

First Peter

Living a Christ Centered Life

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Heart of Mary
Women's Fellowship

About This Study

We hope that you'll dive in, grow in the Lord, and share with others what beauty God reveals to you through it. If you are doing this study independently, know that we at HOM are here for you & that you also have a LARGE community of women through our website and social media that are participating too! You are truly never alone!

If you are completing this study in a group setting - we are excited that you have found a local community to grow with, on top of our online sisterhood. Please use this study journal for your reference, resource, and more during your meetings and the personal time leading up to it.

Looking for a group? Please visit www.heartofmarywf.com/groups to find a meet up near you.

Are you already in one but not listed on our website? Looking to start one? Please contact us for more information about our "HOM Ambassador" program. We have team members available specifically to help you grow a local group and lead other women through community, prayer, and devotion. Their support is available at all times. We also want to help you grow! We will advertise your group on our website & social media! And we have free resources for you as well. Please email us at heartofmarywf@aol.com

Note: All written content has been reviewed by a Catholic spiritual director to cross check that all statements align with the teachings and tenants of the Roman Catholic Church.

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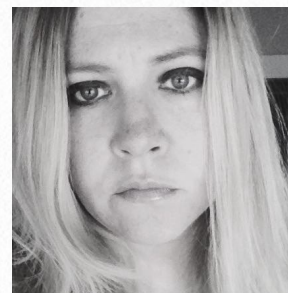
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FIRST PETER

DAY 1: INTRODUCTION

Many people have this misconception that having a life in faith is easy, borderline childish, naive, and stupid. In reality, life as a Christian is a constant challenge. For one thing, God constantly pushes us outside of our comfort zones and asks us change.

Most of us don't like to change unless we feel that it's absolutely necessary. But as C.S. Lewis said "I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."

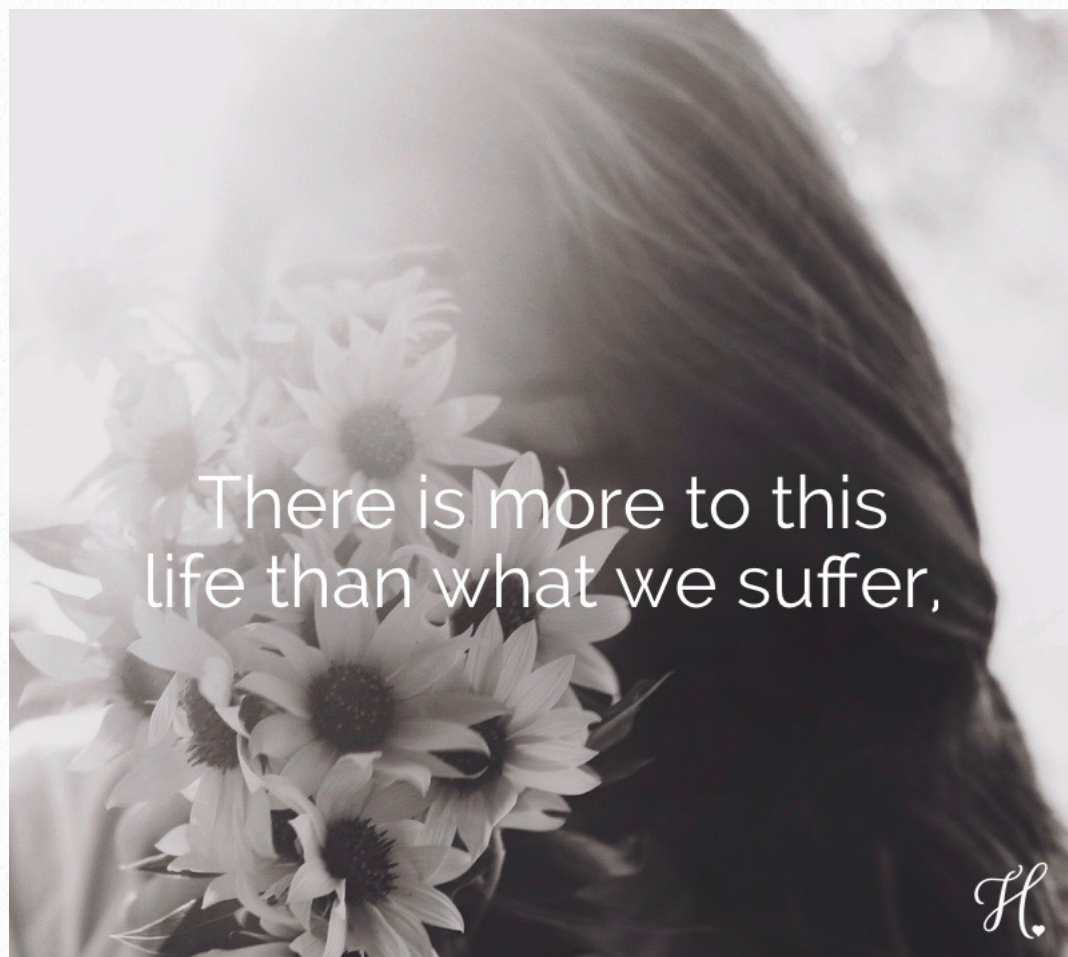
First Peter could be considered a short guide to living a Christ-filled life. A lot of the advice in this short letter centers on discipline. And granted, discipline doesn't sound like a whole lot of fun. It brings to mind montages from army movies with very loud drill instructors or memories of school uniforms and nuns with rulers.

