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A Sacred Journey

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A Sacred Journey: Christmas in Vienna and New Year in Prague

Traveling with family is a sacred endeavor that opens new horizons, and for my family, this year's journey held a special significance. Inspired by my grandmother's adventurous world tour from 1922-23, we decided to celebrate Christmas in Vienna, Austria, and welcome the New Year in Prague, creating lasting memories reminiscent of her travels.

Anita Willets Burnham, an ambitious artist, wife, mother, and teacher, chronicled her journey in the illustrated travel book *Round the World on a Penny*. Her spirit accompanied us as we embarked on our European tour, reliving her tales of exploration and discovery.

Reflecting on the biblical journey to Bethlehem by Joseph and Mary, our family aimed to emulate the virtues of seeking holiness, finding a safe home, and recognizing our common ancestry as children of God. In the midst of life's challenges, we endeavored to share our gifts and talents, fostering a sense of solidarity with fellow travelers.

Amidst the winter weather and the picturesque landscapes of Austria, we discovered the true treasures of our pilgrimage—castles, cathedrals, and the enchanting Christmas markets. The outdoor markets, alive with the warmth of holiday cheer, showcased talented artists drawing portraits as families enjoyed delicious baked goods.

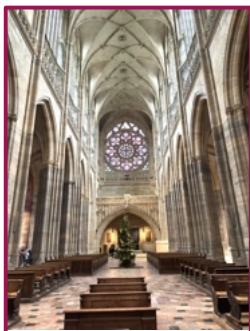
The spirit of my grandmother resonated deeply as the Vienna Boys Choir filled the sacred liturgy on Christmas morning. Renewing my baptismal promises in that chapel alongside my family was a poignant moment, reminding us of the blessings we received during our journey.

I am grateful for the companionship of my family; we faced daily challenges with perseverance and solidarity. The journey through Austria's provinces, though accompanied by castles and cathedrals, became truly memorable during our encounters with the vibrant and boisterous Christmas markets. We also enjoyed our quiet meditations in many churches and chapels.

In the midst of holiday festivities, the greatest gift remained our teacher and Savior, calling us by name and guiding us to love one another in truth and the light of Amazing Grace. On the eve of New Year 2024, we found the perfect roof-top location to see delightful fireworks in the city of Prague and to whisper a thank-you prayer as we exchanged cheerful New Year greetings.

As a member of FCM, I extend this advice: plan a journey for yourself and your loved ones. Embrace the opportunity to celebrate life's pilgrimage, for it is in these shared experiences that the richness of our existence multiplies.

In conclusion, let this be an invitation to my fellow FCM members and readers alike: don't delay or procrastinate—plan your sacred journey and celebrate the adventure that awaits. Amen.



VIENNA HOFBURG CHAPEL



CHRISTMAS MARKET IN VIENNA



ST. VITUS CATHEDRAL
PRAGUE



WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS
CESKY KRUMLOV CZECH
REPUBLIC

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The Ethics of Scripture

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Hospital ethics committee rely on the hospital Chaplains to provide Spiritual insight on the patient autonomy, Ethical decisions for patients who are suffering and wish to die, or patients who object treatment based on his or her Spiritual belief. In 2018 the American College of Surgeons released an article by called "Ethical Framework to Guide Decisions of Treatment over Objection." Christian Doctors question their moral and Scriptural beliefs concerning killing a patient before the patient's time. This paper will argue hospital chaplains face tough questions about patient's autonomy, Spiritual beliefs, and the Doctrine of God.

According to a University PowerPoint presentation there are four branches associated with Ethical systems introduced as "Metaethics: What is the nature of good? Descriptive Ethics: What do people believe? Normative Ethics: What should we do? And Applied Ethics: How do we apply what we believe to a specific issues." Hospital Chaplains face Spiritual questions based on the autonomy of a patient who may not be Christian but his or her right to decide how or when to die is important to them and their families. The category of Normative Ethics would ask the ethics committee what Doctors should do. In the Descriptive ethics Doctors would ask what the patient believes. This is a patient's right to decide against Deontological by Nature or Rule based by "Divine commands theory, natural law and Ethical Rationalism." Teleological consequences focus on individual Physicians belief in either Utilitarianism or Egoism and Aretaic is their integrity to do the right thing for the patient's goal.

One of the prominent non-biblical ethical worldviews that dominate my ministry as a hospital chaplain are decisions patients have made for Death with Dignity. This is when a person has been diagnosed by a physician that he or she has six months or less to live. Death with Dignity will allow the person the right to die on his or her terms. The duty of the physician, staff, and chaplain is to adhere to the wishes of the patient. A term Wilkens calls, "The Categorical Imperative," Wilkens says, "Kant tells us, a duty is what corresponds to the rights of another. Where there are no rights there are no duties."

