

# An Encounter with Your Destiny

BY MARY BETH  
NEWKUMET

My kids and I always tussle during the summer about how they will fill their lazy days. The school year pace of homework, sports and scouts is gone for now, so the “electronic wallpaper” of videos, computer games and television entices. Their boredom is almost frenetic as they itch for some virtual excitement. I tell them to move away from the screens and go outside. Take a walk. Look up at the sky. Turn over a rock. Listen to the wind.

I am considered a mean mother.

My motive for booting them outside is manifold. I want them to get some fresh air and exercise and play with their friends. But more importantly, I want them to notice the natural world. As crazy as it sounds, it is a challenge for modern kids to develop a sense of wonder about the complexity of nature and the grandeur of the universe. There is just so much else to distract them.

## THE ULTIMATE QUESTIONS

Why is it so important for them to pay attention to the natural world? Because it is a sign post to “something out there.” Deep within each human person is a recognition of the splendor of nature, a splendor that could not have reasonably sprung up on its own. Wonder at creation leads to awe, and awe leads to the consideration that some great mystery must be behind all this. At some point every person internally poses the “ultimate questions”: Who did all this? What is my relationship to this mysterious presence? And given my insignificance in the scheme of things, what is my destiny?

Even scientists as brilliant as Albert Einstein have wondered about this mystery: “To Einstein,” Dennis Overbye wrote in *The New York Times Magazine*,



“God was a code word for the mystery and grandeur of the universe, the wellspring of awe, a reminder that there was something at the core of existence that all his equations could only graze.”

## EVADING THE QUESTIONS

These “ultimate questions” are pondered internally by every human person whether they acknowledge them or not. But who has time, you may be wondering, to think such big thoughts in the midst of our whirlwind days? This is precisely the point. If you haven’t thought much about the ultimate meaning of your life, your destiny, *then what are your whirlwind days for?*

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Mary, the first  
Steward of Christ

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“The basic human drama is the failure to perceive the meaning of life, to live without a meaning,” says Pope John Paul II. In fact, the entanglements of modern life can enable some people to go for years — sometimes even a lifetime — evading life’s ultimate questions, grasping for meaning in meaningless things. Consequently, many people live with a deep restlessness, hounded, almost haunted by Someone they sense is there, but will not acknowledge. When St. Edith Stein was searching for meaning in her life, she could sense the presence of this Someone out there, yet tried to avoid it: “I am making plans for the future,” she wrote to a friend, “and am arranging my immediate life accordingly. But I am deeply convinced that there is something looming in the offing that will upset all my projects. I mean the true and living faith which I still refuse to assent to, which I prevent from becoming active in me.”

## “I AM YOUR DESTINY”

Those who do seek to begin a relationship with this great mystery are faced with a different kind of challenge: how to define — and touch — the Creator of heaven and earth, a creator who can not be grasped or contained. This would seem like an insurmountable problem, except for the astonishing fact that the mystery has made itself known. Says Msgr. Luigi Giussani in his book, *The Religious Sense*: “The Christian message is this: a man who ate, walked, and lived the normal life of a man proclaimed, ‘I am your destiny,’ ‘I am he of whom the whole cosmos is made’.”

This is an outrageous claim. It

was outrageous 2,000 years ago; it continues to be so today. Yet our whole destiny depends on whether we take this claim seriously.

Jesus of Nazareth, a carpenter’s Son, placed himself right in the middle of the mystery, approached this mysterious presence as a Father and told us that we could only know this Father by knowing him, for he and the Father were One. He taught with authority, forgave sins and read hearts. He performed countless signs showing how he easily controlled the natural world. He challenged — and fulfilled — perceived divine laws. He acted like he was God.

## SURRENDER TO YOUR DESTINY

The most dramatic choice for each human person is deciding whether they believe this claim of Jesus Christ. Do you believe that what this man proclaimed is true, and that his living presence can still be encountered during your own time, at this point in history? This is the decision of faith.