But it's not like that at all. Discipline gives our lives structure. Discipline refines us, challenges us, improves us. We all have a desire for some kind of solid ground and a life in Christ gives us that.

Having a life in Christ means that we are called to become the best version of ourselves. We undergo trials by fire and slowly, but surely we start to change. The idea of change is a scary one. Funny thing, though, is that these changes don't happen overnight. They happen gradually. It starts out painful, but it becomes a new normal, and all of a sudden, we find ourselves completely different from how we were before.

The other major challenge that comes with living a Christian life is that not everyone is going to like it. We get called names like "small minded," "backwards-thinking," and "foolish." Sometimes, the name calling turns into outright harassment in the name of making sure that people stay in their "safe spaces." In the most extreme cases, some Christians are even killed for what they believed in.

1 Peter debunks another popular misconception about Christianity: the idea that people are only Christian for some kind of personal gain. Yes, we all long for Heaven and we all want to go to Heaven, but ideally, we pursue Heaven with God in our hearts and not ourselves. Being a Christian doesn't make our earthly lives will get any better when we have to endure suffering, but, like the changes that we implement into our lives, our suffering is done for the greater glory of God. So, to echo the very famous British catchphrase,



Peter asks us to "Keep Calm and Carry On."

Having Jesus Christ in our lives is a gift that we receive in Baptism, but it comes with great responsibility. If we live Christ-filled lives, we open ourselves to being refined, to be changed for the better. In spite of the sufferings we have to endure, 1 Peter reminds us that we suffer for a good reason. That there is more to this life than what we see, than what we suffer. There is eternity.

– Monique



FIRST PETER

DAY 2: INHERITANCE

Today's Verses // 1 Peter 1: 1-12; Matthew 6:21

The word "inheritance" means that you get something that belongs to an older generation, usually at the death of a family member. My mother, for example, inherited some property after my grandfather passed away. The inheritance that Peter describes in today's passage, however, is a little bit different.

"By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1: 3-5)

Read that again for a second. Through Jesus's infinite mercy, we are given a new birth, a living hope, protection by the power of God, and life after death. The inheritance we gain through a life in Christ is immaterial. These things will never rust, rot, get dusty, or eaten by termites. No one can take these things away from us. Our faith is more precious than gold and can endure the trials and tribulations that the world inflicts upon us.

Even though God is invisible to our eyes, we can always ask Him to be present with us in our prayers. We may not even feel Him with us, but He is always there.

Today's passage also reminds me of a verse from the Gospel of Matthew:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Mt 6:19-21)



We all like to collect things. My brother likes action figures. My mom has an entire closet filled with handbags and purses. I like collecting postcards and things that have some kind of memory behind them. However, the things we collect are just that. Things. As much as love as we give to these things, they will eventually go away.

But God's love for us? Jesus's infinite mercy? A new life in Heaven? These things will last forever. It's these things that keep us through

the good times and the bad. It's what gave hope to the martyrs of the church, like St. Joan of Arc and St. Maximilian Kolbe.

As long as we serve God, these wonderful, immaterial consolations become our inheritance. I remember how I volunteered at a retreat and the heartbreak I secretly carried with me at the time. However, one song that constantly played throughout the retreat was Aaron Schust's "My Hope is in You." In spite of my broken heart, God gave me hope that I would eventually get over it. Eventually, I learned from it and moved on. I included this song in the playlist for this Bible study. I pray that the song will give you as much hope as it did for me.

Have hope in the Lord, dearest sisters in Christ!

– *Monique*



Today's Verses // 1 Peter 1: 13-21

The title of today's meditation is the motto of the Jesuits, which translates to "For the Greater Glory of God."

Peter asks us to "prepare your minds for actions; disciplines yourselves."

It doesn't sound like a whole lot of fun. We're all grown ups here, and yet he asks us to act like obedient children. However, he gives us a reason as to why we need to be living holy lives. We don't discipline ourselves just because a government or some other kind of authority figure says so. We don't do it for any sense of personal gain. We don't even do it just because it makes us feel good. We do it for the greater glory of God. We do it because we are saved by Christ.

As Peter says, "Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God."

