

Reflections

International

Catholic Family Newsletter

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Volume 83

Bringing Light Into a World of Darkness

Do You Have to Be Christian to Enter Paradise?

Beyond Buddha to Beloved Christian

Homeless Man Makes Palm Crosses For Others

Blessing to All:



Death chases each of us. After you die, where will you spend eternity? God has Paradise waiting for us. Will you be allowed to enter?

Some religions teach that you have to be baptized and believe in Jesus to be saved and get into Paradise. Is this true? There are billions of people on earth that don't know Jesus, like Buddhist or other types of belief systems. What happens to them when they die? What does the bible say about them?

The bible teaches us that Christ came for **all people**. *"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom **for all people**."* 1 Timothy 2:3-6

George Weigel, in his book, "The Truth of Catholicism" (2001), offers the Catholic church's teaching succinctly through a series of yes-or-no questions:

*Does the church believe that the salvation of those who do not know Christ is somehow made possible by Christ? **Yes.***

• *Does the church believe that this puts all of those saved in some relationship with the Catholic Church? **Yes.***

The Catechism describes the teaching in this way, rooting all salvation in Christ and His death: **"Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partakers, in a way known to God, of the Paschal mystery. Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of His church but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have desired baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity"** (Catechism, 1260).

I believe that God is love and wants all His children to be in Paradise. Many Jewish people born and died before the time of Christ, were not baptized nor knew Jesus Christ, yet we know from the Old Testament, that God will save His people. Isaiah 43:1-7 describes God's love and His promise to save.



Sometimes religions put God in a small box and are so rigid in their belief system, that God's greatest attributes of Love, Compassion and the free gift of salvation is too often discounted by teaching repeated bible verses that speak of the necessity of baptism or you cannot be saved. Too much emphasis on one or more verses

in the bible can negate the greatness and love of God for all of us. Some Christian religions preach a false message directed at the unbaptized or people with different belief systems that they cannot be saved unless they are baptized. Shameful disregard for what the bible teaches about Christ dying for all people.

Some religions were founded on the teachings of one individual, while others seem to have spontaneously occurred. The Catholic church was founded by Christ. Amen. All others split away from the Catholic church, based on a bible verse, or interpretation of a verse, or a host of other complaints and reasons.

By whatever religion you identify yourself with, how you treat others is probably the most important aspect of your belief system "in action."

Matthew 7:12 sums up how we are to act..." "Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets."

Be good to your family, friends, strangers, and those you work with. Stop judging others and you will not be judged (Matthew 7:1)

If you are a Christian, be a good Christian. If you are a Buddhist, be a good Buddhist. Be good to all and God will be good to you. Forgive those that insult you and call you names. Bless them and blessings will return to you.

Paradise is assessable to all people. How you live your life is more important than the religious organization to which you belong. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). This is a quote from Jesus and speaks of how we are to treat others. He didn't say be merciful to only Christians or Jews...but to all. Amen. Paradise awaits many....be good to others and honor your mother and father. God will honor you if you do this.



Revelation 7:9 "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from **every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.** They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands."

When you look into "your" future, your actions, love of others and forgiving others, will bode well for you, in reaching Paradise.

If you are a Buddhist, Hindu, Agnostic, or Atheist reading this newsletter, we invited you to read the New Testament. May the Holy Spirit enlighten you to the truth of Jesus Christ. The gospel of John is a good place to start. Read it slowly and think about what is being said.

Beyond Buddha to Beloved Christian

How I became the first-ever Christian in my family lineage.

BY: ALEXANDER CHU



Click ... click ... click. I could hear my parents in the other room using a handheld tally counter as they recited mantras. In one day in our home, the counter might reach 1,000 clicks, or 2 hours of meditation. They chanted in order to clear their minds and purify themselves, seeking perfect enlightenment in the way of the Buddha.



Each morning, I would wake up to the smell of incense burning. Oranges and pineapple cake were offered in front of Buddha statues in a room designated for meditation. Our home was like a temple. On each wall hung a Buddha portrait, totaling more than 30 deities throughout

the house. A statue of the Grand Master, revered as a living Buddha, stood at the center of our home. My parents spoke often about discipline, wisdom, and training the mind according to the Four Noble Truths.

You might picture us nestled on a street in Thailand or China, yet the story of my life begins in Lawrence, Kansas, home of the legendary Jayhawks. My father was a science professor, my mother a homemaker raising my two sisters and me. The influence of a Guggenheim Award-winning dad and a so-called "tiger mom" kept the pressure on for straight As. Academics, achievement, and ambition were nonnegotiable in my search for parental approval.

My Taiwanese family lineage includes generations of Buddhists, so religion was destined to be integral to my identity formation. Yet outside our home, our neighbors pursued an entirely different faith. As I practiced the violin on Sunday mornings, my attention drifted to the sound of cars pulling up outside. Families dressed in their best would get out and walk to one of the many churches down the block. I would watch them, and then return to the Suzuki method. Somehow, I managed to go through 18 years of life without ever hearing the Good News of Jesus.

