

Secretum Meum Mihi



Volume 1, Number 3



November 2006



A Newsletter for Catholic Women

What does it mean to be a Spouse?

Few women today would say that they aspire only to be a good wife. Her successful endeavors might also include motherhood, friendships, a career and household management. Yet, all these goods flow directly from the “spousal” relationship at the center of a woman’s vocation, be she single, married or consecrated. Women are uniquely gifted in receiving and giving love, and helping others succeed.

In her 1928 essay, *The Separate Vocations of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace*, Edith Stein differentiates between the original order created by God in the Garden of Eden, the fallen order after original sin, and the redemptive order instituted by Christ on the cross. It is foundational for women in particular to understand the potential of spousal love within these categories.

In Genesis, both accounts of the creation testify that Adam and Eve are equal in the eyes of the Creator. Their mutual trust flows from God’s gift of life, which in turn they give to each other as helpmates. Their shared duty to know, love and serve God reveals love as fruitful, life-giving.

The serpent in Genesis 3 causes Eve to question her trust in God, and leads both Adam and Eve to disobey God directly. After the fall, their distorted spousal relationship loses the power to become life-giving in all but the carnal sense.

(continued on page two)

Woman as Spouse

Feature Essay: Page 1
What does it mean to be a Spouse?

Interview: Page 2
Kathy Sullivan Vandenburg:
Why I believe in a paradigm shift

Scripture Study: Page 4
St. Paul on Obedience within Marriage

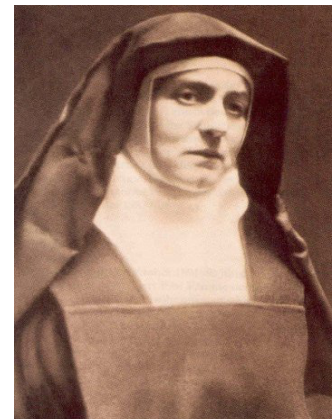
Prayer Intentions: Page 5
For Racial Bias and Tension

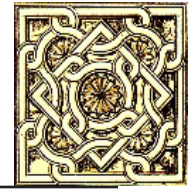
Historical Sketch: Page 6
Mother Teresa Draw in the Dirt

Book Review: Page 7
The Bridal Wreath, by Sigrid Undset

Secretum Meum Mihi means “My secret is mine”

St. Edith Stein (1891-1942) became a Catholic in 1922 after reading the autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila. When asked about her sudden decision to convert, she wrote, “secretum meum mihi”. She became a Carmelite in 1934, but perished in Auschwitz. Her feast is August 9.





Jesus and Mary take the place of Adam and Eve in the new covenant. The power plays of domination and manipulation are countered by the submission of Mary in the Annunciation and of Jesus in Gethsemane. Trust in God and each other is restored by loving obedience which defies worldly logic. In the redemptive order, men and women receive freedom in Christ, not only freedom “from” sin, but the freedom “to” become what we were created by God to be.

For women, Mary is our model of spousal commitment to Christ. This is not an Oedipal complex a la Sigmund Freud, but the exact description of the relationship between Mother and Messiah. Remember that the Annunciation preceded the Nativity. Prior to her exaltation as the mother of God, Mary had to espouse herself, literally, to God the Holy Spirit. Only then could her vocation as mother begin. As the new Eve, Mary’s spiritual powers enable all of the temporal duties of her state in life.

You might think, “This is a lovely ideal. But the Church is a mess. Where’s the freedom?” Alas, the redemption begun on the cross has yet to be completely fulfilled. We reside temporally between the Cross and the Second Coming. Thus, our personal trust in God and obedience to His promptings is crucial to salvation history. Women have a uniquely prophetic role to play in the Church, as they are intuitively receptive to the Holy Spirit in ways that inspire faith and perseverance in others.

Edith Stein was no ivory tower idealist. She was keenly aware of the dangers and challenges inherent in submitting to male leadership in the temporal order. Women are physically vulnerable, and yet spiritually usually stronger. Prophets such as Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila convinced Stein, an ardent feminist, that spousal love could be more powerful, leading both men and women to the promised Kingdom. Seek, and ye shall find.

Peace be with you

Kristen West McGuire interviews Kathy Sullivan Vandenburg: “Why I Believe in a Paradigm Shift”

(Ed. note: Ms. Vandenberg was “ordained” as a “womanpriest” this year by a woman “bishop” who has already received official notice of excommunication from the Vatican. While sorrowful over her actions, Secretum Meum Mihi editor Kristen West McGuire asked her to explain the spirituality that led her to this.)

Q. Tell me about your family of origin.

A. My father didn’t go to any church. But he had a great reverence for nature. My mother was a good mother--so supportive. She made sure I went to church and CCD on Sunday. We lived in rural Waukesha County. I would read and sit and think out in the back forty acres behind our home. I first became aware of God’s presence there.

