

Blessed Be



*This homily was delivered
by Linda Pinto at the
2005 CORPUS national
conference with the theme:
A New Church for A
New World.*

*It took place in Chaska,
Minnesota, with featured
speaking including Tom
Fox, Thomas Doyle, O.P.
and Andrea Johnson.*

In 1978, my husband, Ralph, received a folded flyer in the mail. After reading it over and over again, he smiled and I could tell there was something different. You see we had just left active ministry and moved forty miles from our parish.

I was condemned as the temptress who had stolen one of God's special ones. Ralph's family told him he was responsible for placing more thorns in Christ's crown. His picture was removed from the mantle.

Upon leaving public ministry, we were instructed not to share any information about who we were or what we had accomplished. Ralph donated his collection of theology books to the local thrift shops. The pastor of the local Catholic Church discovered them and instructs us not to join the parish. We were alone and alienated.

Soon after these events, a flyer arrives. It was an early edition of CORPUS REPORTS. As Ralph stared deeply and intently into its pages, it was as if the proverbial scales fell from his eyes.

We haven't been the same since.

We, to our forefathers and foremothers who had the courage and chutzpah to "stand ready to serve"; to all who have guided the vision of CORPUS over the years, restoring our personal integrity and dignity fashioning a new church for a new world; and to all of you who celebrate your priesthood in all its forms, keep the vision of CORPUS alive for ourselves and for posterity, thank you.

When first asked to give a reflection on today's gospel, The Beatitudes, I suggested that Allen and Sylvia (Moore) could not have chosen a more unlikely candidate.

For those who know me, meek and humble will never be etched as tributes on my tombstone. Peacemaking, while a noble goal unto itself, is something I am usually assigned as a penance. Finally, I am the one usually doing the persecuting rather than the one being persecuted.

Honestly, the Beatitudes are probably one of my least favorite parts of the New Testament. Give me Jesus cleaning out the Temple of moneychangers prior to his passion. Give me Jesus standing next to the woman accused of adultery. He kneels down and begins to write in the sand. One by one, the accusers leave. Wouldn't you love to know what he scribbled:

And probably my all time favorite, Jesus explaining to his mother that his time had not yet come. And her response, who cares? It's a marriage feast. They've run out of wine. Do something!

Despite my pleas to find a more appropriate choice, they remained unwavering in their invitation. I set upon reflecting on the beatitudes, hoping to find some valuable insight or reflection.

The first thing I noticed is that there are eight Beatitudes. What's up with that? I know a little bit about sacred numbers... twelve tribes of Israel....twelve apostles...

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forty days in the desert....forty days of Lent. Then why eight Beatitudes?

There's seven days of creation, seven sacraments, seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, seven cardinal virtues and sins, so why Eight Beatitudes? We know Jesus must have been good at math....we have the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. I realize this is not a profound insight. But I sense that it is significant.

The Beatitudes frame the kind of kingdom Jesus envisioned, the kind of church we must become. They provide us a blueprint unlike any other in Scripture. They are singular, unique, unlike any other call. They are simple and obvious truths that contain profound meaning for our lives. Peacemaking, purity, justice, compassion. They are simple and obvious truths that contain profound meaning for our lives as CORPUS. Let me humbly begin.....Blessed Being.

*Blessed be the birds and the bees,
for that's what got us here in the first place!*

Let me begin with a story.

The proverbial priest and rabbi are in a car traveling to a wedding. They had traveled together many times before and had developed a friendship. After a long period of silence, the priest begins a conversation about how stringent that rabbinical prescriptions seem to be and asks if the rabbi has ever strayed? "Once". He replied. "I was in a Gentile home and was served pork chops. I couldn't resist." They traveled several more miles before the Rabbi asks, "and you, Father, have you ever strayed?" "Once" the priest replied. "I was lonely and tempted and I slept with a beautiful woman." Many miles passed before the Rabbi noted: "I bet that was better than pork chops!"