Deciding that Jesus is your destiny is a profound choice that can not be mistaken for “belonging to a religion” or “going to Church.” Because it was such a dramatic moment for her, Jewish-born St. Edith Stein, describes her conversion in Christ as “a total suspension of all mental activity in which one can make neither plans nor decision, in which one can do nothing, but in which, having given over all things to the divine will, one surrenders entirely to one’s destiny.”

Yes, Jesus is our destiny because *only he* can bring us mere mortals into full communion with this mysterious presence, this Father, the creator of the

grand mysterious universe.

As believers in this revelation, we no longer have to quake at our insignificance beneath the vast nighttime sky. We do not have to evade life’s questions. Through the life of the Church, Christ calls us to know him in an intimate, familiar way — so that our ultimate destiny is a destiny that is known, loved and serenely awaiting fulfillment thanks to our everyday encounter with his mysterious loving presence. ❖

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# An Eternal Destiny

Often a crisis in life causes us to ponder our destiny. Problems such as sickness, separation and death karate-chop our carefully propped-up existence, reminding us that we are powerless to hold back hardship and misfortune. “Where might the human being seek the answer to dramatic questions such as pain, the suffering of the innocent and death,” reminds Pope John Paul II, “if not in the light streaming from the mystery of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection?” (*Faith and Reason*).

Each Sunday, the celebration of Mass shows us that — united in love with Christ — the passion of the cross must be our destiny, too. This worries many Catholics. When they consider saints who actually seem to “enjoy” suffering, these believers wonder if this is what they have to endure to be “truly Catholic.” Is this yet another outrageous Christian requirement? No, just a way to walk well in a fallen world full of real pain and sorrow. The Mass is where the world of sorrow and the world of joy can meet.

## THE TRIUMPHANT CROSS

Every human being carries a cross whether they perceive it to be one or not. Some people see their crosses as fate, rotten luck, bad karma, an unfortunate lineup of planets or the anger of an uphappy god. Yet no matter how modern men and women describe the cross, the feeling is the same — out of control and powerless to make any difference



in what “fate” has planned for them.

Men and women who have recognized the presence of Jesus Christ in their lives know that “fate” does not play a part in their eternal destiny. Therefore suffering and death, while terrible, has no ultimate power over them. The secret of the cross is that suffering in union with Christ allows you to live without fear. How can this be? Because those who live in Christ experience an interior place of deep peace and love that no crushing sorrow can reach. “My Jesus,” wrote St. Vincent Pallotti, “You know that I will be sure of being really one with you. Then, you will have given me the grace to feel joy in contempt, calumnies, oppressions and sorrows.”

At Mass each Sunday, we experience Christ’s passionate sacrifice

## Getting There...

The Feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross is September 14. This year, try to celebrate this wonderful feast anew in your home by dusting off the crucifix and making it a place of family prayer. Perhaps it can be placed in the middle of the table at dinnertime. If you don’t have a cross or don’t wear one, the feast of the Holy Cross is a reminder to include these important sacramentals in your life after Sunday with Christ. The cross is a sign of the depths to which Christ went to give himself to man, to be our eternal destiny. ❖

on the cross, but through this gift of himself, we also experience his triumphant resurrection and the reality of his eternal life. This fact — and his living presence among us — enables us to carry our crosses with grace and dignity. “Let the little whistling, chilling wind blow above your head and blast nothing of your dear interior cheerfulness, your bright and hopeful look at eternity,” advised St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Yes, the cross is the destiny of a fallen mankind, but through the passion of the One who loves us — so is the glorious resurrection. ❖

## Bearing the Cross

A significant turning point in the conversion of St. Edith Stein (1891-1942) was watching the Catholic wife of a colleague cope with her beloved husband’s death. Edith dreaded her first visit to what had been their “happy house.” But instead of inconsolable mourning, Edith found the wife at peace. “It was my first encounter with the cross,” she later wrote, “and with the divine strength it inspires in those who carry it. For the first time, I saw the Church born out of the passion of Christ and victorious over death. At that moment my unbelief was utterly crushed.” She had seen up close that deep sorrow had no ultimate power over people who realize that Christ is their destiny. ❖