How exactly do we do that, you ask? Living a holy life goes beyond just wearing a WWJD bracelet, after all. It starts with offering ourselves to God completely and totally. Military boot camps everywhere break their soldiers down in order to build them back up. In a similar way, a life in Christ starts with surrendering ourselves to God in order for Him to make us better.

It's not going to be easy, obviously. We prefer to be the ones in control, the ones dominating other people, instead of letting anyone and anything dominating us. However, we revolve our lives around a lot of things instead of God: our schedules, our goals, our jobs, our ambi-

tions. Or worse still, we give ourselves to people who end up using us and casting us aside when they no longer need us.

So what makes God any different? To start with, he's the one who created us. Our hearts were designed for His love and to paraphrase St. Augustine, our hearts will always be restless until they rest in God. Second of all, he saved us from sin and death. As Peter said "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ..." Last, but not least, God loves us.

The song from the 1 Peter playlist that I want to feature today is "My Heart is Yours" by Passion featuring Kristian Stanfill. The song talks about God taking everything from us. Don't be afraid to surrender yourselves to Him, sisters in Christ, because He will give you so much more than what you offer to Him in return.

I'm going to leave you with a prayer by St. Ignatius of Loyola. I hope that this prayer will become a part of your everyday life.

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what
you will.
Give me only your love and your
grace,
that is enough for me.



May we all surrender ourselves to the Lord, dearest sisters in Christ!

– Monique

FIRST PETER

DAY 4: PURIFIED FOR
AN EVERLASTING LOVE

Today's Verses // 1 Peter 1: 22-25, Matthew 22:34-40

My absolute favorite fairy tale is and always will be Beauty and the Beast. The Disney version that came out in 1991 is still my favorite Disney movie. I love that the Beast had to win Belle's love by saving her life and being her friend. Eventually, he loved her enough to let her go. It wasn't until Belle came back and told him how she loved him that the Beast turned into a prince.

One moral that the fairy tale teaches is that love has the power to change people, but only if they are willing to change. God's love is very similar in that sense that it changes us for the better. His love can't be earned or bought, but instead is freely given. When we receive God's love, we become purified. The love we receive is different from the love that we would have for things or for a significant other. It's a love that lasts forever.

However, that love won't change us unless we allow God to change us. One way of allowing that love to change us is to follow the commandment that Jesus gave us: Love God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22: 37-40)

Which is hardest for you? Loving God? Loving your neighbor? Or loving yourself? It seemed easy to love God back when we were children or when we were starting out in our new lives in faith. It's not easy to love God when bad things happen or when we feel stuck in a rut or when we don't feel like God's really there. In spite of how we feel, God has called us to love Him and since He created us, we have a special place in his heart. We belong to Him, so He is always there for us. He is there to provide for us when bad things happen.

He is there for us when we feel stuck in a rut. And even when we don't feel like He's there, He is holding us close to his heart. Loving your neighbor isn't so easy, either. People have a tendency to rub us the wrong way for one reason or another.

Nobody's perfect, after all. We may disagree on politics or how we see religion or what kind of shows we like to watch. It's even harder to love our neighbor when they come in the form of total strangers like the homeless people standing in the streets or mugshots of criminals you see on the evening news. As impossible as it sounds, God calls us to love them, too.



I think loving ourselves comes the hardest, though. We don't want to act like those narcissistic divas who think that they're all that and a bag of chips, to use an old 90s catchphrase. On the other hand, we don't want to look at ourselves and see only our flaws because that's not a healthy way to live. Instead, we need to love ourselves as God loves us.

We are fearfully and wonderfully made, dear sisters in Christ, but we also need to remember to be humble. Look at yourself in the mirror today and thank God for your life, the

body that you have, and all the wonderful qualities He gave to you.

Today, live your lives with JOY: Jesus first, others second, and yourself last. If you need some help remembering, there's this awesome song called Joy from Rend Collective with a wonderful upbeat rhythm that keeps your toes tapping. There's also a wonderful song from Danielle Rose on the Spotify playlist called "Shine Through Me," which is a prayer to make JOY a reality for us.

May God's love help you love and live with JOY, dearest sisters in Christ.

– *Monique*



Today's Verses // 1 Peter 2: 1-10

The name Peter, as many of us know, comes from the Greek word "petros," meaning "rock." I used to joke that the name had a double meaning, referring to Peter being the foundation of the Church and referring to Peter's rock-thick head.

In today's passage, Peter talks about people being "living stone," solid yet moving. These living stones become a spiritual house, God's own chosen people. These people are those who are rid "of all malice, all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander." He refers to people who don't accept Christians as being like the builders that rejected a stone that became the cornerstone.