As inappropriate as this story may seem embedded in a homily, I use it very intentionally. Sex....that's what the church thinks was the deciding factor in our decision to leave canonical ministry. And yet, how well we know differently.

If our choice was just about having sex, we obviously would not have had to resign. Tragically, beyond our wildest expectations, the Church has made it abundantly clear that priests having sex is tolerable as long as it is not publicly known.

It's intimacy they can't accept. It's about a mutually respectful relationship...one life intertwined into another where magically the individuals are cherished and celebrated and the couple becomes one heart. It's about being vulnerable, and strong. It's about laughter in the midst of sorrow, joy when we are faced with tragedy. It's about sharing the tender moments of silence and the raucous shouts of celebration. It's about relishing in the successes and embracing the challenges. It's about never being alone.

Eugene Kennedy said it so profoundly:

"Persons, created whole, are meant to sense and exult in, rather than be estranged from, their remarkable unity. We, men and women, are conscious of our wholeness in profoundly human moments...whenever we lose ourselves in the kindred activities of created something...teaching a class, doing a job thoroughly, preparing a family meal, painting the truth of one's vision in watercolor or in words, and in living the other in every self-forgetful way, including our healthy passionate sexual celebration of our intimate relationship. These moments of dying and rising are unmistakably and richly human for, at one and the same instant, they are sensual and spiritual, in short, sacraments."

So, blessed be you who have heard God's call to intimacy, mutuality and the celebration of sexuality, for you are the face of a new church for a new world.

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*Blessed be the women,
for they are our blessing and our baggage.*

I have used this phrase many times before and I use it again because it is so fitting. We are your wives, mothers, sisters and colleagues. We are the Marthas, the Marys and the Magdalas. It has always been my opinion that a married priesthood is not the problem.

The Pastoral Provisions have proven its success within our own ecclesiastical backyard. Even our beloved last Pontiff John Paul II acknowledged that marriage and ordained ministry were equally valued. It's the women.

For the courage you showed to publicly proclaim the goodness of a woman and the value of an intimate, loving relationship with her, you are no longer regarded as worthy.

You were asked to deny your calling, move away from your parish, exclude yourselves from reading the Gospels publicly and remain silent about your past. All this because you chose to proclaim the sacredness of the other.

What scandal would occur if you lead a prayer service, deliver Eucharist to the sick, proclaim the word of God to the broken and lonely or act as a minister of God's love? What scandal?

Ironically, it is the women who have proved to be your blessings. Not only your lives, but your ministry has been enriched by the feminine perspective, intuition and experience. You have interwoven "the other" into your understanding and pastoral outreach and your priesthood have changed the lives of all you touch.

So, blessed be the women.

*Blessed be our families,
for they are a reflection of the church we love.*

Our families...who could have ever imagined decades ago what an incredible adventure we were embarking upon. Birthing children, nurturing their individuality, weaving them into a family, connecting it to our large community. Our homes have become the laboratory for testing the principles we hold dearest.

Collegiality is demanded each time your children are clever enough to pit one parent's opinion against the other. Mutuality is exercised when you drag your children to home liturgies, hours from your house, but then in return, you enthusiastically spend hours in the bleachers cheering on the softball games. There are no successful family road trips without the spirit of consensual decision making. Inclusivity's metal is testing when your daughter announces she wanted to be an auto mechanic and your son enrolls in the Fashion Institute of America.

Mission is collectively participating in community clean-up day or cooking together for the local food pantry. Sacramentality is celebrated with our family traditions, such as setting out luminaries on Old Soul's Day, recounting the names and lives of your loved ones; hatching butterflies during the Easter Season and launching them on Ascension Thursday; having a special family dinner on the anniversary of ordination. (Our's is loaves and fishes (actually fish and chips) and chocolate. In our home, chocolate is a god.)

Our homes are the petri-dishes that germinate the sense, scope and spirit of Vatican II. What an incredible grace, privilege and gift.

