

Doors
to the Sacred

Doors *to the* Sacred

*Everyday Events
as Hints of the Holy*



Bridget Haase, OSU



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Doors to the Sacred: Everyday Events as Hints of the Holy

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CONTENTS

	INTRODUCTION	3
	<i>You Never Know What You'll Find Behind a Closed Door</i>	
1	A Part in the Play <i>Enthusiasm</i>	7
2	Bargain Hunting <i>Devotion</i>	10
3	Blessing and Inconvenience <i>Present Moment</i>	13
4	Burdens and Rest <i>Suffering</i>	15
5	By My Side <i>Fidelity</i>	18
6	Called by Name <i>Affirmation</i>	21
7	Catching Fire <i>Witness</i>	24
8	Change and Exchange <i>Sensitivity</i>	27
9	Collector's Items <i>Searching</i>	29
10	Encounters and Connections <i>Community</i>	32
11	Everyday Christmas <i>Incarnation</i>	35
12	Father and Daughter <i>Strength</i>	38

13	Fields of Hope <i>Dreams</i>	42
14	Floyd's General Store <i>Kindness</i>	44
15	Gaping Holes and Damaged Bricks <i>Perfection</i>	47
16	Gift of Sandals <i>Generosity</i>	50
17	Golden Thread <i>Caring</i>	53
18	Grotto of Massabielle <i>Pilgrimage</i>	56
19	Hot, Steaming Coffee <i>Acceptance</i>	59
20	Inventive Love <i>Compassion</i>	61
21	Jobs Well Done <i>Work</i>	64
22	Lego Castle <i>Heaven</i>	67
23	Life on the Subway <i>Divine Reflections</i>	69
24	Light from Above <i>Wisdom</i>	72
25	My Left Hand <i>Almsgiving</i>	75
26	Never Done Before <i>Death</i>	77
27	Night in the Forest <i>Trust</i>	80
28	Ocean Thoughts <i>Poverty</i>	83

29	Out of Nowhere <i>Protection</i>	86
30	Piece of Cake <i>Fasting</i>	89
31	Prison Grace <i>Redemption</i>	92
32	Putting on a Show <i>Praise</i>	95
33	Quilting Squares <i>Gospel Living</i>	98
34	Red Sky <i>Love</i>	101
35	Rich Young Man and a Teddy Bear <i>Discipleship</i>	104
36	Ruffles and Ribbons <i>Holiness</i>	106
37	Salt and Pepper <i>Service</i>	109
38	Sand Through Her Fingers <i>Empowerment</i>	113
39	Sharing a Biscuit <i>Bread of Life</i>	115
40	Sign on the Door <i>Humility</i>	118
41	Slice of Life <i>Adversity</i>	121
42	Spring Measurements <i>Re-creation</i>	123
43	Strawberries and Champagne <i>Gratitude</i>	126
44	Street Adoration <i>Eucharistic Presence</i>	129

45	Talk and Truth <i>Experience</i>	132
46	Tender Moment <i>Nurturing</i>	135
47	The Long Haul <i>Perseverance</i>	137
48	The Look in Her Eye <i>Concern</i>	140
49	Up in the Air <i>Faith</i>	143
50	Watching Myrtle <i>Prayer</i>	145
51	What a Buddy! <i>Encouragement</i>	148
52	Where and What <i>God's Will</i>	151
	CONCLUSION	155
	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	157
	BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES	159
	OF THE SAINTS AND HOLY PEOPLE QUOTED IN THIS BOOK	

DOORS TO THE SACRED

Everyday Events as Hints of the Holy

INTRODUCTION

You Never Know What You'll Find Behind a Closed Door

WHEN I WAS ELEVEN YEARS OLD, MY FAMILY moved from a small home on Cedar Drive in the New Orleans suburbs to a rambling old house on Dupre Street in the city neighborhood called Uptown. The winding front steps, the backyard banana trees occasionally laden with fruit, and my very own room charmed me. I thought that this was a castle in the Haases' kingdom.

