

The Legacy of Love: What Holds Us

BY: NEWTON LIH



In a small cabinet of an old friend is a small wooden stool. It is about 6 inches high and 8 inches long. It was carved from a piece of wood by the great-great-grandfather of my friend for his daughter when they crossed the Atlantic to America. It was carved because the boat was so crowded that the tickets were standing room only. This stool is not a craft of a master carpenter. It has no adornment on it. But it was made with love and care by one person for another. It is the centerpiece of their family history.

Let me tell you another story: In ancient China, a man brought to the great philosopher-poet Zhuangzi this complaint: he had a seed that grew into a gourd. But the gourd was massive. Normally you could use a gourd for a container or scoop: something useful. But because it was so big, he couldn't find a use for it. Zhuangzi replied: If it's so big, why not make it into a boat, sit in it, and explore the rivers and seas? The man wanted something to hold his soup, he couldn't imagine it as something which could hold his personhood.

When I began attending Mass at Most Holy Redeemer, I had no intention of becoming Catholic, though I was a baptized Christian. On a whim, I decided to schedule a meeting with Father Matt Link, our pastor and a member of the Precious Blood. But somehow in that conversation I became comfortable sharing my personal struggles with addiction, the escalating consequences that have led me to many hospitalizations, and the internal chaos within my soul. Listening, Father Matt took a



a huge risk. He offered me the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. He explained the Sacrament to me, noting that it included a brief prayer of exorcism. He brought me into the sacristy and explained to me the meaning of his alb, his stole, and his love of the Priesthood. In the sanctuary, he prayed for me and anointed me. In one morning, I was catechized on the liturgy, the priesthood, and the sacraments. A few weeks later,

in May of 2017, I was found unconscious in the parking lot of Trader Joe's in Walnut Creek, California. I had driven over 30 miles in a blackout, overdosing on crystal meth. By a miracle, no one was hurt. Police officers and firefighters pulled me out of my car, unconscious. If I had not been parked directly across from the hospital, I probably would not be here today.

The greatest legacy we will ever leave behind is the people we love and how we love them. It is tempting to think of legacies as those things we pass on to each other: The Chaplet of the Precious Blood; The musical setting to the Seven Offerings; the relic of St. Gaspar given to me by Father Jeffrey Kirch. But I have never been satisfied with the things which I can hold. I believe in the things which hold me. When I came into our community, I had no experience with religious life. Religious Sisters were people on movie screens. Missionaries were people in far-off countries. But here was a Missionary in my life, Father Matthew Link at Most Holy Redeemer Parish in San Francisco. He did not come to find me, but I was called to him. I did not know how to ask for the sacrament of Anointing. But through his discernment, he understood God was inviting me into something greater than myself.

I understand that some might criticize Father Matt for anointing me. When he anointed me, I felt for the first time that there was a church that cared about what was happening to me. People in the church have always been very sympathetic, but the church always felt cold. How can any single group of people represent the entire ecclesial body? In the sacraments, I understood that it was not just Father Matt anointing me, but the entire body of the Church with him. "There are no private sacraments," he taught me. In receiving it, I was no longer just a lonely person struggling with his faith with a murderous illness.

In April, I would attend my first Easter Vigil. Death and resurrection were in the air. I would lose my housing and move into a van. I was working full-time at a pharmaceutical company that was just bought out by Pfizer. This meant that if I could just make it to May 15, I would receive a large severance package. I was hoping to escape somewhere to try and get clean. My life was spiraling out of control, and I was deeply afraid and ashamed of what might happen next. Something told me not to hide. One night, our Young Adult group went to eat tacos after the meeting. I found the courage to tell a friend what was going on. I never made it to May 15. Early in the month of May, I woke up in the hospital trying to figure out what had happened.

Now let me bring you to the gospel: Of all the stories that are told in the gospels, it is the woman who anoints Jesus that carries with it this commandment: “Amen, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.” (Mark 14:9). No other story, no parable, nor teaching comes with this commandment. And it is not a story about resurrection. There is no exorcism or healing. There are no records of her speaking. She leaves no relic behind. Centurions will be praised for their faith, Pharisees will be rebuked, and disciples will be lamented. But it is this story which must be proclaimed with the gospel. How incredible to know that the love of Christ is inseparable from those who love Christ! What an immense and immeasurable legacy to share!

Our legacy as servants of the Precious Blood may never find its way to a shrine, a basilica, or an incorruptible corpse. But does that make it any less meaningful to the people who carry us with them? Let us not look only for the legacy of things which we can hold. Let us look for the legacy of things that will hold us.





Questions for Reflection:

- Who has been a lasting presence in your life through an act of kindness, compassion, or accompaniment? How did that person's love shape your faith or help you through a difficult time?
- Newton writes about the difference between things we can hold and the things that hold us. What gifts of faith, love, or belonging have sustained you throughout your life? How might you offer those same gifts to others?
- The woman who anoints Jesus leaves no relic behind, yet her loving act is remembered wherever the Gospel is proclaimed. What kind of legacy of love do you hope to leave through the way you live your faith and care for others?