The living stones turn into stumbling blocks for them. The last part of today's passage particularly stands out to me: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of the darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9)

I used to suffer from anxiety attacks. It started when I was in college. I learned some ways to prevent the physical symptoms of anxiety, such as switching out coffee for tea, but after college ended, my anxiety got so bad that I had to take medication as needed for it. The anxiety was triggered by the constant changes happening: changing my major, the death of a beloved teacher and friend, moving back home, graduating.

Then the anxiety continued because I was afraid of the future. I didn't have a job and still lived at home. Through renewing my faith in Christ, I eventually found a new life outside the safety of a college campus. I volunteered at my parish, I went to a lot of retreats, and eventually I started teaching Catechism to little kids.

I gradually stopped taking my medication because I no longer needed it. As of now, my anxiety attacks only occur once or twice a year, and I can handle them without medication. This is a big difference over what I had to deal with before and what others who have more severe symptoms have to live with on a daily basis.

The healing process started when I offered my anxieties to God. I constantly prayed for the healing of my heart. That healing came in the form of new friends and a renewal of spirit from volunteering and going on retreats. I also sought counseling that helped me to understand where my anxieties were coming from.

Through God, I was brought out of the darkness of my fears for the future and into the light of his magnificent love. Whenever I suffer an anxiety attack (as seldom as they happen), I say that I am shaken, not stirred. (Yes, like the James Bond martini.)

Today, I want to ask that you pray for those who suffer from anxiety on a daily basis. Pray for their healing. Then listen to Matthew West's "Into the Light." The story behind that song is also on the playlist. I pray that if you are undergoing any anxieties right now, that God will lead you into the light of his love and make you rock steady, able to be shaken, but never stirred.

Stay solid, dearest sisters in Christ!



– *Monique*

FIRST PETER

DAY 6: STRENGTH IN ADVERSARY

Today's Verses // 1 Peter 2: 11-25

Today's passage is going to make you feel uncomfortable. I'm not gonna lie. I had some trouble getting my head around the fact that Peter wasn't preaching civil disobedience and told slaves to be obedient to their masters. But remember that there's always a context to the Scriptures. Even though we have a tendency to distrust authority given our cynical 21st century mentality, we still look towards our leaders for guidance and assurance.

First of all, think about the audience Peter was addressing. He was talking to Gentiles who didn't have the power to change the society that they lived in. Strangers in a strange land. Slavery wasn't the cruel, harsh practice that took up half of our American History books, but it wasn't exactly a picnic either. But instead of going against the law and risk everyone's lives,

Peter asked his audience to make the best of a bad situation. Or to use a more modern phrase "Bloom where you're planted."

We may not be slaves anymore, but we can all relate to the idea of enduring suffering. We have a choice on how we can deal with it, though. We can complain and whine or we can offer our sufferings to God who understands all too well how we feel.

One verse that particularly stands out to me is "As servants of God live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil." (1 Peter 2:16) Just because we're living in a society where we aren't slaves and have the freedom to do whatever we want doesn't mean that we act like a bunch of party animals. Nor should we act like entitled brats that think that we

should get everything that we want or say whatever we want because it's a free country. Instead, Peter says "Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge." (1 Peter 2:12)



So no matter who's in charge on Earth, we ought to live our lives in as God wants us to lead them. This doesn't go against the idea of civil disobedience. A great example of someone who practice civil disobedience while still accepting the authority at the time was Saint John Paul II. Pope John Paul II never got in trouble for breaking the law. In spite of Poland being under Nazi, and later on Communist regimes, Pope John Paul II, or Karol Wojtyla as he was known at the time, conducted himself as a dutiful civil servant. He worked in a rock quarry during World War II, which

saved him from being sent to a concentration camp. When he became a bishop (and later archbishop) during the Communist regime, he made a joke of the fact that he was constantly being spied on and followed. In spite of the fact that he constantly defied authority, he never outright broke the law. In other words, he bloomed where he was planted.

Eventually, God chose Karol to become Pope John Paul II and the Polish Pope became a great influence in the fall of the Communist regime that suffocated Poland and many other parts of the world. There is a time to rebel and there is a time to accept authority, but ultimately follow God above all else.

If you want to know more about the Church's stances on social situations, I recommend reading Compendium on Social Justice.

Today's featured song is "Greater" by MercyMe. No matter what kind of suffering we have to endure in our lives, remember that God is greater.

Keep fighting the good fight, dearest sisters in Christ!

– *Monique*

FIRST PETER

DAY 7: LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Today's Verses // 1 Peter 3: 1-12, Ephesians 5: 22-33

We've all rolled our eyes at that passage from Ephesians about wives being subject to their husbands. We live in an age where women don't have to depend on a man to get what they need and we can dress however we want to. So why on Earth is Peter asking wives to accept the authority of their husbands and to not adorn themselves by dressing nicely?