With the respect of the patient's wishes, Oregon has adopted, "Death with Dignity Act which allows terminally ill Oregonians to end their lives through the voluntary self-administration of lethal medications, expressly prescribed by a physician for that purpose. October 27, 1997." The right to die for someone who is suffering from cancer who has no hope of survival, and a physician has given the patient six months or less to live, the patient is cognizant of the choice he or she is making. This is an exceedingly difficult subject and as a Chaplain I have an obligation (duty) to the patient to be compassionate in choices the patient is making.

9 Rubin J. Prager KM. *Guide to considering nonpsychiatric medical intervention over objection for the patient.* Mayo Clinic 2018), 826-829.
0 John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, (P and R publishing, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 2008). 21.
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Wilkens quotes Kant further referencing what the categorical imperative represents. Wilkens mentions Kant saying, "A categorical imperative would be one which represented an action as objectively necessary in itself apart from its relation to a further end." Wilkens says, "Categorical refers to that which is absolute. A categorical imperative, then, is a command or law that allows for no exceptions." In this case non-biblical would fit the description allowing death by providing the medication to end one's life based on no other option. Did these methods occur in Scripture? Death by sword, Abimelech asked his sword bearer to kill him because "He did not want it said that a woman had killed him" (Judges 9:54).

Suicide death by self-hanging Judas Iscariot. Death with Dignity is the patient who has only days to months to live allows the patient to choose when he or she dies. The un-sedated patient during his or her time only given medication to ease any pain he or she feels. This gives the patient time to say goodbye, complete the legal documents, even be involved in the celebration of life while still alive.

An ethical hospital failure is to tell a cognizant patient that he or she has no medical choices. Rubin and Prager describes seven ethical questions to ask a patient: "1. What is the likely severity of harm without intervention, 2. How imminent is harm without intervention, 3. What is the efficacy of the proposed intervention, 4. What is the risk of the intervention, 5. What is the emotional effect on the patient, 6. What is the patients reason for refusal, 7. What are the logistics of treating over objection."

To summarize, hospital chaplains do face tough questions about patient autonomy, Spiritual beliefs, the Doctrine of God, and doctors who worry about their fate with God. The two questions Rubin and Prager asks that a hospital chaplain focus on for the patient's spiritual autonomy would be #5, does the patient fear God's wrath if he or she considers dying before God intends, and #6. Does the patient refuse treatment because he or she is ready to meet with God.

The simple ethical answer for patients and staff is God has designed humans in His image along with His compassion. Let God be in control as Frame mentions, "God controls the forces of nature, human history, and free human decisions (including sinful ones)." God remains in control in spite of free will, ethically to be compassionate is to provide free will, as God has designed. The bible does mention suicide for a variety of reasons; however, God is the only judge, and God is merciful.

1 Ethical Framework to Guide Decisions of Treatment Over Objection - PubMed (nih.gov) (Accessed 1/2024).

2 Philosophical PowerPoint Presentation, Liberty University, (Accessed 1/2024).

3 Ibid.

4 Steve Wilkens, *Beyond Bumper Sticker Ethics, An introduction to Theories of Right and Wrong*, (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2022). 116.

5 Ibid.6
www.regon.gov/oha/ph/providerpraterresources/evaluationresearch/death with dignity act. (Accessed 1/22/2024).

7 Ibid., Wilkens, 116

8 Ibid.

Rubin J. Prager KM. *Guide to considering nonpsychiatric medical intervention over objection for the patient.* Mayo Clinic 2018), 826-829.



The Keys to Paradise

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The Keys to Paradise

I had lunch with Tim recently. We are products of the St. Joseph's Catechism which was the focus of our childhood's indoctrination into dogma. Tim was given a pamphlet by a member of his prayer group. The writer proclaimed that his dogma are the only keys to paradise. I reminded Tim of the time when St. Peter, standing at the Pearly Gates, pointed to a door and told a new arrival, "Shush!!! They think that they are the only ones up here!!!"

I grew up believing dogma until Marriage Encounter and Twelve Steps broke the mold. I came to believe in a Power greater than myself. I explored my new spirituality with feelings. I also felt the call to the diaconate. I didn't get past the first year because of church politics. It took me 10 years to let go of my resentment and accept the will of God. Enter JR. We were like ships passing in the night. We met in the doorway of the dining hall at Graymoor. We were both looking for a midnight snack. That night JR was in a quandary. A fellow candidate left the program weeks before their ordination without explanation. "Welcome to the club," I said to JR. I was in a better place which allowed me to wish JR a great ministry as we parted into the night. We became fast friends and the rest is history.