# Discovering a Marian Destiny

BY JOHN M. CAPOBIANCO

A few years ago, when the *Star Wars* Trilogy was released on videocassette, I purchased a set for my kids. Like most late 70's moviegoers, I really enjoyed the original movies, but I wondered if my sons might still be too young to peer into the "power of the dark side" or appreciate the mystery of "the force." My fears, however, not only proved unfounded but my son's fascination with the story provided fun opportunities to peak his curiosity about the divine mysteries of human life.



reveals to Luke that he is Luke's father. As Luke is clinging to a small pathway over an abyss, Vader ominously says: "Luke, you can destroy the emperor. He has foreseen this. It is your destiny. Join me and together we can rule the galaxy as father and son."

Nick, who had hardly said a word the entire film, suddenly asked, "Dad, what is that?"

I stared at the tube, wondering what dazzling effect or galactic prop had captured his attention. Clueless, I finally asked, "What is what, Nick?"

"Destiny," this five year old asked, "what does destiny mean?"

At first I was amazed how he had honed in on Vader's appeal to life's most compelling challenge. Nick's eyes were fixed on what Luke was going to do next, yet he clearly awaited my reply.

"Destiny is the reason why you were created Nick," I said. "It's what God created you to fulfill in life."

His eyes got bigger. He seemed to grasp the dilemma before Luke, who apparently had no where to go but follow his father's sinister wishes or die.

"Do you think he'll listen to his father?" I asked, probing his reservoir of fatherly respect.

He looked bewildered as Vader reached out for Luke and said: "Come with me, it is the only way."

Then Nick's eyes bugged out as Luke simply let go and fell helplessly into the abyss rather than submit to the power of the dark side. He seemed surprised by this Jedi openness to the mystery of the force.

## RECEPTIVE TO THE MYSTERY OF GOD

After it was clear that Luke had miraculously escaped, I taunted Nick: "I guess Luke didn't believe his father really knew his destiny, did he?" Nick turned and looked me in the eye, sensing a possibly sinister fatherly challenge, he could only smile and say: "Daaaaaad!"

Yet in my conversations with this young boy, discovering his openness to mystery began in a new way that I had never anticipated. Our popular culture promotes and exploits this mysterious openness, yet leaves us ill prepared to truly discover our ultimate destiny. To do that, we need not imagine something that happened in a galaxy far, far away. We need simply to discover what happened here on earth, to a Jewish girl named Mary who was bold enough to let the Mystery shape her destiny. Every human person has this same Marian destiny: to be receptive to the Word of God, to be receptive to the mystery of His destiny for us, to allow the Lord of life – the real power of the Force – to work through each of us. The Blessed Mother was the first human person to embrace Jesus and make him her destiny.

And so an ancient lifelong battle to discover our true destiny was engaged anew for a father and son. "That was a great question, Nick," I said to him. "I'm really proud of you." He looked at me with an expression of dismay, as if to say "Do you mind, I'm trying to watch a movie here!" The moment had passed, but the discovery of the mystery had just begun. ❖

## "DAD, WHAT DOES DESTINY MEAN?"

One memorable moment occurred when my son Nick and I were perched on the couch watching the climatic light saber battle between Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader from "The Empire Strikes Back." You remember the scene. It's when Darth Vader

## Marian Feasts

The Blessed Mother: Our Lady of Sorrows (Sept. 15), yes, but also Queen of Heaven and Earth (Aug. 22)! The Blessed Mother is the only human person who has truly reached the fullness of her destiny: a communion of life and love with the Trinity for all eternity. Yes, others are there too, but they have not yet reached their ultimate fulfillment. Only Mary's body has been assumed. She is complete in love and life. This same perfection of body and soul in heavenly bliss is the destiny of every human person who has ever been created. ❖

# A Passion for Their Destiny

**M**y daughter Kate and her grammar school friends are entering different high schools in September. This summer, I watch them adjust to the changes already taking place in their relationships. Some are starting to move away; others are holding on for dear life. Deep in their hearts, they know that they have begun a journey that may or may not include each other.

