious instruction.

Eventually, she chose to remain in the Church of England. Her decision was reinforced at that time when several harsh papal decrees were issued condemning “modernism.” Those decrees created concerns in Underhill about submitting intellectually to church authority. Those, along with her husband’s objections, prompted her to remain with the Church of England.

Though she was not a formal convert, it was the
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Catholic church that was dominant in her spiritual formation. On her own, Underhill continued to feed her enormous appetite for information about the spiritual life. Though she lacked academic religious and theological education, Underhill plunged into the vast literature of Catholic Western spirituality, engaging in a disciplined program of self-study. She read widely and deeply, learning from St. Augustine, Eckhart, St. Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas a Kempis, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the anonymous author of The Cloud of Unknowing, Juliana of Norwich, and more.

As she read, she began to share her insights via books, lectures, and retreats. Single-handedly, she introduced Protestant Christians to the neglected authors of medieval Catholic spirituality. And she presented those mystics in practical, user-friendly ways that resonated with her audiences and readership. In fact, one of her books is titled Practical Mysticism: A Little Book For Normal People. A person who attended one of her public lectures later commented:

“As you listened you asked yourself, Oxford or Cambridge? And then realized with a start that she was for the most part self-taught, and that though she owed a certain amount to the start and trend that King’s College had given to her studies, she owed most of her unwearied zest for
the truth to her admiring love of sanctity, her diligent and enthusiastic study.”

**Authentic Living**

The power and authority with which she communicated in person and via her writings was this: she not only studied and spoke about the spiritual life, but she lived it authentically. Also, Underhill’s approach to mysticism appealed to both Catholics and Protestants. For Protestants, much of what they knew about medieval mysticism was perceived as odd and even bizarre—voices, visions, stigmata, etc. For Catholics, while they may have been intrigued by mystics who had those experiences, they did not see how mystics related to their own daily living.

It was Underhill’s gift that she could present mystics and saints, not as eccentric individuals but quite not much different from the average individual seeking to develop a spiritual life. In fact, Underhill reminded ordinary Christians that it was their calling to be saints: “We may allow that saints are specialists; but they are specialists in a career to which all Christians are called,” she wrote.

“They have achieved, as it were, the classic status. They are the advance guard of the army; but we, after all, are marching in the main ranks. The whole army is dedicated to the same supernatu-
eral cause; and we ought to...remember that every one of us wears the same uniform as the saints, has access to the same privileges, is taught the same drill and fed with the same food. The difference between them and us is a difference in degree, not in kind.”

In 1911, Underhill published her highly popular and landmark book *Mysticism*. The publication of this slim volume brought her a great deal of public attention, including that of Baron Friedrich von Hugel, a prominent lay Roman Catholic philosopher, who wrote extensively about religion and spirituality. Before long, Underhill asked him to become her spiritual director. In that capacity, he criticized her individualistic approach to spirituality, which was typical of Protestants, encouraging her to be active with a local church. He also advocated she link her spiritual life more closely with the poor by engaging in charitable work.

Von Hugel not only provided spiritual direction but became an academic tutor for Underhill, guiding her through the nuances of academic theology and the philosophy of religion. Upon Von Hugel’s death in 1925, Underhill had emerged as his most famous student. In his memory she wrote a philosophy of religion, titled *Man and the Supernatural*.

As her reach expanded, Underhill noted that the words “mystic” and “mysticism” were often
perceived as esoteric and peculiar practices. Consequently, she began to drop them in favor of the phrase “spiritual life,” which she defined this way: “It is the life in which God and His eternal order have more and more their undivided sway; which is wholly turned to Him, devoted to Him, dependent on Him.”

This, of course, is also an accurate description of a mystic but her term “spiritual life” piqued the interest of her readers and listeners in ways that “mystic” and “mysticism” could not.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

Though her knowledge of medieval theology was both vast and deep, Underhill continued writing in ways which connected with the average lay person. One example of this can be seen in her exposition of the Lord’s Prayer. Describing the seven sentences of this prayer as representing the “seven fundamental characters of the one indivisible relationship between the spirit of man and the Eternal God,” she offers readers this outline:

1) Our Father which art in heaven: establishes our status before God, not merely as His creatures and slaves but as His children...we have in us the spark of absolute life.

2) Hallowed be Thy Name: Selfless adoration, awe-struck worship as the ruling temper of our life and all we do.
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3) Thy Kingdom come: devoted and eager cooperation with His transforming and redeeming action; the defeat of evil and the triumph of love as the first object of our prayers.

4) Thy Will be done: active self-abandonment to the mysterious purposes and methods of God, and complete subordination to His design.

5) Give us this day our daily bread: confident dependence on God for all the necessities of life.