What fascinated me was the dark basement, reached by a steep flight of stairs. Steam pipes hung low, hissing and clanging, providing their own sense of mystery. But what I loved to investigate most were the many doors of different widths, heights, and kinds of wood. Most led nowhere, not even to closets; they were just ornamental doors opening to a blank wall. But, in my young imagination, I expected that someday I would open one up to a land of princes and princesses or at least a pirate's treasure.

When I mentioned to my mother how much fun I had opening the basement doors, she, chuckling, encouraged me by

replying, “Well, you just *never* know what you’ll find behind a closed door.” Thinking that Mama may have known something I didn’t, I kept my hopes high for months, always anticipating an exciting discovery.

Think of this book as I thought of my basement: an opportunity to open fifty-two doors. Spend a year with *Doors to the Sacred*, if you can. Take your time. One chapter a week will keep you busy, I promise.

Or, use it as a devotional at a weekend retreat or on a day of intensive reflection. Wherever you are along your pilgrim way, I hope you will pray with it before Mass, in Eucharistic adoration, or in a faith formation group. Share it with a friend in a retirement center or in a nursing home, as you commute to work, or in your car as you wait to pick up children from school.

Join me in opening doors to the sacred in our everyday life. Let this book become part and parcel of your daily prayer during the forty days of Lent as you contemplate the mystery of Christ’s suffering and death. Recall Resurrection “alleluia” moments in your life during the joyful fifty days of Easter. Reflect on the stories and passages from Scripture during Ordinary Time as you continue your journey of transformation begun in Lent. During the Advent and Christmas seasons, use it as a guidebook as you anticipate and celebrate the coming of Christ in history, mystery, and majesty.

Whenever and wherever you begin, let me offer you a tried and true method for using this book. *The first step* is to descend

the steep stairs down into your heart. Select a spiritual trait from the table of contents, open wide the sacred door, and attentively read the story. Walk slowly around the room of the reflection. Although these are my own stories,¹ they can offer you a glimpse of God's presence in *your* life if you take time to see similarities; focus on their perspective; study them from different angles.

Step two is to consider completing during the week, either in your journal or in your heart, the three sentences that follow each story. Please remember that they are meant to be guides to foster thought and help you open your life to grace.

Step three is to ponder the prayers, Scripture passages, or quotes from a saint or holy person that will encourage you to grow in the particular spiritual disposition.

In whatever liturgical season you use this book, I hope you discover that your own hallowed portals reveal hints of the holy in everyday events and lead you into the provident hands of God and the unconditional love of Christ.

Bridget Haase, OSU

November 1, 2013

Feast of All Saints

1. Names and some details have been changed.

A Part in the Play

Enthusiasm

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD ADELAIDE HAD HER HEART SET on a part in the school play. Running to the car after school, she jumped in, winded and excited. “Look, Mommy,” she breathlessly said. “Here are the lines for our class play. It’s all about a vegetable garden, fuzzy rabbits, and a bunch of nice neighbors. I am *dying* to be the carrot. She even wiggles when she’s pulled up and gets to say a poem about being healthy and sweet.” Adelaide chattered all the way home as her mother sank deeper and deeper into the driver’s seat.

■ A Story

Paula, Adelaide’s patient mother, knew from experience that her daughter did not have much of a chance. She lacked stage presence and struggled to memorize the simplest lines. Each year tryouts resulted in a disappointed child, embarrassed at her inability to be chosen for even the smallest part.

For the next week, Adelaide practiced and practiced the carrot poem. Paula coaxed her and crossed her fingers, constantly anxious that her precious daughter would fail again. Paula wondered why Adelaide couldn’t retain a mere nine words: “pointed hats, upside down, growing deeply in the ground.” But she was determined not to abandon hope.

The day of tryouts Paula worried and fretted as she prepared her “maybe next time” speech. She visualized the scene as she vacuumed and washed dishes: Adelaide sobbing dramatically and she trying to console her with Fruit Loops and lots of hugs.