Take a step back and take a deep breath, ladies. It's all a matter of context. This passage asks women to lead by example. While we are free to dress how we want to, the evidence of our holy lives is better shown by how we act as people. True beauty, after all, is found within. Don't worry so much about having the latest hairstyle, the trendiest accessories, or a closet filled with designer clothes. Men are definitely visual creatures, but if you ask your significant other (or a beloved family member) what they find most beautiful about you, they're more than likely to (hopefully) say something about the way that you smile or something related to your personality.

The second part of today's passage also feels a bit counter-productive. "Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but on the contrary, repay with a blessing." (1 Peter 3:9) It's a bit reminiscent of Jesus asking us to turn the other cheek. But what exactly does that mean? It doesn't mean that we act like doormats or run away from the evil that we encounter. Instead, we lead by example.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta didn't have it easy, living in a country many different religions are seen in conflict with each other and especially against Christianity. I recently

watched a wonderful biopic about Mother Teresa that showed her leading by example by keeping calm in the face of adversity.

A large group of locals were protesting against Mother Teresa and her sisters moving into their village and creating a hospice for the severely sick and dying, thinking that they were buying souls for God. Things got particularly scary when they started throwing rocks against the hospice. However, the ringleader of the group went inside the hospice and saw Mother Teresa tending to the wounds of a Hindu temple priest without even speaking to him. The ringleader stopped the group from attacking the hospice, saying that Mother Teresa was a daughter of their Goddess of Mercy.

By choosing to lead by example, Mother Teresa was able to take care of the poorest of the poor. She still faced adversity, but she repaid those problems by blessing her enemies. The example of Mother Teresa's life inspired hundreds of women to join her in the Missionaries of Charity. To this day, whenever I see a woman dressed in the famous white and blue habits, I feel like I just saw a famous celebrity because the women in the habits are carrying on Mother Teresa's legacy.



Today's featured song comes once again from Danielle Rose called "The Joy of the Lord." It's an upbeat song that reminds us that when we lead by example, we should do so with joy in our hearts.

Blessed Mother Teresa, pray for your fellow sisters in Christ!

– Monique

FIRST PETER

DAY 8: SUFFERING WITH CHRIST

Today's Verses // 1 Peter 3: 13-22, Matthew 5: 10-11, Daniel 1: 3-21

When I was a kid, one of my favorite shows to watch was VeggieTales. One of the stories from the VeggieTales series was inspired by the story of Daniel's friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abendego, who called Rack, Shack, and Benny in this kid-friendly retelling. The three boys worked in a chocolate bunny factory and were promoted to factory managers when they decided not to eat as many bunnies as their co-workers.

However, their lives were quickly put in danger when their boss Nebbie K. Nezzar created a giant bunny statue and asked all of his employees to bow to it and for the three boys to lead a song praising the bunny. The boys refused to do so because they wanted to honor God, so Nebbie threw them into a furnace.

When the three boys were inside the furnace, one of Nebbie's men looks inside and says: "Hey boss, how many guys did we throw into the furnace?" Nebbie replies: "Uh, three?" His employee said: "Well it looks like there are four guys in there now and one of them's real shiny!" Rack, Shack, and Benny were quickly taken out of the furnace and Nebbie realized that God saved them from the burning flames.

Doing the right thing is always easy when everyone else is doing it. It's a lot harder to do so when you're doing good, but end up suffering for doing so. In today's passage, Peter reminds us that when we suffer for doing the right thing, we are suffering with Christ. We shouldn't be afraid of suffering because Christ is the reason for our hope.

The second episode of Fr. Robert Barron's Catholicism series looks into the Beatitudes under the lens of St. Thomas Aquinas.

The last beatitude that Fr. Robert Barron looks into is “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.” Fr. Robert Barron examined the previous beatitudes as counterpoints to what he calls the four “addictions”: wealth, pleasure, power, and honor. The last beatitude is counterpoint to the addiction to honor.



At first, I didn't understand how honor could be an addiction. I come from a culture that values having honor and dignity. However, there are a lot of ways that the desire for honor can develop into something you want to have more and more of no matter how much you already have. We may not want a million dollars or a position of power or the pleasure of eating giant hot fudge sundae, but there are many times in our lives that we seek the approval of others.

And unlike the other three addictions, honor is something immaterial (unless it comes in the form of gold plaques and various degrees or certifications). According to Fr. Robert Barron, the perfect example of how the Beatitudes are lived out is found in Christ crucified. The crucified Jesus didn't have any wealth. He was stripped naked and his hands and feet were nailed to the cross. He couldn't enjoy any pleasure because he endured agonizing physical, psychological, and even spiritual sufferings. He was powerless, unable to move or defend himself.

Most of all, on the cross, Jesus was denied any kind of honor and dignity, as evidenced by the jeers of "If He's the Son of God let him come down from the cross so that we may finally believe!"

