



Pastor's Pen

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- Fr. Tom Wilson, Pastor

THE PATH TO NEW LIFE

Jennifer Hubbard is a regular contributor to *Magnificat*, the monthly paperback missal that includes the daily readings, portions of the Liturgy of the Hours, and many articles and reflections. All the content is easy to read, whether from 570 AD or today. Ms. Hubbard's intense and honest reflections on topics ranging from Mary at the foot of the Cross to Jesus as the Good Shepherd are insightful and searing. In less than 500 words, she can express spiritual depth and wisdom that comes from an authentic spirit, depth of experience, and clear God-given talent. Few people can do what she does. I highly recommend anything that she writes as worthy of study and in-depth reflection.

In one of her recent reflections, she shares images of Psalm 23 (*The Lord is My Shepherd*), in which she is carried by the Good Shepherd through "dark valleys," over "steep cliffs," and through "prowling predators" in her own quest to continue her journey. The reflection, of course, is one that any one of us could give based on our own relationship with the Lord and our own lived experiences through "dark valleys, steep cliffs, and prowling predators." To know and appreciate the Good Shepherd is to also recognize the darkness and valleys of our lives, through which He carries us.

It's clear that Jennifer loves and appreciates the presence of God in her life. Her writings, brief, intense, and insightful display that without any doubt. She is a credible witness to the presence of God in the world. Her background includes a path to that knowledge of the Good Shepherd which is common to all people of deep, trusting, and authentic faith that includes the darkest of darkness. It's important that we all have people who demonstrate that to us, so we can see it in our own experiences. We need examples to look up to and experiences that mirror, even if imperfectly, our own journeys. She celebrates new life in this world that can only come from Jesus honoring his promise to rise from the dead.

That road to credible witness and authentic discipleship must include the Cross. We cannot passively wait for the joy, hope, and promise of new life in the resurrection without knowing suffering and death. The common link in all disciples of Jesus is living through suffering, being able to tell about it, and knowing that on the other side of the dark valleys and steep cliffs lies a regeneration and newness of soul and life. If we do not know death, we cannot know life. It is as simple as that.

Ms. Hubbard has credibility in living the darkness of human suffering. Knowing her story brings a depth of understanding to her reflections and her deep faith, which can only be described as heroic. Jennifer Hubbard is from Newtown, Connecticut. Her child, Violet, described in detail and with great tenderness in many of her writings, was a victim of the Sandy Hook school mass shooting in 2012. She knows death in an acute way that no mother or father ever wants to know it. She is also a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ who knows new life within her pain and loss.

In order for us to know something new, we first must recognize that something is old and in need of renewal. The first disciples, in receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit and hearing the voice of God in their hearts, knew they were different. They left behind the shame and sorrow of their old lives that weighed them down. Whether that shame and sorrow was self-inflicted or part of their circumstances of life, they grew to know the joy, hope, and promise of new life in Jesus.

That new life that we can experience does require a dose of honesty and humility. Part of the old is my own choosing of the sins that hold me back from Jesus and includes my prideful unwillingness to accept healing. For any of us to rejoice and share our new life, we must know the old. That trail, I believe, comes in part by our recognizing and honoring the paths of suffering that those who have gone before us have walked. It's more than an inspiration that suggests, "If they did it so can I." New life can't come without suffering and recognizing Jesus' love and presence within it. Jennifer Hubbard and all mothers who suffer with their children know the trail well. It's part of the vocation of marriage and motherhood.

I pray they all know the joy, hope, and promise of new life in the resurrection that Jennifer knows, and are willing to share the comfort and presence of the Good Shepherd to those who follow.