At 2:50 PM, Paula drove up to the school, joined the line of cars for after-school pick-up, and, once again, reviewed her pep talk. Taking one long breath, she drove up to the school carport. From the dismissal line Adelaide came jumping and running. She bolted into the car, panting with excitement. “Mommy!,” she shouted at the top of her lungs. “I got the best part ever in the *whole* play. I’m *sooo* happy. I get to clap and cheer!”

Paula, breathing a sigh of relief and whispering a prayer of thanks, blew Adelaide happy kisses. Paula knew what “clapping and cheering” meant. Her daughter would be hidden behind the curtain applauding her classmates after each act. But that didn’t matter. Adelaide’s dream had *finally* come true. She was, at long last, on stage!

Oftentimes we too have our hearts set on a particular job, promotion, or special recognition after years of faithful service. But someone else gets the step-up-the-ladder position we strived for, the salary increase, or the prized trophy at the annual awards dinner. The roles we desire in life never seem to come our way, no matter how much we rehearse, no matter how diligently we work. Watching from the wings, we can allow discouragement to set in as others take center stage, receiving both the applause and the standing ovations.

Part of our mission may well be lauding the success of others. This does not mean that we abandon our desires or personal goals but that we put aside our disappointments to support and praise others' efforts and accomplishments. In so doing, we may discover that clapping for friends and colleagues energizes us, cheering them on brings us selfless happiness and, although we are hidden behind the curtains, lets us discover joy in our part in life's play.

Owning the Story, Opening to Grace

- My role in life is . . .
- It's difficult to clap and cheer for others when . . .
- This week I will praise a colleague or family member with whom I feel in competition by . . .

GOD OF MY LIFE, you “have fashioned me to do some definite service; have committed some work to me which is not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I have a part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons” (John Henry Newman).

“*Keep on looking up towards the goal you have in view.
Keep on at the task God has given you to do.*”

(Anonymous)

2

Bargain Hunting

Devotion

I FIRST NOTICED HER IN THE TOY SECTION OF THE local Goodwill store. She would choose a stuffed animal or a fire truck, examine it closely, and then, with a pronounced smile of satisfaction, place it in her shopping cart. Hunting for just the right bargain and singing along with the piped Christmas carol, she went up and down each row of each section of the store with both determination and deliberation, selecting items here and there. She eventually parked her full cart in an out-of-the-way corner and got a second one to continue her search. After about an hour, she maneuvered both carts to the checkout counter.

“That will be all together \$102.67,” said the cashier.

“What do you know!” the shopper exclaimed. “I have a Christmas gift for all seventeen of my grandchildren, and I kept to my \$120 limit. I am going home a happy woman.”

She put one cart in front of the other and began pushing both of them simultaneously. Realizing it was a bad idea, she both sighed aloud and prayed, “Jesus, help me.”

“May I help you?” I asked.

“Mercy me,” she said, chuckling. “I call upon the name of the Lord and he comes right to my aid.”

I took one cart and she the other as we made our way to the parking lot. She loosened the rope that kept the trunk of her rust-eaten, paint-chipped red Ford tightly closed. As I handed her the bagged purchases, she carefully arranged each one in a secure place.

Out of the blue she blurted, “I have a question for you.”

Thinking this interesting woman would ask *my* name as I hoped to ask *hers*, I had “Bridget” on the tip of my tongue. But she had another thought on her mind.

“Tell me, what titles do you use for Jesus?” Before I could even gather my thoughts for an answer, she jumped in. “Me? I love Savior, Deliverer, Prince of Peace, Messiah, King of Kings, and, best of all, just plain Brother. There are so many names to choose from. It just makes me smile.”

She jerked open her stubborn car door, settled down in her well-worn driver’s seat, and fastened her seat belt. Starting the car, she said in utmost sincerity, “Thanks so much for the help. I hope *you* are going home a happy woman.”

Then, leaning out the window to the tune of her chugging engine, she offered goodbye counsel: “Now don’t forget to call on the name of the Lord.”

In her simple question, spirited response, and prayerful exhortation, a grandmother, bargain hunting in a Goodwill store, offered priceless gifts to me on a cold December day.