So, blessed be our family.

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Blessed be the art of tempering, for caution can turn anger into accomplishments.

One of the great gifts that this opportunity has given me was to revisit some old friends....books that have been “ah-ha” moments. One of those friends is entitled *Beyond Anger: On Being a Feminist in the Church* by Sr. Carolyn Osiek.

Feminists in those days were widely regarded as bra-burning, verbally vicious, uncompromisingly angry venomous vipers who unrelentingly blamed men for all the ills, not only in the church, but on the planet as well. I was not at peace with my place in the church, but could not identify with this posture. The book came highly recommended by a sage grandmother, wife of a married priest, whom I admired greatly. So, I gave it a shot.

I found myself stealing moments to absorb its goodness. I’d bring it to the bus stop, to swim meets, even read it while waiting for water to boil...each moment was rich. The beauty of the experience was that I finally found in words what I had been really feeling all along. I was angry...justifiably angry that this church I loved had ignored and even worse discarded my rich experience of being a woman. I even remember late one evening sitting in bed reading by a book lamp as Ralph eased into evening’s sleep. The words leaped off the page: It is good and right and holy that you are angry. I immediately closed the book and started pelting Ralph. “This is why I am the way I am! I’m angry and proud of loving it.”

It wasn’t until much later that I learned the art of tempering.

Tempering is the process of balancing the temperature of the fat in foods like chocolate or cream so that a smooth texture is achieved. Carolyn’s book named my anger and made me hot! A terrible injustice has been perpetrated. Not only are women devalued but our church has tossed aside its finest because you dared to fall in love and celebrate it publicly. It makes my blood boil. Martin Luther King has been attributed to saying “I never work better than when I am inspired by anger.”

But, anger alone will not accomplish our goal. Our justifiable anger must be tempered with understanding, dialogue and lots of love. Our bishops and priests continue to support an oppressive structure...one which says that “cradle Catholics” who seek ordination are ineligible to fall in love. But we will not accomplish our end unless we consistently, patiently and untiringly temper our anger with understanding, communication and lots of love.

Blessed be our mistakes, for as James Joyce wrote “They are the portals of discovery”.

One of the most freeing experiences in my life was when I finally admitted to myself that I make mistakes. Before that time, I feverously attempted to hide or cover my missteps. I even thought at one time I could overcome mistakes and just be perfect. My financial reports were accountable to a Finance Committee for review. Those of you who know me understand that to me, math is a foreign language. But given my addiction to perfection, I tried untiringly and unsuccessfully to be correct. One day on the verge of being broken, I looked my Bookkeeper/Accountant straight in the eyes and said: “Hi, my name is Linda and I am a mistake maker.” What a relief?

Mistakes, I have come to learn, can be miraculous events. Coca-cola was medicinal syrup developed by a pharmacist named John Pemberton to be used for people who were tired, nervous or were plagued by sore teeth. Once, his assistant accidentally carbonated water to mix a batch, threw some ice and voila! A beverage now consumed all over the world. Post-it notes is a mistake which emerged from an effort to improve adhesive tape. Scotchgard is a mistake which grew out of an attempt to make synthetic rubber for airplane fuel lines. Rubber tires, Silly Putty, penicillin and even the pacemaker were all the results of mistakes. Blessed be such mistakes.

Two of my many mistakes stand out as worthy to be shared with you.

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Early in our marriage we were invited to the wedding of Ralph's best friend. They had met in seminary, and while they had chosen different paths, remained close. This was his second marriage and his future mother-in-law, a woman born and raised in Vienna as a devout Catholic, was disappointed that it was not sanctioned by the church. Sometime after the ceremony, Lynn and Tony approached Ralph and asked if he would bless their rings? A simple request, I thought, until I turned toward Ralph and realized that all the color had gone out of his face and he was beginning to sweat! You see, it was the first time Ralph had been "called to serve" since he left active canonical ministry. As uncomfortable and unsure as he was, he chose to make what the Church considered the mistake of blessing their rings, their lives and their marriage. Oh, blessed mistakes!