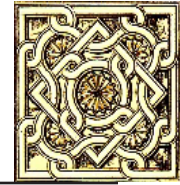
Q. What was your religious education like?

A. I never went to Catholic school, so I wasn’t aware of the inside technicalities and subtle religious practices that students in Catholic schools had to deal with every day. CCD was a pleasant religious experience, taught by nuns. I don’t really remember my first communion.

Q. As a young mother after the Second Vatican Council, how did the changes strike you?

A. We had home Masses, and study groups of families. We realized that God wasn’t out there, but in our homes, on our living room tables. It didn’t have to be so rigid -- you could grow in spirituality without going to Church. I was involved in the parish council, and liturgy committee, and was very active in starting a preschool. I was a very good Catholic and I continue to be a very good Catholic.

Before, it was very easy to be a Catholic; whatever Father said, you did. Through prayer, I learned I had to make my own decisions. Father doesn’t have all the answers, but God does. If you’re connected with God, God speaks to you. God is a nag! When I started prayer journaling, God would say to me, “Great things are coming, beyond your wildest expectations. “



My best expectation at the time was to raise my children-- that remains my greatest accomplishment. That's what I was called to do.

Q. What brought you to believe that you were being called to the priesthood?

A. I went to a Lutheran minister for counseling during my divorce. One day he asked, "What do you feel that God is calling you to?" And I responded, before I knew what I was saying, "God is calling me to ordained ministry." Then he said, "I knew you were going to say that. You act just like the seminarians."

I knew there was something different within me. I told my spiritual director, and asked him, "What do you think I answered?" And he said, "You're called to ordination in the Catholic Church. You act just like the men in the seminary act." But then, what do you do? There weren't any options for women then. So, I got a masters in counseling at University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.



Kathy Sullivan Vandenburg

Q. But you did go to seminary?

A. My decision to go to St. Francis Seminary was difficult. The whole time, people would ask me why I was there, and I told them, "Because I am going to be ordained."

Q. When a woman becomes a nun, people see her as "married" to Jesus. When a man becomes a priest, people think of him as "married" to the Church. How do you view your "ordination" in that light?

A. (a long pause) I hadn't thought about it that way before. I don't see it as a marrying of the Church. This is a new paradigm. I guess I am learning how to be a "womanpriest". I don't expect to ever be in a parish-- my ministry is to the disenfranchised.

Q. Like me, many of my readers disagree with the recent step you took. How would you explain to them what you did?

A. It was "prophetic obedience". After listening carefully to what God is saying, checking it out with prayerful people, and reading scripture, I had to be obedient to what God wanted for me to do.

I didn't want to go as far as I have. They kill the prophets. They do...

Kathy's Favorite Prayer

The Jesus Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
Son of the Living God
have mercy on me, a sinner.
Amen.

(Kathy says that when she first began praying, she was strongly influenced by the book, *Way of a Pilgrim*, a 19th century Russian classic by an anonymous author. She prayed using a rope of 100 beads, and said this prayer, slowly and steadily, as an entry into contemplative prayer.)



Bible Study:

Ephesians 5:21-23

St. Paul on Obedience

Within Marriage

Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife, just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her, to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

So husbands should love their wives as they love their own bodies. He who loves his wife, loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

For this reason, a man shall leave [his] father and [his] mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church. In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband.

(New American Bible)

Context: St. Paul is well aware that he is introducing a radical concept here. He models this section after similar household codes in Greco-Roman times that outlined the household relationships. Christianity was (correctly) appraised by some as a challenge to the social order by advocating equality. For this reason, Paul seeks to outline a hierarchical formula in Christian terms. It is fair to say that one might trace the beginning of the modern women's movement all the way back to Paul, who challenges men to lay down their lives for their wives.

Translation: In Colossians 3, one finds a similar listing of the various duties of "inferiors" to their superiors, including the relationship of the slave to his master, and the child to the parent. Experts have noted many structural and verbal similarities between the two books in the original Greek.

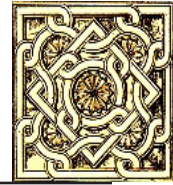
Vocabulary:

to be subordinate: The Greek term here (*hupotasso*) has all of the connotations of our own English term. (Obedience to authority of some kind must be a universal linguistic concept.)

without spot or wrinkle: the connotation of the Greek spot (*spilos*) includes a defect or disgrace, and wrinkle (*rhutis*) especially references facial wrinkles.

holy and without blemish: this phrase is a referral back to the Old Testament concept of being chosen, and the chosen people of God.

respect: The Greek term (*phobeo*) is more directly translated as "fear", or, perhaps, awe and reverence.