Owning the Story, Opening to Grace

- One name of Jesus that has special meaning for me is . . .
- One way I help others respectfully utter the name of Jesus is . . .
- This week I will pray to Jesus as my . . .

○ JESUS CHRIST, teach me reverence and devotion as I meditate on your many names. You are my Redeemer who, at the last, will stand upon the earth (Job 19:25), the Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace upon whose shoulders authority rests (Isa. 9:6); the Messiah, Emmanuel, who is “God-with-us” (Matt. 1:23); and the Lamb of God, our Savior, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). May I stand before you in wonder and awe, for you are the Son of God (Lk. 1:32). May I also stand before you humbly and confidently, approaching you in utter trust and faithful love, for *you* have called *me* by the name of friend (John 15:15). Amen.

“God confides his name to those who believe in him; he reveals himself to them in his personal mystery. The gift of a name belongs to the order of trust and intimacy.”

(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2143)

3

Blessing and Inconvenience

Present Moment

IRMA LOUISE, A STRONG APPALACHIAN WOMAN, rises early and offers the prayer she has said each morning for sixty-three years: “Thank you, Lord, for another beautiful day to come to me. I’ll be a-lookin’ for you in every moment.” Her seasons are spent in the routine of daily mountain life: tending a fire, drawing water at the well, pickling her garden cucumbers, and going to church. As the gospel radio strains of “Me and God, we got our own thing going, we got it all worked out” drift into the mountain air, Irma Louise knows that living in the present moment is a blessing.

Farther north in Green Bay, Wisconsin, Sean Herriott, a talk show host on the Catholic Relevant Radio Network, also rises early with a prayer to live in the “here and now.” His life brims with many hectic demands: hosting a daily four-hour radio program, arranging and hosting guests, accepting last-minute schedule changes and unexpected cancellations, and balancing

family responsibilities with his career. “Living in the present moment can be tough and really inconvenient,” he once shared on the air. Having experienced that no two days, no two hours, will be exactly alike, Sean knows that living in the present moment can be a challenge.

The key to living in the here and now is *awareness* of what we are doing and *acceptance* of what is going on beyond the surface of appearances. This daily discipline is difficult and takes practice. It requires that we be sensitive to what we are experiencing, accept the person before us without judgment, savor and enjoy what surrounds us, and deal with interruptions and change of plans with grace and peace. When we live fully in the here and now, we reverence the holiness of *each* action of our daily routine. Why? Because we are convinced that this moment is God’s ambassador that reveals the divine will for us in the here and now. Generously accepting the present moment, we can then gratefully bow to receive its blessing. After all, “me and God, we got our own thing going,” right here, right now.

Owning the Story, Opening to Grace

- I am challenged to live in the present moment when . . .
 - The blessings that are flowing right here, right now are . . .
 - I can reverence the holiness of my daily routine by . . .
-

GOD, PRESENT IN EACH MOMENT OF MY DAILY ROUTINE, quiet my heart and saturate me with your grace right here, right now, as I pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). “So do not worry about tomorrow” (Matt. 6:34). “It is the Lord!” (John 21:7). “Get up . . . and you will be told what you are to do” (Acts 9:6). “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

“*Each day is unique and blessed. There are cloudy days and sunny; windy, wet days and calm, dry days. It’s the same way with your life. There are ups and downs; no two days, no two hours, no two moments, are exactly alike.*”

(Francis de Sales)

4

Burdens and Rest *Suffering*

RADIATING THE QUIET SERENITY OF A LIFE dedicated to his parish community, elderly Father Michael Joseph, with conviction and assurance, called us forth. It was the moment in the Good Friday service to approach the crucifix and honor it by touch or kiss.

“My good people,” he began. “Come to kiss the cross, yes, but bring your tears and struggles with you. On this holy day thank Jesus for what he has done for you, but also renew your desire to accept the cross in your own life. With great hope and expectation, draw near to the crucifix, and offer your crosses back to Christ, assured that you will find rest.”

Slowly the parishioners made their way to the front of the altar. As sobering peace filled the church, we revered the cross of Christ and the many other crosses borne on different shoulders.