I'm now going to do something no one in CORPUS has even seen me do before, I am going to apologize. You see, unintentionally of course, I have made a number of mistakes. In each case, owning the shame has allowed me the joy of righting the course. So let me begin.

In my very early days of CORPUS, the newly appointed Board set the goal of writing a constitution. A draft was sent to the membership for comment. Within days, I received a very long, well thought-out treatise of the strengths and weakness of the document. This letter was authored by my colleague, Bill Manseau. As I wanted to acknowledge how much time and energy he put into the reflection, as well as point out where I differed from his conclusions, I set out upon a two or three day project of drafting a response. I was so proud of myself!

Within days of sending it, I received a phone call from Bill. He was decidedly vexed. I prepared myself to defend my position, when he explained that I had insulted him by using the salutation "Mister" rather than "Reverend". This comment threw me for a loop! Three, single spaced typed pages of response and all they could think about is the salutation? It was some time later that I fully realized the value of my mistake. The term "Reverend" was not so much a title of response or privilege. It was one of identity, an identity which is well served. After this

time, we commonly use "Reverend" to address our ordained members. This "mistake" has helped heal so many in so many ways.

Years again, Ralph and I attended an Advent retreat sponsored by the Diocese of Paterson, New Jersey, for canonically active and inactive priests and their wives. The spiritual director of the seminary, now a Bishop, was invited to share some reflections. He started with a zinger. He asked those who had resigned to marry to consider whether we were prophets or mistakes? My answer today is very different from the answer I gave then. Today, I say we are both. We are prophets because we answered the call of God to live and speak the truth, no matter what the consequences.

We are mistakes because we are not the way it should be. Our Church has yet to discover the way to recognize and welcome us, to value and utilize us, to celebrate and cherish us. So, blessed be the potential for discover embedded in our mistakes.

Blessed be belly rolling laughter, a sharp wit and glint in your smile, for holy humor heals.

Hands down, CORPUS people are the funniest group of people I have ever known. There is not a CORPUS conference, local meeting or even Board meeting that I have not left with my cheeks hurting.

Humor is derived from the Latin word *complectere*, meaning to weave opposing characteristic of a person...hot/cold, love/hate, funny serious. Humor has been called the mark of our humanity. Sara Davidson, a psychologist, observed:

"the ability to laugh at life is right at the top, with love and communication, in the hierarchy of our needs. Humor has much to do with pain; it exaggerates the anxieties and absurdities we feel, so that we gain distance through laughter, relief." Humor is now widely recognized a medicinal, relieving stress, boosting the immune system and fighting infection.

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I don't believe that our profound sense of humor is a coincidence. We have been egregiously violated. Your call to priesthood within official circles has been severed simply because we fell in love and chose to honor and celebrate our spouse as another gift from God. Many of you have lost careers, connections and communities. We have every right to be bitter. But instead humor has been our choice to heal, survive and even thrive.

I cite two examples.

In the early nineties as a response to the growing priest shortage, the Vatican released a word service for priestless parishes. Outrageous! Twenty-three thousand married Catholic priests in the United States and the Vatican releases a paper procedure to distribute pre-consecrated hosts?

So over dinner one evening, Ralph and I developed a new and complete line of ecclesiastical paraphernalia designed to keep the community both valid and licit. Prices were subject to change according to the status of the Vatican deficit. Visa, MasterCard and Holy Cards were accepted.

