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THOUGHTS UPON WAKING

Ron Cauthern

Most people, when they awake in the morning, think of what their day will require: work, family appointments, and perhaps plans for the evening. Along the way it's easy to be overcome by an onslaught of demands.

By reading Pope Francis' *Joy of the Gospel*, it's quickly obvious he is familiar with our obstacles in daily life. His carefully chosen words tenderly urge us to evaluate our course. It reminds me of a lighthouse gently directing a lost ship to shore during rough waters. It's often when there's an emergency or threat of danger that we truly listen and hear words of wisdom and comfort for guidance. This human condition is not a strange oddity, it's a plight we've faced since the beginning of time. The characters have changed, but the stories remain similar.

The one certainty is that factoring in the impact of God turns the tides on every outcome. If there's a magical mix, it's by the grace of God. I do not believe that Pope John Paul II or Pope Francis were brought into our life to be mere images of comfort that pour forth doctrine

to merely meet the Churches requirements. They are here to dutifully perform an awakening with their influence. What I do believe is that with each carefully chosen word, there is wisdom and prayerful care and love provided to improve our lives through the loving guidance of our Holy Father.

Our duty is to embrace the direction and create a path through the living word of Christ. Stewards of the word are no longer passive recipients that consume the word but fail to bear witness to the teachings.

When we become a witness of the Word's direction, we challenge our Society or community to heal. We take on a Prophetic Quest to demonstrate the healing and changing power of Christ's love being an essential ingredient in life directing us to "obscura." (Listen, _____)

Unfortunately, most of my life did not have any guidance during rough waters. What transpired was the desire to simply survive each day. The loss that takes place is enormous when life is dwelt in darkness and the isolation that accompanies it in the life of a youth.

Today, I read wonderful books written by Pope Francis, the Desert Fathers and the Saints transforming experiences. I read while living on Tennessee's Death Row for the past 28 years, and facing on and off again possible execution dates.

During my daily existence, a remarkable or exceptional occurrence has taken place. The undeniable sense of the presence and power of God has flourished in every moment. My life is pleasant, and God has profoundly changed the course of my entire life. The only way to adequately describe it is by saying it's a "divine sigh." There is nothing to fear, and His hand has taken control of the future.

Having this kind of experience from a cell on Death Row can only be described as having supernatural faith, and nothing compares to this treasure.

What also transpires along the way is praying to give others this same feeling when you see them struggling and suffering in their life. All of us, find it difficult to accept what we can't do on our own. It's hard to ask for help, and pride will get in our way.

On Death Row, an amazing event has transformed a community of society's outcasts. The discarded souls of society have gradually become prophetic instruments of God's plan for the future. It is well known that God hears the suffering and cries of the poor. There's no doubt his believers standing at the threshold of pending executions have bowed their heads to plea their hearts case. These experiences alter and change men, especially when they lay down their swords to please God in a hostile environment. Courts, prison, public scrutiny, isolation, abandonment.

Questions flood the quiet cells on Death Row that surface from deep and humble contemplation. Men with nothing to hide, nothing to gain, and nothing to lose reach out to lift others from their dark and desolate places. No one is better qualified to breathe life into a person than a Death Row prisoner with no control or power to save his own life, yet willing to save another.

Pope Francis refers to a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets. This easily holds

similarities when it comes to the experience of the despised and overlooked being privileged recipients of the Gospel. Both put in the work to reach God – it's no easy path. Most importantly, it echoes the screams of redemptive value in the least likely circumstances. While the world we live in is filled with death and the destruction of hope and faith, prisoners embrace a long ago belief from the Desert Fathers suffering and become born into enlightenment.

While we live in a world that is teaching us to discard objects that do not serve our needs successfully. If a problem arises, it is quickly advised to throw out the object and replace it. This concept's perpetuation has slowly extended into the tossing out of souls and lives when they serve no satisfactory purpose, and the abandonment of our responsibilities. When a relationship falters, we toss it out. When a church offends us, we leave. We abandon, we discard, and sometimes we destroy or shun. For us, life is transformed by the introduction of elimination of people and places. When it suits our needs we embrace it until we determine our needs have been met.

Our belief in God becomes measured by what we believe He has added or taken from our life that is satisfying to us. Rarely do we truly see his hand in our life work because we are consumed with a personal vision of what we want to see and experience.

It's all too often in our loss or suffering that we call to our God for strength, and then we reflect with honest appreciation of our struggle, or His struggle and suffering for us.

There is a beautiful lesson to be learned from living under the threat of constant death, and sadly, very few will be able to live through it to tell their story. The first and foremost path to feeling God in your life is to illuminate your daily

your daily path with love despite the situation or circumstances. If you want to see God reveal himself, then see Jesus in the eyes of the next person you encounter and tell them they can awake every morning celebrating the day with one of the most fundamental teachings: “As you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me.” (Mt 25:40)

The second and most often overlooked result we don’t experience enough to learn the significance of is: “The measure you give will be the measure you get.” (Mt 7:2)