6) And forgive us our trespasses: major types of disharmony with love.

7) Lead us not into temptation: the acknowledgement of our creaturely weakness and trust in His care.

Lenten Training

Another example of her practical approach can be seen in her “Lenten Training For Church Members,” contained in her book *The Fruits of the Spirit*. “A good Lent means deliberately accepting some of the hardness and obligation of being a Christian,” she explains, adding: “Giving up some of the things we find pleasant and doing other things which are an effort, giving more time and attention to essential things, trimming off superfluous things.” Then, she offers these specific suggestions for having a “good” lent:

**Abstinence.** “This means giving up or reducing our use of some superfluous things..., comforts
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and self indulgences and generally bracing up and making our lives more simple and plain, and therefore more useful to God.” Among the bodily comforts to give up, Underhill offers a comprehensive list—reducing or stopping completely the use of cigarettes, chocolates and sweets, after dinner coffee, cocktails, sherry, hot-water bottles, bath salts, bath powder. She also suggests “A time limit of five minutes on hot baths. Avoid lounging and sometimes deliberately choose an uncomfortable chair. Do not linger in bed, but get up at once when called.”

**Almsgiving.** “This means being more generous in spending money, time and trouble on other people’s needs; and consequently spending less on ourselves.” It also means visits or letters to lonely and “unattractive” people, in volunteering for “uninteresting” jobs, in listening patiently to other people’s worries and frustrations.

**Prayer.** “This means more time and attention given to our communion with God, and a real effort to learn more about Him and so improve the quality of our prayer.” To find more time for prayer during Lent, she advises “rising earlier, to give a rather longer time to prayer. Make a point of praying for half an hour in church once a week if possible.”

**Reading the Mystics**

Because the reading of mystics was so formative for her own spiritual life, Underhill often recom-
mended that others do the same: “The question of the proper feeding of our devotional life must, of course, include the rightful use of spiritual reading.” Among her recommendations were the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, the *Dialogues* of St. Catherine of Siena, Tauler’s *Sermons*, Gerlac Petersen’s *Fiery Soliloquy with God*, the *Revelations* of Julian of Norwich, the *Life* of St. Teresa, the little book of Brother Lawrence. This kind of reading “is one of the ways in which the communion of saints can be most directly felt by us,” she said.

Though Underhill began her study with Catholic mystics, her curiosity about mystics in other faith communities began to grow and evolve. She promoted readings from Quakers and Methodists—The journals of Fox (Quaker), Woolman (Quaker), and Wesley (Methodist). She entered into a unique partnership with the Indian Hindu mystic Rabindranath Tagore. Together they engaged in a study of the Muslim mystic Kabir, with Tagore translating 100 poems of Kabir into English. Their study was published as *One Hundred Poems* by Kabir and cites as authors Sir Rabindranath Tagore, assisted by Evelyn Underhill. Later, she wrote Tagore a letter of appreciation for his spiritual guidance in her life:

“This is the first time I have had the privilege of being with one who is a Master in the things I
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care so much about but know so little of as yet; and I understand now something of what your (Hindu) writers mean when they insist on the necessity and value of the personal teacher and the fact that he gives something which the learner cannot get in any other way. It has been like hearing the language of which I barely know the alphabet, spoken perfectly.”

Pacifism and Last Days

Like the vast majority of mystics, Underhill was a fervent pacifist. As hostilities erupted in Europe leading to World War II, Underhill was distressed and dismayed by how easily violence was perceived as the first and only option. In a letter to a pacifist friend she expressed her disappointment and frustration with emerging events:

“Don’t you find these times very difficult for pacifists? The War seems to enter into everything.... Most of my quasi-pacifist friends are becoming more warlike, apparently feeling that provocation is more important than principles, and that the only way to combat sin in others is to commit sin ourselves. The attitude of the Anglican Bishops has been very disappointing, though a great many clergy are strongly pacifist”

As she continued writing, lecturing, and conducting retreats, Underhill struggled with chronic
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asthma. This condition worsened during the late 1930s, often forcing her to remain bed bound. Yet, she permitted the illness to deepen her spirituality. Writing about illness and confinement to a friend, Underhill explained what she was learning spiritually:

“Though I am not yet half-way through the sixties, illness plus age has come to mean a very thorough limitation of freedom, and general slowing down, and dependence upon others; none of which is altogether easy to a person who prefers to do everything for herself at express speed. But it’s a marvelous discipline...and involves the discovery of so much devoted kindness.

In another letter to a friend, Underhill describes how serious her asthma had become:

“I am still in my room but (can)...hardly move as everything makes me breathless. It transpires that the long illness destroyed the elasticity of my lungs and that takes ages to come back—so far as it does come back. Meanwhile one just has to stay put, and submit to having everything done for one. I can’t say I like it much but it seems to be the Lord’s idea for the present moment.”