The best way to follow what Peter says in today's passage is to lead a life of humility. Humility is the complete opposite of seeking honor. A great prayer that will help you increase in humility is the Litany of Humility, which is one of my favorite prayers. Through humility, we learn to die to ourselves and be risen in Christ.

Today's featured song is "I Shall Not Want" by Audrey Assad, which was inspired by the Litany of Humility. Stay humble in faith, dearest sisters in Christ!

– *Monique*

FIRST PETER

DAY 9: DISCIPLINE AND STRENGTH

Today's Verses // 1 Peter 4: 1-11

One of my favorite movies growing up was Disney's *Mulan*. One of the more well-loved parts of the movie was the training montage in the military camp that Mulan joins under the guise of a man named Ping. Shang shoots an arrow to the top of a tall pole and holds two weights: one representing discipline, the other representing strength. Every soldier in the camp had to try to climb to the arrow while carrying those two weights.

Nobody succeeds in doing so, which leads into the famous training montage song "I'll Make a Man Out of You."

Today's passage from 1 Peter is reminiscent of that training montage. He asks us not to give into the vices you'd hear about in Top 40 music like clubbing or getting drunk or giving our love freely to complete and total strangers. We will be held accountable for our actions, so proceed with caution ladies.

That's the weight of discipline that we have to carry. It doesn't sound like a lot of fun, conducting ourselves with discipline. But I've heard stories of women seeking happiness through what the world says is good and coming out of it all feeling empty. In contrast, women who lead lives with dignity and serve others find life to be fulfilling and meaningful.

The second part of today's passage emphasizes loving one another, serving each other with God's grace, and letting God be in all the things that we do. When we serve, we do so with the weight of God's strength. It was through serving others with God's strength that I

was able to get out of my post-college crisis and work towards becoming an independent adult. However, we can't live our lives with just discipline or God's strength.

We have to combine them. Towards the end of "I'll Make a Man Out of You," Shang tells Mulan to go home because she's constantly failing in their training drills. As she leaves for home, she passes by the pole and figures out how to get the arrow from the top. She ties the weights together and uses the strength and discipline to pull herself up, step by step. The sun rises on the camp as she gets closer and closer to the top. Shang steps out of his tent and finds the arrow thrown to the ground, with Mulan sitting on the top of the pole, victorious. After that, the soldiers are able to improve in their drills, with Mulan becoming the most improved one of all.

We may not be part of a real army (unless you're actually in the military, in which case, more power to you), but we can all use strength and discipline in our lives. It takes strength and discipline to handle a room full of noisy little kids without losing your patience. It takes

strength and discipline to deal with co-workers and bosses we may not always get along with. It takes strength and discipline to cope with the changes that life throws at us.

This strength and discipline doesn't come from ourselves, but from God.

Today's featured song is "Press On" by Building 429 featuring Blanca Callahan. The song talks about enduring the daily hardships while fully relying on God to get through it all.

I pray that God gives us the strength and discipline to press on in our lives, dearest sisters in Christ.



– Monique



Today's Verses // 1 Peter 4: 12-19

Why does a God who is supposed to be all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving allow human beings to suffer? This question gets brought up by Christians and non-believers alike. There aren't any easy answers, to be honest. Humans were born with a tendency to sin ever since the original sin of Adam and Eve.