We had our differences over dogma. Every so often I would try to give JR a new insight on a dogmatic theme. He told me that he had to remarry a couple who were "living in sin." They had married outside the church because the groom couldn't, in good conscience, promise to raise his children according to dogma. Now, they had to get back into the Church's good graces because they wanted to adopt a child. I had just finished reading Fr. Grizoni's Joshua. When Church authorities confronted Joshua with the very same issue, he asked them by what right. "Who are you to say?" Joshua asked. JR was only following orders.

The humanity of Jesus was another of my favorite topics with JR. Who were Jesus' brothers? In story of the Nativity we are told that Mary brought forth her first born. Jesus was the first of four boys between Mary and Joseph. JR gave me the standard answer. It was the loosely translated Greek word for "brothers." True to our Catechism, JR came to believe that "first born" meant that Jesus was an only child.

But, I was not detoured. Was Jesus married and to whom? Who was the bridegroom at Cana? Why did Mother Mary bring the news to Jesus, if only to prevent a scandal? **"Mom!!!"** "Do what he tells you," she says to the wine steward. Why was Jesus able to call Mary Magdalena out of the house when she was sitting Shiva for her brother Lazarus? How do you explain Magdalena's answer to the Roman guard at the crucifixion, "I am family." Why did the resurrected Jesus admonish Mary, "Don't touch me." if only because they had been intimate before he entered the tomb. Magdalena is described as the first disciple and the one whom he kissed on the lips. JR used dogma to explain away their behavior. Mary was a "family" friend. And, we don't talk about the rest. What was the power Jesus had over Mary Magdalena? According to Jewish tradition, Magdalena could only be called out by her husband as she sat Shiva. Dogma rejects the notion that Mary and Jesus were lovers so as to protect his Divinity. I would rather that the Church acknowledged their love so as to enhance his Humanity. It's a story that is over 2000 years old. JR? He would have none of it. Me? I am sure!!!





Present: In My Own Skin

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Present: In My Own Skin

Frodo stands at the edge of the river to consider the consequences of leaving the Fellowship to go alone to Mordor. He can barely hear Sam as he calls, running down the hillside behind him. His mind outlines the faces of his companions. All are loved and dear, but especially Sam. Frodo is weighed with the burden of the ring, the quest to the Cracks of Doom, and the welfare of his friends.

"I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had ever happened... I will do what I must. The evil of the ring is already at work in the Fellowship. The ring must leave them. They are all too dear."

He hears the rustling of leaves and the breaking branches made by short strides—a sound that is familiar to him from the Shire. He knows that it's Sam, so Frodo quickly launches his boat. He's not away quick enough for his purpose.

"Frodo, no!... Mr. Frodo!"

"No Sam... Go back, Sam! I'm going to Mordor alone!"

"Of course you are, and I'm coming with you."

Sam, knowing he can't swim, throws himself into the river to be with his friend. After Frodo rescues his drowning companion, Sam gives him a stiff reminder, through his tears, of the charge to him from Gandalf.

"I made a promise, Mr. Frodo. A promise! 'Don't you leave him, Samwise Gamgee'... And I don't mean to" Frodo embraces his friend. Then, with a brief acquiescent gaze, he gives in, "Oh Sam, come on." Much later, as they stop atop a hill looking into the distance toward the Cracks of Doom, Frodo gratefully tells his friend, "Sam, I'm glad you're with me."

Samwise Gamgee, a beloved friend of Frodo Baggins, reminded him of the promise he made to Gandalf not to leave him in his most difficult time. This Hobbit character calls to mind several things about those of us fashioned in the image of God. We are intended not to be alone. Solitude is healthy until it becomes isolation. Moreover, the times we least need to be alone are in our most trying moments, even in our own time of death. This latter point was illustrated in the same story when Boromir was dying and Strider remained with him, talking with him until he died.

When crises such as these come, there is usually little time for preparation or liturgy; we simply go to the one in need. There is no time for "I'm not ready. The life trial is before you now. When in that place, it very seldom feels comfortable, and even less often does it seem put together," as played by Viggo Mortenson in the role of Strider. Each of us may be called to be present in our own skin, and it may resemble more the disorganized character Sam, portrayed by Sean Aston.

Sam and Strider each refused to leave their companion to the cultural cancer of 'aloneness.' Both were willing to enter the grievous circumstances with their comrades and see them through. These two characters illustrate the importance of the company that we are called to keep—to be *with*—to be present—not necessarily polished, not perfect, but present nonetheless.