Some of the items for sale included:

- Singing stoles, containing a computerized chip which when nudged will play "O Salutaris Hostia" or "Tantum Ergo"
- Vintage homilies: pious platitudes from your 'ole time favorites like Bishop Sheen, Msgr. Patrick Payton and my personal favorite, Joseph Cardinal Cushing.
- Do-it-yourself parish financial kits complete with two sets of book and a variety of colored pens.
- Specialty items included: a pair of episcopal limbs guaranteed to insure apostolic succession

•A bull kit which comes in papal, Episcopal and pastoral editions

•An assorted Ratzinger candy sampler including (Leonardo) Boff Bars, (Charles) Curran Crunchies, (Matthew) Fox Fudge and Raymond (Huntzinger) Raisins.

•We also offered forty hour tapes available in three languages: progressive, modern and pig Latin.

•And my all time favorite...an inflatable bishop with a portable carrying case for overnight shipment to the "ad whimpina visit".

The prize for humor, however, goes to Charlie Davis of Catholic's Speak Out. At a time when rhythm was demanded to be considered as the only form of family planning and oral contraceptives were not covered by medical insurance plans, the Church stood silent when Viagra burst on the scene. Not that he is against Viagra, but in response to this disparity of justice, Charlie drafted the Proper for the Feast of Saint Viagra the Upright. The collect reads:

Almighty God, who dost make the crooked ways straight and supportest the upright in their affliction, hear the prayers of thy servant Viagra, who fainted at the sight of the sword but was raised up straight to endure the pain of martyrdom. Grant us the strength to be upright in the face of suffering and harder than stone when confronted with the wiles of the Devil. We pray this through....

So, blessed be belly rolling laughter, a sharp wit and glint in your smile, for holy humor heals.

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Blessed be irrational optimism, uninhibited enthusiasm and a blinding sense of wonder for that is what God deserves.

This past year CORPUS has enjoyed a lively exchange regarding its core values, mission and future. This dialogue began at a workshop given at the National Conference entitled “Where is CORPUS Going?” It was a comprehensive and compelling analysis of our past and what potential we had for any future. This challenge was followed by an article in CORPUS REPORTS entitled “Who is CORPUS?” examining what membership meant and inviting members to actively engage themselves as stewards in the work of CORPUS.

I’d like to continue and possibly deepen this conversation by asking, what I consider, a more fundamental question....Why is CORPUS?

More than an advocacy group of aging hippies drunk with the vision of Vatican II more than a support group for professional religious transitioning in career and identity; more than a service organization offering our gifts and talents for sacramental ministry...Why is CORPUS?

CORPUS is an agent for change....social, political and religious. Coincidentally, it was eleven years ago, just after addressing the CORPUS Conference in Washington, D.C., that Tom Fox, former Publisher of the National Catholic Reporter and our Friday evening keynoter, wrote a favorable editorial about us. It set the tone for the decade and was entitled “CORPUS: A Symbol and Agent of Change.”

As a change agent, the normal prescriptions for good business cannot exclusively apply.

Malcolm Gladwell in his book entitled *The Tipping Point* analyses the nature of successful social epidemics. More specifically, he examined a number of societal changes, whose roots festered for some time and then suddenly bore fruit. While the book treats serious epidemic change like the lowering of the

crime rate in New York City in the ‘90’s or the decrease in the AIDS epidemic, he begins his book with an interesting story about the resurgence of Hush-Puppies, the seemingly ugly suede shoe of the ‘60’s. The company had just decided to discontinue production, when an odd resurgence of orders appeared. It seems several students at New York University purchased them from a second-hand shop. A designer happened to pass them and placed it in his Autumn “retro” collection. Voile! Sales soared.

Malcolm isolated a number of elements which must be present in order to change to occur. Contagious behavior (he uses the examples of laughing or yawning. In our case, it is ministry, stickiness (having a message that is simple and attractive “ready to serve”), and the Law of the Few (Margaret Mead’s posture that change has always happened because of a handful of committed individuals), all apply to the CORPUS community. The most striking (no pun intended) part of the book and the most poignant message for CORPUS is the image on the cover. It is a lone stick match. Harmless enough stored for years on the shelf, until something, someone strikes it causing it to burst into flame.