Radiating Love

In the mid-1990s, I arrived at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) with eyes wide open, eager to soak in all campus life had to offer. I had chosen UIUC because of its engineering program and its closeness to home, plus its diversity and active student organizations. Back in Lawrence, I had been regularly reminded that I am in an ethnic minority. At UIUC, for the first time in my life, I met not one or two but a whole group

of people who looked like me, had similar upbringings, and knew what it's like to be bicultural in a white-majority culture.

My dorm was full of fervent Christians: the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) students shared a bond with each other and seemed to radiate love. They were the first Asian American Christians I had ever met. They cared about things that were important to me—like living with purpose and having compassion for a cause beyond themselves. Living with them, I began to realize that the Buddhism of my upbringing was not in my heart.



Growing curious about Christianity during my sophomore year, I asked a friend if I could join him at an IVCF gathering. There I heard for the first time God's promises declared in worship songs and saw men and women praising him. I soon joined a gig (Groups Investigating God) and began studying my first Bible, beginning with the Gospel of John. The authority with which Jesus spoke amazed me; it's as if his words jumped off the pages, addressing me directly.

Before I could place faith in Jesus, I needed to know there was a rational basis for Christianity's foundational truths. Early that summer, I attended Chapter Focus Week (a retreat sponsored by IVCF), where I took an apologetics track. I heard well-founded explanations of the inspiration of Scripture, the problem of evil, and the uniqueness of the gospel. After the doctrines were satisfactorily defended, my gig leader recommended that I focus on the person of Jesus, so as not to let my endless philosophical queries distract me from the main character of Scripture. Jesus' display of

justice and compassion from the cross made perfect sense, and my reservations dissipated. I found that, contrary to the media's portrayal of it as narrow, crazy, and judgmental, Christianity was the most intellectually stimulating worldview I had ever encountered.

In October 1997, during my junior year, I decided to take a study break. I started reading John Stott's pamphlet "Becoming a Christian," which I had picked up at an IVCF gathering. While reading, I grew convinced of my sin and need to be forgiven. I drove to an open forest area that night, knelt down on the grass beneath the stars, and committed my life to Christ. I had grown up in a sea of deities, yet never had a relationship with any of them. On that day, I experienced the living God, *Emmanuel*: "God is with us." A peace overtook me as I gazed at the sky. That night I became the first Christian in our family's lineage.

Honoring My Parents



By presenting the gospel in a profound and simple way, Stott's booklet had sealed my conversion. But over a dozen believers had led me up to that point. I had heard the gospel both through the message and its messengers, who embodied the Word of God in their lives. Some had an intellectual style and could answer my tough questions. Others shared about Jesus' mark on their life. A few of them regularly invited me to events. God sent his only Son as both the message and the messenger. Likewise, the IVCF community served as the message and messenger united as a faithful witness.

For months I prayed about how to tell my parents what had happened. When I was at home for winter break, I sat in our living room to read *Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents*. My father was stunned by my reading choice, but also pleased by the dutiful title of the book (written by a team of Asian American ministers, including Peter Cha and Greg Jao). When he asked why I was reading it, I told him I had become a Christian.

That evening, my dad, ever the scholar, took my Bible to his office and spent hours reading it to learn about my new faith. Being from a collectivist culture that emphasizes group identity, my parents insisted that our family religion was Buddhism. My mom recognized Jesus as a humble man with good character, but said he is one of many gods. Both parents held out hope that I would come to my senses and return to the Buddhist faith.



As the years passed, God's indwelling in my heart grew deeper, and I started to discern a call to vocational ministry. My parents said that if I followed through with this plan, they would cut me off. Sensing disunity in our home, I decided to stay and care for my father, who was battling heart disease. My presence and devotion built mutual respect and helped preserve our relationship. In God's timing, my family softened to my hopes of becoming a pastor. My parents continue to share their Buddhist experiences with me, and I continue to share my faith with them. My mom regularly prays to Jesus to bless and protect me.



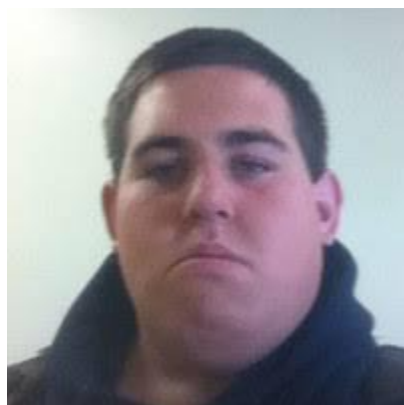
Today I serve on staff at a multisite church in the Chicago suburbs. I help equip members to become ambassadors of justice and mercy within a ten-mile radius surrounding the church. I was fortunate to have experienced the love of God and now have the privilege to shepherd others in living out the gospel. There were a number of twists and turns in the road to reach this point. But every season of my life is in response to God's love, not a striving to achieve or obtain it. He who began a good work in me will carry it on to completion. Through the power of Christ's resurrection, my shame-based culture's search for affirmation is transformed and redeemed by grace. I am God's workmanship, approved and unashamed (2 Tim. 2:15).