Life is a challenge. Across the seas there are typhoons and earthquakes, drought and floods, famine and starving refugees. Across our yards neighbors worry about mortgage payments, loss of jobs, and care of elderly parents. Across our dinner tables we glimpse the struggles of teenagers, the pain of family divisions, and the frustration of misunderstandings. Across our own hearts we discover nagging doubts about faith, anxiety about the future, or dissatisfaction for years squandered in selfishness. We feel that life is just too tough, and our crosses, consuming the energy of our hearts, weigh heavily upon our shoulders. We are at a loss as to what to do.

Christ, understanding our struggles, extends a divine invitation: to come to him with all the cares and pains that burden us; with the physical suffering that depletes our strength; and with our spiritual restlessness and confusion. Jesus does not promise to take our worries and cares away or make them disappear. He reminds us that we, like him, will always have

crosses to carry, but we never have to bear them alone. In letting Christ help us, in allowing Christ to carry them with us, our crosses will seem lighter upon our shoulders and our hearts will be at rest.

Owning the Story, Opening to Grace

- The cross that I need to accept is . . .
 - The comforting words of Jesus that bring me rest are . . .
 - My life is full of hope and promise because . . .
-

CHRIST, COMFORT OF THE AFFLICTED AND BURDENED, “there are days when the burdens we carry chafe our shoulders and wear us down; when the road seems dreary and endless, the skies gray and threatening; when our lives have no music in them and our hearts are lonely, and our souls have lost their courage. Flood the path with light, we beseech you; turn our eyes to where the skies are full of promise” (Augustine of Hippo).

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

(Matt. 11:28–30)

By My Side

Fidelity

IT WAS ALWAYS EASY TO ROUND UP MY SAN ANTONIO, Texas, first graders at the end of noon recess. In fact, they began to line up, to my amazement, about three minutes before the sound of the bell. After a few weeks, I realized why.

A Story

Each afternoon after lunch, my students gathered on the floor around my feet for “story time,” a favorite ritual that sparked various conversations and an abundance of happy smiles. These six-year-olds discovered that being the first in line yielded a prime place close to the teacher, the book, and the pictures!

This particular day I had chosen one of my favorite books, Robert Munsch’s *Love You Forever*, a story of the enduring love of a mother for her son through all his toddler antics, teenage challenges, and other life stages. I had practiced reading the story to myself several times, since experience had taught me that I had never mastered getting through it without a tear or two. As the children bubbled with anticipation, I took a deep breath and began to read. All went well until the very end when the son takes his frail, elderly mother into his arms. As he rocks her, he sings, “I’ll love you forever,” the song *she* has sung to *him* all through his life. At that moment, tears began to cascade down

my face, flooding my eyes as the children, sitting in stunned silence, became one big blur.

Suddenly, I felt a tug on my shoulder. Beside me stood Juan, his little face squinched up in concern and sympathy. He handed me a Kleenex and a gentle hug at the same time. Then, in a tender voice, he comforted me. “Don’t cry, Sister. No matter what, I’m always here for you.”

Juan gifted me with a compassionate assurance, a promise of faithful love, a pledge to be by my side . . . so like our God.

Owning the Story, Opening to Grace

- I witness to God’s faithful love when I . . .
 - A time I was there for another was . . .
 - In trust and confidence, I ask for the grace this week to . . .
-

O EVER-FAITHFUL, LOVING GOD,

You are with me when I surrender to your will and when I struggle to accept it.

You are with me in sapphire-sky days and in cloudy futures.

You are with me in the seasons of luscious strawberries and of falling autumn leaves.

You are with me in my mountaintop prayer moments and in my inner valleys of darkness.

You are with me in both the challenges and the comforts of family life.

You are with me when love for you fills my heart to the brim and when I struggle to believe.

You are with me when I am called to comfort another and when I am the one who needs help.

With a grateful heart I thank you for always being there for me and for loving me unconditionally and forever. Amen.

“ *For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.* ”

(Ps. 100:5)