Few married men in this day and age insist that their wives must obey them. At the same time, it is clear from the success of pop culture psychologists like Dr. Phil that relations between the sexes haven't evolved much past the original apple bite that broke the harmony of Eden.

The first lines of this scripture intrigue me, in juxtaposition with the last line. Essentially, Paul is pointing out that leaders endure a passion all their own. As too many evangelical pastors have found out the hard way, he who exalts himself is humbled. Women have good reasons to fear in the post-Hugh Hefner era.

We each belong to the Lord in varying degrees of justice and mercy. The mutual submission of married life is not a blind one, but entirely focused on the good God who needs us to be His hands and feet in the world. Leaders lead by example. If we wish others to submit (or respect), we must model our own submission (and honor) to God first, and to others in service second. It is indeed a mystery...but a very powerful tool to build the Kingdom.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think St Paul had a realistic vision of the possibilities of married life? Why or Why not?
2. When St Paul instructs the father to "lay down his life" for the sake of the wife and the children, what does he mean? What are some concrete examples of this idea?
3. In an abusive or dysfunctional relationship, how does the injunction to "fear" one's husband translate? How would you encourage and strengthen a woman facing such evil?

Prayer Intentions

For an end to racial bias
and tension in America

During my studies at Wesley Theological Seminary, I learned that I was a racist. I wasn't wearing a white sheet, nor was I spouting neo-Nazi trash talk. But I did not understand how my experience as a white woman was different from the experiences of my brothers and sisters of other ethnic backgrounds. I am not certain yet that I do understand completely. Careful listening taught me that African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans are people first, and ethnic minorities second.

The difference I missed was subtle, but important. I rarely am questioned about my credentials or worthiness. This is a luxury that people of color cannot rely upon. Racial slurs and intimidation still happen, in addition to honest misunderstandings and complacency with the status quo that impedes race relations even more. Jesus calls us to meet new persons and new situations mindful of the full dignity of all His children. If we seek Him in others, we can then receive the fullness of His gifts found in each soul we might encounter.

Native Americans have long suffered discrimination in our country. See a report on local conditions for Navajos in Farmington, NM: www.usccr.gov/pubs/122705_FarmingtonReport.pdf

Illegal immigration is regrettably a hot button issue in many communities. The USCC has issued a statement on this issue here:

<http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2006/06-197.shtml>



African Americans in particular still wonder today if our election system fairly counts their votes. A report on voter intimidation by People for the American Way and the NAACP, is available here:

<http://www.pfaw.org/pfaw/general/default.aspx?oId=16368>

LORD, we pray:

* for all Americans to combat the evil of racism in our country on both an individual and corporate basis;

* for illegal immigrants who risk crossing the border to work in the U.S., that their lives might be spared, and their economic needs be met;

* for an end to the scourge of inner city violence, which disproportionately affects minorities and their families;

* for the healing of those persons bound by the demons of alcoholism, substance abuse and poverty;

* for the complete repentance of those who engage in religious hatred and hate crimes of any kind; and

* for those who knowingly or unknowingly contribute to the perpetuation of racism, that they might be enlightened and repent.

AMEN

Historical Sketch:

Mother Teresa Draws in the Dirt to Start her Order

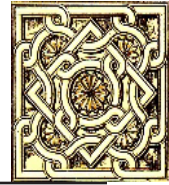
On December 21, 1948, a middle-aged woman in a simple white sari sat under a tree in the Moti Jihl slum of Calcutta, and wrote lessons with a stick in the dirt for the malnourished children at her feet. It was her first day as the foundress of the Missionaries of Charity.

Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, a native Albanian, completed the novitiate of the Sisters of Loreto in Darjeeling in 1931, high in the Himilayan foothills. From its cool air, she descended into Calcutta ready to teach at St. Mary's School in Entally.

She took the name Sr. Teresa at her first vows, honoring St. Therese and her passion for the missions. A gifted teacher, Sr. Teresa became the headmistress not long after taking her final vows in 1937. The Loreto nuns were enclosed, but often sent their charges to serve the poor in the neighboring slums such as Moti Jihl.

Famine, war and religious violence created horrendous suffering in the 1940's in Calcutta. On August 16, 1946, Muslims rioted against Hindus. 5000 died, and another 15,000 were wounded. Sr. Teresa went on her annual retreat two weeks later.

On the train back from Darjeeling on September 10, she heard the call from Jesus to live among and serve the poorest of the poor. She was certain this new "call within a call" was the will of God. But, as a professed nun, she would need permission to follow it.



Her spiritual director, Fr. Celeste Van Exem, S.J., requested that she speak to no one about her new calling while he consulted the local archbishop.