I watch all of this remembering the dear friends who have come in and out of my own life through the years. It is sad to feel like you are losing touch with someone who has meant so much to you. Yet, I have learned that the challenge of friendship is to love someone so much that you want only what is best for them. This means wishing them well when they move away, take a better job, find a new group of friends or marry someone whose personality clashes with yours. To truly love a friend, you must have a passion for their destiny.

A “passion for their destiny” means that you care enough for them to let them go along their own path — even if it may not include you as much as before.

You do not try to cling, to possess them or keep them from pursuing something else. You love what the Lord has in store for each friend because he is always pursuing them in everyday ways. Since the ultimate destiny of each human person is Jesus Christ, each event can be the path to him.

## OPEN TO THEIR DESTINY

This challenge of friendship mirrors the struggle of parents as we watch our children go off on their own paths. The Lord is in pursuit of each one of them, and will reveal himself to them in his own time, in his own way. This is why it is good for them to develop their own religious sense. Encouraging them to be intrigued and attracted by his presence is the way to point them in the direction of finding their destiny.

When the uncertainty of all this gets scary for a parent, the Blessed Mother can help. Imagine how hard it was for her to stay open to the destiny



## Getting There...

“Fair son,” wrote St. Louis of France to his eldest boy, “the first thing I would teach you is to set your heart to love God.” Timeless advice. The months of August and September are filled with the feast days of some remarkable saints like Louis, Clare, Maximillian Kolbe, Augustine, Monica, Vincent de Paul and on and on. The witness of these very real people clearly shows how a life in love with Christ can profoundly change the destiny of each human person. The twists and turns of the lives of the saints can be especially interesting to young people searching for their own path. Do you have a “Lives of the Saints” book in your home? If not, consider getting one for the searchers who dwell with you! — MBN ❖

of her Son. Once he began his public ministry, his daily life did not include her as much as before. Yet she had a passion for his destiny. She knew that by loving his destiny, she was providing him with just what he needed. This is what parents — and friends — must learn to do for each other too. Because if we begin imposing our own plan on the destiny of another, we may cause them to lose their way, and possibly lose their love and friendship as well.— MBN ❖

## Seeing Her Destiny

**S**t. Therese of Lisieux saw her destiny early. As a young teenager, she went to Rome to petition the Pope to allow her to join the Carmelite order earlier than the rules allowed. Seeing her ardor, the Pope smoothed her path. “Jesus! I want to give myself completely to Him,” she wrote with youthful exuberance behind the cloister walls. “I want to live only for Him... to be one with Him.” He was her destiny — not a few of his teachings, not his good values. Him. In fact, Therese’s relationship with Christ was so intense during her short life that she was able to write about their life together with great authority. In 1997, Pope John Paul II named this poorly schooled, simple young nun a Doctor of the Church. ❖



# Destined To Be One

I love talking religion with my dear friends, Neal and Carla. (My husband sits with us, drinking his beer, amused as the three of us ramble on around the dinner table!) In the past five years, we have become intrigued by a mysterious presence that attracts and challenges us to come closer. Responding to this come-hither, they are exploring the depths of their Jewish faith, while I seek out a more authentic experience of Christ in the Catholic Church.

During dinner, we speak in a similar language of love for the One who is drawing us in. Although we come from different backgrounds, we recognize a common experience in the way we have been captured in this new relationship. Each of us has seen how it is transforming our lives and making us all into lush people. (You should meet us!)