The debilitating asthma left her very fragile and, on June 14, 1941, Underhill succumbed to a cerebral hemorrhage. Commenting on her extraordinary influence, Thomas S. Kepler editor of The
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*Evelyn Underhill Reader*, observed:

“No woman in Christian history has written more on the meaning and value of Christian mysticism; and few have been able to interpret the meaning of mysticism in terms of practical, everyday living in a deeper fashion.”

**Victor M. Parachin, MDiv**, is a graduate of the University of Toronto School of Theology. While there he took theology courses at the University of St. Michael’s College, federated with the University of Toronto. He is the author of a dozen books, including *Eastern Wisdom for Western Minds*, Orbis Publishers.

**Books by Evelyn Underhill**

1. *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book For Normal People*
2. *The Essentials of Mysticism & Other Essays*
3. *Concerning The Inner Life*
DEVOUT AND GOD-LOVING PEOPLE, enjoy this kind and bright festival. Wise people, come and share joy with your Lord. You who have laboured in fasting, receive your deserved reward. You who have laboured from the first hour, come to the festival now! You who came at the third hour, rejoice! You who lingered until the sixth hour, celebrate! You who came at the ninth hour, do not be sad! You who managed to come only at the eleventh hour, do not be dismayed by your lateness. No-one will be deprived of heavenly joy. For our Lord is generous.

He welcomes those who come last in the same way as those who come first. He is grateful to the first and rejoices in the last. He consoles those who came at the last hour, as if they had laboured from the first hour. He gives to everyone: those who laboured and those who wanted to labour. He receives the service and kisses the intention. He values the deed and praises the desire. All of you enter into
the joy of the Lord: First and last, receive the reward! Wealthy and poor, rejoice with one another! Diligent and lazy, celebrate the festival! Those who have fasted and those who have not, be glad together. The feast is abundant, eat your fill! All of you enjoy the wealthy banquet of the faith and mercy of God.

Let no-one go away hungry or offended. Let no-one be sad about their poverty, for the kingdom is now here for everyone. Let no-one weep over their sins, for forgiveness for all has burst with light from the grave. Let no-one be afraid of death, for the death of Jesus has freed us all. Embraced by death, He subdued death. Having descended into hell, He took hell captive. He embittered it when it tasted of his flesh.

Isaiah prophesied: “Hell was troubled, having met You in the underworld!” Hell was in mourning, for it was abolished! Hell was distressed, for it was condemned! Hell was impoverished, for it was deposed! Hell was destroyed, for it was bound! It took on a body, and touched God. It took on the earth, and met heaven. It took what it saw, and fell to where it did not expect! Death! Where is your sting? Hell! Where is your victory?

Christ is risen, and you are brought down. Christ is risen, and the demons have fallen. Christ is ris-
en, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life triumphs. Christ is risen, and there are no dead in the grave. Christ has risen from the dead, become the firstborn of those who sleep and set into motion the resurrection of all. To Him be glory now and forever. Amen!

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1Peter 1:3-5)
Book Notices

A Poor and Merciful Church
By Stan Chu Ilo

Orbis Books Paper $44.00

Stan Chu Ilo deserves our praise for this book, especially for the way he presents the metaphor of “culture of encounter” as a key to our appreciation and understanding of the emerging illuminative ecclesiology of Pope Francis. The book provides insight into the mind of a young African theologian coming to grips with the cross-cultural encounters that underpin contemporary theological scholarship, and points to a way of being a church that lives and witnesses among the marginalized peoples of the earth.

A Faith that Frees
By Richard Malloy, SJ,

Orbis Books Paper $22.00

Fr. Malloy speaks to all Catholics who are neither ideologically “left” nor “right” but simply seeking to understand and live the gospel in a messy world of confusion, violence, and excess. He brings to life a Catholicism that does justice and a faith that forgives. He brings a positive and enthusiastic point of view that is more needed than ever.
The Way of Transformation is a play on the title of St. Teresa’s classic The Way of Perfection. Written for her Discalced Carmelite nuns, it is nonetheless considered Teresa’s “operations manual” for anyone genuinely committed to the spiritual life. But by “perfection” she doesn’t intend the futile pursuit of idealized flawlessness, as some might think. Rather, Teresa means achieving an authentic human fulfillment—a true becoming of that person we are meant to be.

The Rosary with St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

A wonderful new resource for your prayer life is on the press right now! It weaves together Scripture reflections with selections from the Little Flower’s writings. This new pocket-sized booklet retails for $4.50.

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