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Everything I'd ever need to know about God

Michael Leach | Jan. 17, 2012 Soul Seeing

?Even though you get the words right doesn?t mean you get your life right.? That?s Leach?s Law No. 27 of Religious Book Publishing. I mentioned it to my friend and author Jack Shea once and he said, ?Especially if you get the words right!?

We read books by Catholic authors that inspire us and think, ?If only we could call them up on the phone like Holden Caulfield and be their friends and maybe even hang out with them, how happy we would be!? Maybe so. But we would be in for a surprise. They can be as melancholy as the rest of us.

Henri Nouwen, for instance, was and is one of the greatest spiritual authors of all time, but he was, in his words, ?a wounded healer.? He was often as tortured as anyone and his gift was in feeling our pain and applying the ointment of Jesus? teachings to our experiences. He got the words right better than anyone but was working on getting his life right all the time. Perhaps that?s what it takes for us to get the words right.

The only person I ever knew who got her life right was my Gramma Lou. She was a beneficial presence who never wrote a book or gave a sermon. She smiled a lot and said little. Her favorite words to me were, ?Let nothing disturb you,? and ?Michael, you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.? She always got the words right because she listened to you with her soul and never thought about what she was going to say next. Let me give you an example I will never forget.

My parents had divorced when I was 5, right after World War II, and Gramma Lou was the harbor I could always go to, where I knew I was safe. Every weekday when I got off for lunch at St. Andrew?s School, I?d walk through the playground to her house, and she?d make me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a cold glass of Bosco chocolate milk. After lunch we?d lay next to each other on the old blue sofa that smelled like my dad, and Gramma would read me a comic book. Her favorite and mine was Blackhawk. Blackhawk was an ace fighter pilot from World War II who gathered a motley crew around him to fight injustice. Did I tell you that my

Dad was a World War II pilot with more missions than Catch-22?s Yossarian? That he earned two Purple Hearts and gave them to me along with his leather fly jacket that had 32 little bombs painted in white on the front? He also killed Hitler with a penknife, but we won?t go there because nobody believed me then and you may not believe me now, but believe me, it?s true. He told me.

One day lying next to Gramma Lou, I pushed the comic book down with a finger and said, ?Momma Lou, I don?t want to go back to school. I want to stay with you.?

?We?ll see,? she said. ?Oh, look, Chop-Chop?s coming through the window!?

Chop-Chop was Blackhawk?s sidekick. He used to be a cook and carried a butcher?s cleaver. I pushed the comic down, turned on my side and looked at Gramma Lou. ?Momma Lou,? I said, ?you love me, don?t you?? It was more a statement than a question.

She looked at me with her sweet brown eyes the color of Cracker Jacks. ?Of course I love you.?

?Even when I?m bad, right??

?Yes,? she smiled.

?You?ll always love me, won?t you, Momma Lou??

She took me in her arms and said, ?Michael, you could take Chop-Chop?s hatchet and chop off my arms and chop off my legs and chop off my head and throw them all in a garbage can and my head would still look at you and tell you again, I love you!?

That was the day I knew, without knowing, everything I?d ever need to know about God.

The corollary to Leach?s Law No. 27 then is that when someone has her life right, she will always get the words right, especially if they are those three little words that mean nothing unless the right person says them.

[Michael Leach, writer, editor and publisher, is still learning to get his life right. He would welcome your insights on Soul Seeing at NCRonline.org/blogs/soul-seeing.]

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