## THAT THEY MAY BE ONE

I have become convinced that this is the natural start of the ecumenical conversation encouraged within each parish community. So often we try to start with Catholic teachings (either what's wrong or what's right with them depending on our perspective), but this is like serving up dessert when you haven't begun the meal. Perhaps a better way to begin with our friends and neighbors is by sharing our common experiences of the mysterious presence who dwells at the heart of the interior life of each human person. By pointing out this presence, we take the first step toward union with other members of the human family. Eventually, they may see that this presence is Christ.

## ALLOW HIM TO REVEAL HIMSELF

Every human person shares the same destiny as we do — Christ — yet many do not know it. Perhaps it is through us that he will reveal himself in ever deeper ways to other members of our parish. St. Thomas Aquinas illuminated this point in a sermon about

## Called to Be Salt & Light

As people who have seen their destiny, Catholics parishes are called to bring this lush life to others no matter how frustrating this can sometimes be! Need some pointers on how to begin in already-established parish programs? Order the U.S. Catholic Conference video, "Communities of Salt & Light: The Social Mission of the Parish." For information, call Lumen Catechetical Consultants at (301) 593-1066 . ❖

St. Andrew, the first apostle to meet the Messiah. Andrew "did not attract Peter to himself for Andrew realized that he himself was weak and that Christ was strong. And therefore, Andrew led Peter to Christ so that Christ might instruct him, so instructing him that he should become zealous preacher of the word of God."

Andrew brings Peter to Christ and then lets Christ reveal himself to his brother. This is an important reminder to those of us in parish life who are trying to reach out to men and women who do not know him. Simply show them the fruits of Christ living in you. Bring him to them by being yourself and allow him to transform their hearts with his Spirit of Love.— *MBN* ❖

### Prayer For All People

Become what you are, find him who is already yours, listen to him who never ceases speaking to you, and own him who already owns you. — St. Gregory of Sinai, a Father of the Church in the East. ❖

# Who Do The Crowds Say That I Am?

**B**y now, you gotta believe that Christ is the destiny of each human person! Yet people who are only familiar with certain versions of him may find it hard to hand off their hearts, souls and destinies to a Jesus who has been boxed up and packaged by someone else. This is a reasonable stance. Before you can yield to your destiny, you have to personally know the One to whom you are going.



This *knowing* part is key — and it is the reason why the Church tells us to pursue an authentic interior experience of Jesus Christ above all else. Because if we are not open to the ways in which he reveals himself in our daily lives, we run the risk of closing off his

## Destiny Prayer

“O my soul, set aside by grace, you are destined to be a partaker in the divine nature. Through this grace you are united to the Holy Trinity, not yet fully as in the life to come, but nonetheless even now in a real and perceptible way. O my soul, created to enjoy such exquisite gifts, what are you doing, where are you going? How wretched is the blindness of Adam’s children, if indeed we are blind to such a brilliant light and deaf to so insistent a voice!” — St. John of the Cross (1542-1591). ❖

living presence and making him into our own image: not a boundless God, but a god with parameters of our own making. This is how we help create the false liberal Jesus, the false conservative Jesus, the false Jesus who tolerates this group, but not that one.

## HE REVEALS HIMSELF

The Gospels show us clearly how right from the start, men in the world have tried to define Jesus on their own terms. Those who were intrigued and attracted to Christ accepted his invitation to “come and see” who he was. Some stayed with him throughout his ministry, getting to know him better gradually through signs, his words and his presence among them. These disciples were attentive and open as he revealed himself to them. Others saw some of his signs, heard some of his words, but did not linger. Instead, they made up their minds about him and went off on daily business. “Who do the crowds say I am?” Christ asked his apostles one day. “John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, ‘one of the ancient prophets has arisen,’” they replied (Luke 9:18-19). Aren’t similar inaccuracies still true in our world today?

