

At Least I Can Kneel

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By Grace Sears

Ada Loaring-Clark wrote a weekly feature, “Churchwomen Today,” for *The Living Church* starting in 1933, soon after Clifford Phelps Morehouse became editor.

“Churchwomen Today” highlighted activities of women’s organizations, featured women’s ministries, recommended books and causes, and offered missionary news. The author was well-connected within church networks. In 1919 Loaring-Clark had been appointed to the Department of Missions and Church Extension as an associate member of the National Council to the Presiding Bishop, the first woman to serve a role on the council. She had also served two terms on the National Executive Board of the Women’s Auxiliary. She then became publisher of the *Royal Cross*, the magazine of the Daughters of the King. She held offices on the Daughters of the King National Council from 1925 through 1936, and was elected president in 1934.

That year *The Living Church* began to publish an anonymous column, “Everyday Religion,” that — unlike the newsy column about churchwomen and their concerns — surely is the personal voice of Ada Loaring-Clark. This meditation was published on January 4, 1936. The author would not see another Epiphany. She died at the age of 65 on Christmas morning, 1936, at the home of her son, the Rev. Alfred Loaring-Clark, who was rector of St. John’s in Memphis. Her little granddaughter, Sarah, wanted to show her Christmas presents to her grandmother, and could not understand why she was not allowed to go upstairs.



St. Mary's Cathedral, Memphis

Ada Loaring-Clark and her husband, the Rev. William James Loaring-Clark, were British. In 1900, Bishop Daniel Tuttle had stopped at Speakers Corner in London's Hyde Park to listen to "a curly-headed orator proclaiming his thoughts with great gusto" (Margaret Loaring-Clark Jones, "The Christmas Trunk," *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch Magazine*, Dec. 20, 1987). The redoubtable bishop urged Loaring-Clark, then a medical student, to come to St. Louis to study for the priesthood.

Two years later, William and Ada set out for Bishop Tuttle's Missouri diocese, leaving three young children with their grandparents. Later a young nanny, Lucy Cochran, embarked for America with the children, and stayed to care for the Loaring-Clark household, which soon included an infant daughter. Ada helped support the family by giving voice and piano lessons.

After completing a degree at Sewanee and serving St. Paul's, Carondelet, in St. Louis, William Loaring-Clark was called to St. Paul's, Chattanooga, in 1909. Six years later their oldest son, Charles, joined Canadian forces fighting in France, and was killed. William took leave from St. Paul's in order to supervise Red Cross Hospitals in Britain that were caring for wounded Americans. After he returned, the family moved to the Sewanee campus for a time, and eventually to Jackson, Tennessee, where William pastored St. Luke's. Today the church has a stained-glass window that honors not only the parish's longtime pastor but also his wife. It includes this worthy epitaph: "This woman was full of good works" (Acts 9:36).

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Everyday Religion: A New Start in Life

Usually, just at this time, a good deal of fun is poked at "good resolutions." The reason for this is of course that so often even a few days of the New Year find our resolutions already broken. And for two causes:

(1) We load ourselves down with too many resolutions.

(2) We fail to fit our resolutions into the working rhythm of our life.

Let us not be discouraged. Our Christian way always offers a chance for a new start. Here is Epiphany coming — a season most sympathetic toward our humanity, our need for God to be made plain. Our Lord is in His cradle; a little child looking up trustingly to mankind — to us, ready for what we may do.

We know Him now for our Lord, our King, our Savior. But still he is just a little lowly child. The three kings bowed themselves down to His lowliness. That is, they knelt and offered their gifts.

Why not exactly imitate the wise men? Why not fit into the rhythm of every day, something we really can do? Never mind how simple and childlike a thing it is. One must be simple and childlike with a child. You are doing this before the Holy Child. He will accept it. He will be glad for it. He will give you his answer.

There are just 34 days in the Epiphany season of 1936. I am resolved upon one thing — and that just for Epiphany, and not looking any further into the year. It is this:

Three times a day I will kneel down. If I can, I will try to see my Lord Jesus as a little child in the Blessed Virgin's arms, or with St. Joseph, or in his cradle. I will bow before him and hold out my hands as if offering a gift. I will try to have some gift there for him. It may be a letter I have written or a piece of work I have done. It may be a good thought or a sense of thanks. It may be the aching or strain I feel in my soul or in my limbs or feet, because I have traveled a long way. It may be a change of mind, my decision not to do some unworthy thing anymore. It may be a kind word or deed I plan to give.

It may be that all I can do many a time will be just to kneel. But I can do that, can't I? Just kneel?

And I hope that as I kneel I shall always be able to say with my lips and in my heart

*My Lord Jesus,
I believe thee,
I worship thee,
I love thee.*

But perhaps I shall be traveling, or unable to have any privacy. Then I will kneel in the hidden place of my heart, in my thought.

And I will try to do this throughout the 34 days of his Epiphany. Many times I hope that I may find an open church where I may kneel.

And I will keep this thought in mind when I am tempted to break my resolution: "If you can't do anything else this time, you can at least kneel."