Homeless man spreads Gospel through crosses made of palm leaves

Miguel Zamora refuses to let his troubled past dictate his future with Christ



San Antonio – A man is taking his troubled life and turning it around through crosses he makes out of palm leaves for the community.



Miguel Zamora, 46, posts up at the intersection of Culebra and Zarzamora Street, where he spreads the Gospel.

“I do this because I love crosses and, first of all, I love my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” Zamora said. “I feel like it drives me closer to him and encourages me never to give up on the struggles we have in life.”

Zamora said the hardest part is collecting the leaves.

“Getting the leaves is difficult,” Zamora said. “I talk to people who have them and ask if they will allow me to get them.”

Zamora makes the crosses by hand, hairspray, and scissors. He sells them as a source of income because he is homeless.

“Doing this helps me get by,” Zamora said. “Sometimes we are not able to eat, but somehow doing this helps us each day.”

He and his wife, Gina Zamora, have lived on the streets on and off for the past three years. He said his struggles started when he was a child.

“Growing up I had a rough childhood,” Zamora said. “I had a mother who loved me very well, but she also gave me strong discipline. I thank her for that. I have been in trouble, but no matter how much trouble I have been in, I have always had people who prayed for me and who loved me and talked with me and spoke with me.”

Gang activity landed Zamora in prison for several years.

“I was in segregation for five years,” Zamora said. “I had a lot of time to myself. The only thing that kept me sane was reading my Bible and listening to, we had a radio, so listening to the word of God.”

Drug addiction was also a struggle of Zamora’s.

“I did heroin and crack cocaine,” Zamora said. “My biggest drug was fear though because ‘Once you get out of gangs, the only way out is death,’ so I lived in fear for a lot of years.”

He said he has been sober for six months and has been trying to get off the streets ever since.

"We live in a tent, but I know God is going to do something big for us," Zamora said. "He helps us eat and get what we need. I feel like God has a lot for me. I know there is a lot more for me. Sometimes, the day doesn't turn out as good. Sometimes we don't even eat. My wife and I get on our knees and pray together."

Zamora said sharing his crosses with the community fills his cup.

"Every time I give a cross, it goes to a deeper meaning within myself," Zamora said. "I feel like I am giving to the people, hoping that it might help somebody as well. I love to encourage them that no matter what they are going through, I let them know I have been through this and this and this but I also had a way out."

In addition to the cross, Zamora said another thing that keeps him going is his children, who do not know he's homeless.

"I have a six-year-old boy," Zamora said. "He is with my mom. He is very smart. I got a daughter who is in the Air Force and an older son who is in the secret service for the military. I try not to get them involved. I try to keep my homelessness away from people. I just know whatever God is doing, he is leading me to something greater and bigger and maybe he is bringing me through this to get me to where he wants me to be. I do think of them daily. I think of them daily and I want them to understand that I love them no matter what you know."

Zamora said his dreams have changed over time.

"My dreams as a kid was to be a movie star," Zamora said through laughter. "I always said I was going to star in the Walking Dead. That's the show! Now as I have gotten older and going through what all I have been through, I want to be a pastor. To help people. To pitch the word of God and to take it out to the world."

Zamora's relationship with God has encouraged his wife as well.

"Even though I am out here on the streets, it doesn't matter because I still wake up with a smile because I see him and I know that at the end of the day, it is going to be OK no matter how our day turns out," Gina Zamora said. "I see hurt inside of him and I see all of this pain, but he still pulls through every day and it makes me so proud of him."

Zamora said he is a Street Warrior for Christ and a Cross-walker.

"I have walked a cross from New Braunfels to Sutherland Springs in honor of the people there," Zamora said.

More importantly, he said he loves the relationship he is building with others despite being rejected at times.

"If you have Jesus Christ in your life and on your side and in your heart, nothing can take that away," Zamora said. "If he can love me like that, then I can love like that. I can love people like that no matter what they have done to me or what. I can love like that. The cross just shows me not to give up because God didn't give up on me. Even though he got on that cross. He thought of me. He thought of me and he didn't give up."



**REZA POR EL FIN DEL ABORTO
PRAY FOR THE END TO ABORTION.**



**The International Catholic Family Newsletter
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Our mission statement is to motivate people to pray and to be Christian examples in their work, home and with others, for those needing the Light in a world of Darkness.

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**I am watching over you. Pray my children,
Pray, Pray, Pray, My Rosary For The Salvation of
Sinners**