Archbishop Ferdinand Perier was aghast. He knew the Loreto sisters needed Sr. Teresa. And what might befall a lone nun on the streets? He decreed a year of waiting, through 1947. Disappointed, but firm in conviction, Sr. Teresa obeyed.

Early in 1948, Archbishop Perier directed Sr. Teresa to request a release from her vows from the Mother General of Loreto. Teresa wanted to request only exclaustation, the ability to leave the convent to serve the poor. The archbishop insisted that she request secularization, a renunciation of her vows. Fr. Van Exem protested, to no avail.

Despite the wording change, Mother Gertrude Kennedy instructed Sr. Teresa to ask Rome for an indult of exclaustation! Again, Perier insisted that Sr. Teresa request secularization instead. Reluctantly, she complied.

The papal nuncio was in Delhi when the request was received. As conditions in Calcutta were so bad, he granted one year of exclaustation, without sending it to Rome, where the requested secularization request would be rubber-stamped. She would report directly to Archbishop Perier, who was now fully convinced that her calling was from God based on her unwavering obedience.

Finally free to love Jesus in the distressing disguise of the poor, Sr. Teresa began the lonely task of serving, unaware that God's providence would include thousands of nuns who would follow her quiet, prayerful example.

Book Review: The Bridal Wreath by Sigrid Undset

It takes a bit of work to begin the first book of Undset's masterpiece, *Kristin Lavransdatter*, which won the Nobel prize for literature in 1928. Undset's copious research is evident on every page, a tribute to her archaeologist father. The diction is true to its setting in medieval Norway, and detailed footnotes help to acquaint the reader with the meaning of some of the more obscure references. A chapter or two later, you'll be fluent in medieval patter, and eager for the pages to keep turning.

The Bridal Wreath tells the story of young Kristin growing up in the home of a religiously serious father, Lavrans Bjorgulfson, on the estate, Jorundgaard. Her mother, Ragnfrid, is described as "heavy of mood". Early in the book, Kristin is tempted by an "elf-maiden" to don a circlet of golden flowers while gazing upon her beauty in a local pond. This foreshadows the ending, when Kristin dons the bridal crown and gazes into a barrel of water to admire herself.

Originally promised to a suitor chosen for his strategic ownership of neighboring farmland, Kristin convinces her father to allow her to marry her heart's choice, Erlend Nikulausson. The details of their meeting, their trysts and their final engagement illuminate the details of medieval life in a way that challenges your appraisal of your own relationships. It's impossible not to be swept away by the epic insights of Undset's pen.

(continued on page eight)



“To be the Spouse of Christ is the most sublime vocation which has been given, and whoever sees this way open before her will yearn for no other way.” -- Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*

Book Review, continued

A new translation of the full trilogy *Kristin Lavransdatter* by Tiina Nunnally was released last year by Penguin Classics. It's an easier read, with a lilt to the language. For myself, I love the obscure words in my 1951 Knopf edition. It reinforces the sense that one has tiptoed back in time to view a lost world. (Some libraries may have Nunnally's 1997 translation of *The Bridal Wreath* alone.)

Discussion Questions:

1. Fru (Lady) Aashild, the “witch-wife”, becomes a mentor of sorts to Kristin. Although Kristin learns many useful things from the lady, her young heart also learns to chafe at the limits of her country home. The villagers fear Lady Aashild's wisdom. Is there a relationship between superstition and social norms? Should there be?
2. Erlend shows a bumbling indifference and even contempt at times for the holy things of God, including Kristin's honor. Meanwhile, Kristin seems naturally drawn to a trusting faith in God's mercy. How would you describe her attraction to him in terms of her faith?
3. Erlend and Kristin are passionately in love. It affects how Lavrans and Ragnfrid see one another after their daughter's wedding, prompting surprising honesty. Is passion a good thing in marriage? Why or why not?

Secretum Meum Mihi Press

Kristen West McGuire
Founder/Editor in Chief

Editorial Advisory Board

Alexandra Burghardt
Meredith Gould
Beverly Mantyh
Margaret McGuire
Sandra Miesel

Secretum Meum Mihi is a monthly periodical dedicated to fostering the spirituality of Catholic women. Subscriptions are \$12.95/year for download, and \$24.95/yr for U.S. Mail delivery. (International mail delivery \$29.95). Address all correspondence to the address below, or visit our website at:

www.MySecretisMine.com

Coming Next Month:

Woman as Mother

Interview: Meredith Gould:

What's a nice Jewish girl doing in a Church like this?

Bible Study: The Blessed Mother is your mama, too!

Book Review: *The Mistress of Husaby*, by Sigrid Undset

Historical Sketch: The first creche: Pious fable or 18th century marketing ploy?