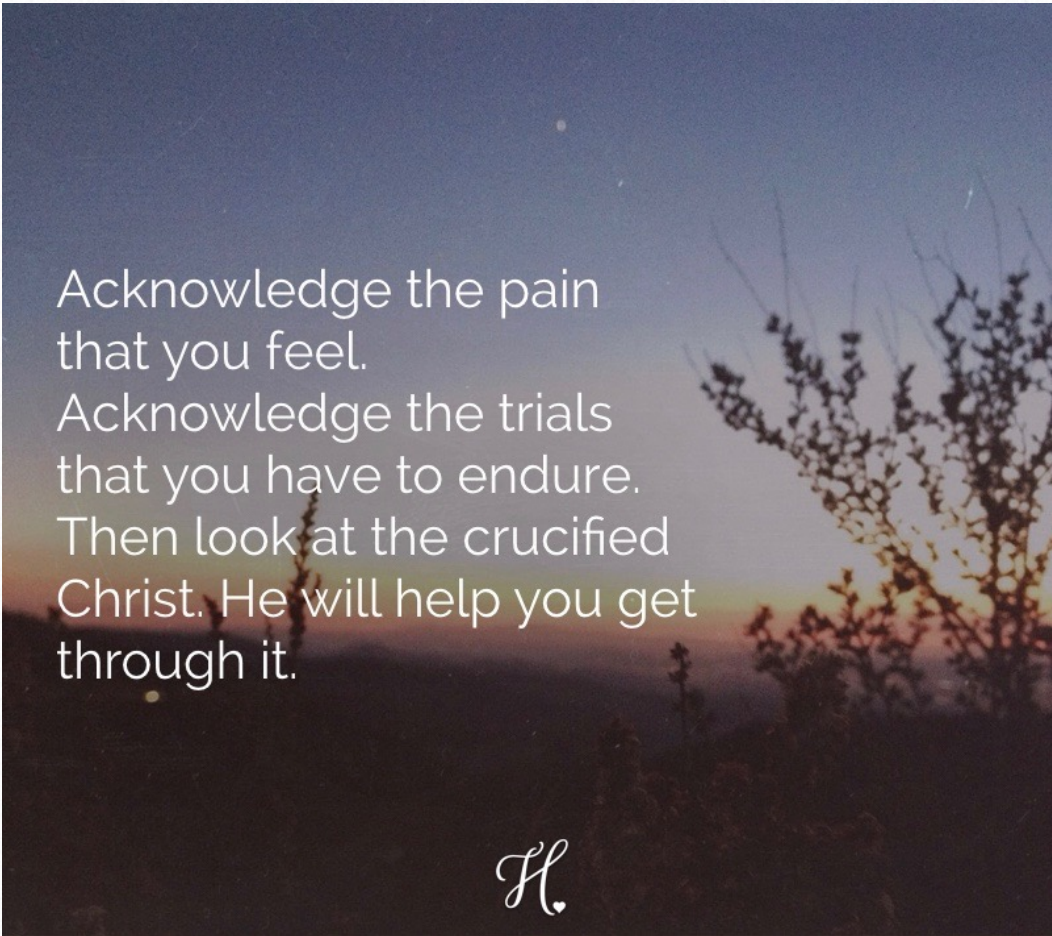
People make choices that can change things for the worse either accidentally or on purpose. Bad things happen to good people. It's a fact of life. I'm not here to try and solve that problem of evil. I'm not here to lie to you and say that all your problems will go away overnight. The answer I always hear about why bad things happen is because God allows them to and that he works the trials and tribulations we suffer into His will.

It's not an answer we like to hear. Unfortunately, sometimes we have to make do with what we have in front of us. Jesus wasn't exactly spared from suffering, either. Being crucified wasn't exactly a picnic. In fact, the word "excruciating" comes from the Latin word for cross and torture. To the Romans, the cross was a torture device, meant to make the people on the cross struggle to breathe, with the person eventually dying of asphyxiation.

Today's passage from 1 Peter says that when we suffer, we share in Christ's sufferings. An intense experience I had at my college retreat was a very dramatized version of that. During one of my retreats in college, we did something called the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, as created by St. Ignatius of Loyola.

These exercises put you into the stories of the Bible and let you experience them through meditation and visualization. The passage that my friends and I meditated on was the one of the Good Thief. As the retreat leaders read the story of the Good Thief, they wanted us to imagine ourselves on the cross, with nails in our hands and feet.

Given the overactive imagination I had, I immediately saw myself on a cross. I felt a cold breeze flowing through my hands and feet, as if they were pierced. My back suddenly felt painful, as if something hard was pressed against it. I started hyperventilating as I imagined myself looking at Jesus and saying "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."



Acknowledge the pain
that you feel.
Acknowledge the trials
that you have to endure.
Then look at the crucified
Christ. He will help you get
through it.

H.

I gasped and open my eyes, as if waking up from the worst nightmare. My body was still shaking. But it was over. Never feel like you are the only one in the world who feels the pain that you feel. Christ Crucified feels your pain and is taking it with Him to Heaven.

It sounds easy to say "Hand it over" or "Offer it up," almost dismissive of the pain. But to quote one of my favorite authors: "That's the thing about pain. It demands to be felt." So acknowledge the pain that you feel. Acknowledge the trials that you have

to endure. Then look at the crucified Christ and ask him to help you get through it.

Today's featured song is from Matt Maher's "Saints and Sinners" album called "Firelight." Matt Maher said that this song was inspired by the life of Mother Teresa, who had to endure a great interior suffering on top of all of the trials and tribulations in her life. I think this song is a wonderful prayer for those who are seeking for God's love and strength in their sufferings and trials.

I pray that whatever trials you endure, you come out of it stronger, dearest sisters in Christ!

– *Monique*

FIRST PETER

DAY 11: A LESSON IN LEADERSHIP

Today's Verses // 1 Peter 5: 1-4

What makes a good leader? Today's passage from 1 Peter addresses church leaders, but I think it can be easily applied to today because it talks about the qualities of a good leader: being responsible of the people you overlook, but not asserting your authority too much.

Being in charge gives some people the idea that they can just tell everyone working for them what to do, no questions asked. "You say 'Jump,' I say 'How high?'" kind of thing. Other examples of bad leadership can be seen in corrupt politicians and corporate executives. Even women in charge can succumb to the corruption of power, such as Queen Jezebel and Lady Macbeth.