In our own time, in our own history, Jesus of Nazareth continues to encounter man and reveal his interior life through the sacraments, his Word and other people

## The Search

**A** description of the search for a “Someone out there” is present in many forms of popular culture, but Jesus Christ — in all his fullness — is rarely presented as the ultimate destination. Nevertheless, plays, movies, fine art, music, books and other medium that express the search can help young people see that it is a universal quest experienced by each human person, no matter what their culture or background. ❖

— people who see him as their destiny. Yet it is up to those who know him well to make sure that what other seekers see and hear about Christ is authentic. Many people are easily misled by false versions of life with Jesus in the Catholic Church. It is good for us to respond to misunderstanding and error by bringing our neighbors in the world to the One who continues to reveal himself to each one of us.

“Jesus Christ is the definitive answer to the question of the meaning of life,” says the Pope, “and to those fundamental questions which still trouble so many men and women on the American continent” (*Ecclesia in America*). As disciples who are growing to appreciate the fullness — and grandeur — of our destiny, we can never stop proclaiming Christ crucified and risen to the people in our world. ❖



## From the Monsignor.....

### FREEDOM AND DESTINY

**W**hen the gospel of Jesus Christ was first preached to the pagan world, its inhabitants were gripped by a fear of destiny. Life, it seemed, moved relentlessly on towards a future that was not the outcome of human freedom, but of mysterious relationships between unknown forces.

Frenetically, “religious” people sought to identify these forces and find ways to influence them, mostly to appease them. The “non-religious” took refuge in a stoic cynicism.

Sounds familiar? There are those for whom “religion” is still the attempt to influence and appease the forces of the unknown — whether by superstitious behavior, or by genetic engineering —while the modern cynics tell us to get used to the idea that human life has no ultimate meaning.

The gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed the reality of human freedom. The terrifying mystery behind destiny revealed its face and it turned out to be a human face, the face of Jesus of Nazareth in his humanity the Mystery revealed itself to be Infinite Love, evoking from us a loving adoration. Love experienced moves us to love in return. The attraction exercised by love is the only one that respects our freedom, for love cannot be compelled by anything. Human freedom exists, precisely, to allow us to respond to the experience of love. This loving adoration of the Mystery revealed in Christ is the highest act of human freedom.

It is revealing that one can say to a loved one: “You are my destiny.” The concept of destiny, therefore, when experienced in love is perfectly compatible with freedom. It was thus that the gospel rescued the pagan experience of destiny or predestination: if the Mystery is as revealed in Christ, we have nothing to fear. Our freedom will be respected — even more so, increased! That is why human love in Christ, such as in the sacrament of marriage, will never reduce or eliminate freedom as long as it remains “in Christ,” as long as it is lived as part of life in Christ. Faith is

## Ponder In Your Heart

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Do you believe that you have a destiny? (p. 1 and 2)

- What connection does Christ have to your destiny?
- What is holding you back from surrendering to the destiny he has in store for you?

Have you experienced a crisis that has caused you to ponder your destiny? (p. 3)

- How does Mass on Sunday help you recognize the beauty of your destiny amidst life’s crises?
- Why is experiencing the love of Christ so essential to living a life without fear?

How do you recognize the Lord’s destiny for you in the midst of everyday family life? (p. 4)

- Like Mary, how do you remain receptive to the Lord’s plan for your life?
- What does Mary’s Assumption say about the fulfillment of our destiny?

Do you have a passion for another’s destiny? (p. 6)

- How does Christ inspire you to be open to the destiny he has in store for your friends?
- What saint’s life inspires you to be open to your own destiny?

Do you feel destined to be united with those in your community? (p. 5)

- Like Andrew, how can you introduce Christ to others in your parish?
- What are some of the visible fruits of Christ living in you?

Do the “crowds” in your world recognize the wonderful human destiny proposed by Christ? (p. 7)

- If someone asked you who Jesus is, what would your answer be?
- Have you ever been rejected by someone who recognized Christ in you?

nothing else, then, than the recognition of Christ as our destiny. Nothing is more compatible with freedom, therefore, than faith. Faith makes freedom possible.

The pagan world was liberated by faith. Will ours?

—Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete,

*U.S. Ecclesiastical Advisor for Communion and Liberation,  
an international movement in the Church. ❖*