Malcolm says it best:

“What must underlie successful epidemics, in the end, is a bedrock belief that change is possible and that people can radically transform their behavior and beliefs in the face of the right kind of impetus. The world of the Tipping Point is a place where the unexpected becomes expected, where radical change is more than possibility. It is contrary to all our expectations. It is a certainty!”

History is replete with images which should console, enliven and inspire us. Gandhi was sixty-two when he began his illustrious 300 mile “march to the sea” to passively oppose the oppressive prohibition against making salt. He was seventy-nine when his hunger fast quelled the bloodshed between Hindu and Muslims. Could he ever have imagined India as the emerging economic force it is becoming?

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Elizabeth Caddy Stanton stood practically alone in the late 1800's proclaiming women as fully human. Not only did she die before she could vote, she felt her vision and leadership were lessened by forces which saw temperance as more important than suffrage. In the late 19th century, W.E.B. De Bois began The Niagra Movement, declaring the pending issue of the coming century as "the problem of the color line." The movement lasted only a few years and had not more than 200 members. He never met Martin Luther King and Martin never lived to see his children and grandchildren valued for the character of their heart rather than the color of their skin. The Gray Panthers was initiated by Maggie Kuhn, a sixty-five year old dynamic and talented woman who was forced into retirement simply due to age.

Regime change in Kenya and dramatic change in the position of women were brought about by Wangari Maathai, a current recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, who inspired others across the nation to simply plant trees! One spark, tens of thousands of women, one by one, thirty million trees, thirty years. In 2002, she was elected to Parliament.

As an agent of change, it is commitment, perseverance, courage and witness which will measure our worth in history. As an agent of change, it is not our value as messengers, as much as the universal appeal of our message.

Blessed be you Harry Potters, you Aragons, Lord of the Rings and you Luke Skywalker. More correctly, blessed be you Harry Potters and Herimine Grangers, your Aragons and Eowins and you Luke Skywalker and Princess Leias

You probably all know Harry Potter, Aragon, The Lord of the Rings and the Jedi Knight, Luke Skywalker. But they are not complete without their women. Hermine is the greatest witch of her time, She is the one who regularly comes up with the potion or magic that mixes with courage and adventure, helps Harry to save the day. Leia is the strength, embrace and direction that Luke needs to ground himself in his mission. But my favorite of

all is Eowin, the niece of the Kingdom Rohan. Not content to accept the traditional role of a woman, she defies the standard and dresses in the armor of a warrior. She secretly joins in one of the last battle scenes. She encounters the Dark Lord who has just wounded her beloved uncle. The Dark Lord laughs at her efforts to battle with him, informing her of his invincibility. It is legend that he could not be killed by any ordinary man. She dramatically removes her headgear revealing her long locks and declares: "I am not ordinary man!" The Dark Lord was toast!

Each of these contemporary myths celebrates the eternal message of the triumph of good over evil. Each of the protagonists were called from their ordinary existence and asked to accomplish impossible things. Each humbly listened to the inner voice of the spirit and stepped gingerly into the future not knowing if they were deserving. Each seemed to be given impossible tasks which required unusual courage, that intimate spirit which comes from the heart. Each succeeded with the help of the women they loved and the friends who became their family. Each knew that their work was not of their own making, but a calling....a vocation. Is this not the story of CORPUS.....your story?

We did not ask to be in this place. We do not want to be alienated and ostracized by the church we love and dedicated our lives to. We could easily slip into passively accepting the church's discrimination against women and married priests. We did not and we could not. This is our vacation and our vision...a new church for a new world.

I have a tattered page from a 1970's Abbey Press calendar on the wall in my home office. It reads: *To do is right; but just to be is holy.*

So, blessed be your being. Blessed be lives and your families Blessed be the vision and presence that you give to your ministry. Above all, blessed be the members of CORPUS, for thus is the kingdom, the power, the glory and the reflection of the face of God!