But good leaders exist. In both men and women. Just look at Judith, from the previous Bible study, who was able to lead an army to victory. Or Queen Esther who saved her people from genocide. There are also leaders found within the saints such as Joan of Arc, who lead an army, and Queen Elizabeth of Hungary. (See, there is such a thing as a good queen!)

But one example of a great female leader from the 20th century who eventually became a saint was St. Katherine Drexel. She was born in Philadelphia to a wealthy, devoutly Catholic family. You'd think that she would become some kind of spoiled debutante, especially when she lost her parents and became heiress to a large fortune. However, she was actually intimidated by all the money she had.

She confessed to her spiritual director that she felt like a little girl who ripped the face of a porcelain doll only to discover that it was straw. She eventually gained an audience with Pope Leo XIII and told him about her desire to help out the Catholic Indian Mission. She said "Holy

Father, what you must do is find an order of priests or sisters who will catechize, teach, and care for these people." Pope Leo XIII told her "You should be that missionary."

Eventually, Katherine Drexel did create that order she so desired: The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. Katherine's legacy can be found today in Xavier University in New Orleans, the first historically black college as well as the schools, hospitals, and institutions she founded all across the country.

All of these things were funded by Katherine's inheritance. If that's not a great example of leadership, I don't know what is! Another modern day example of great leadership can be found in Dorothy Day. Dorothy Day was a young social activist and spiritual seeker who converted to Catholicism during the Great Depression. She worked together with her friend Peter Maurin to create a newspaper called the Catholic Worker, which emphasizes the importance of social justice.



She also set up the first Catholic Worker House of Hospitality in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The Catholic Worker is still around today, sold for the same price it did in the 30s: a penny. Not to mention there are houses of hospitality all over the country and around the world.

We may not be rich heiresses or social activists, but God is calling us to be leaders in some shape or form. Start by volunteering to be in charge of something small, like a fundraiser, or start teaching Catechism. You never know where these things will lead you. Just remember to let God lead you as you lead others.

Today's featured song is one of my favorites: Francesca Battistelli's "He Knows My Name." This song reminds us that we are not called to be leaders for the sake of being famous or for honor, but because we're leading in God's name. Even if nobody around us sees the hard work that we do, God always does.

I pray that you will all be great leaders, dearest sisters in Christ!

– *Monique*



Today's Verses // 1 Peter 5: 5-14

The overall themes in this letter are easy to see: humility, discipline, strength, and endurance. These things are brought up in today's passage. It takes humility so that we may be one day exalted. It also takes humility to cast all of our anxieties onto the Lord because we have to acknowledge that we can't solve our problems without His help. It takes discipline to resist temptation. It takes strength to be steadfast in our faith. It takes endurance to deal with the sufferings inflicted upon us on a daily basis.

If the last few days have felt like a spiritual boot camp, they probably were. In fact, the words "spiritual boot camp" bring to mind St. Josemaria Escriva, the founder of a lay order called Opus Dei. The name may sound familiar to those who hear the conspiracy theories concocted by Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code*, but none of those theories are true. Opus Dei means Work of God, and it was a lay order that emphasizes becoming holy through doing ordinary things with a Christian spirit. There are approximately 83,000 and 1800 priests who are members of Opus Dei today.

The other thing that Josemaria Escriva was famous for is his book called *The Way*. *The Way* reads like a devotional, with little quotes and guidelines from Josemaria Escriva about ways to improve life. My personal favorite is "Don't say 'That person gets on my nerves.' Think 'This person sanctifies me.'" I think we all have a tendency to compare ourselves to other people and find ourselves lacking. This comparison often leads to anger and jealousy. So how can someone we hate sanctify us?

I'm not the kind who usually compares herself to other people, but unfortunately, I still fall prey to it, especially when the person I compare myself to seems to be prettier, more successful, and wiser than me. I get angry and seethingly jealous just thinking about this particular person. However, after I set my anger aside, I realize that I can still learn from this person, even though I am jealous of them. I can learn to value myself just as they cherish their looks without being vain. I can strive to achieve my own goals, knowing that I can have my own levels of success. I can learn from their wisdom and apply it to my own life.

I recommend you look up some quotes from Josemaria Escriva or think about the problems in your life and the people who get on your nerves. How can the problems of our lives help sanctify ourselves? How can we use humility, discipline, strength, and endurance with the trials that we face? It all starts by asking God for help in keeping calm and carrying on.

Today's featured song is "Stronger" from Mandisa. There are a lot of songs out there that are inspired by the motto "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." Just keep in mind that it starts with the humility to admit that we aren't strong enough on our own. That God gives us the strength to press on. That we need the discipline of the Holy Spirit to be vigilant and faithful. That we can endure all things as long as God is at our side.



Be strong like an Amazon, my dearest sisters in Christ!

– Monique

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