

Mom,

I write to explain why I have stopped calling you.

Our family was Roman Catholic. Your two brothers were priests. You yourself briefly spent time in a convent. We had the creepy suffering Jesus painting hanging on the living room wall whose eyes followed you everywhere, ruby red votive candles in the hallway making it look like hell at night, crucifixes and rosaries all over the place. A life full of catechisms and Catholic newspapers and Sunday masses.

I was made to be an altar boy, where I got to be bullied before Mass by some demonic wounded boy breathing stink into my face, pinning me against a wall before I got to 'on stage' and light the candles for all the rich people seeking to justify themselves.

And yet.

Every time I have acted in a Christ-like way, you, YOU, who inculcated me with this philosophy by sending me to a Catholic elementary and middle school and a Jesuit high school with the motto "Men for others," have given me shit for it.

A black kid knocks on our door during a snowstorm. You remember. Only you and I were home. His car broke down outside the house. He needs a ride to Mattapan where he lives. He needs help. You cower behind the door, trying to get me not to answer it, not to speak to him. Then you freak out like a lunatic when I tell him, sure, I'll give him a ride home. Freak out. Like a madwoman. Eyes bulging out, mouth gaping, gesticulating like some monster octopus infected with a virus. Which you were.

The virus of self.

What would this mean for *you*? You didn't even care about me, actually. You cared about what I mean to *you*. What if I got in an accident in the snow, or got mugged or something in a 'bad' neighborhood? What would that mean for *you*? The dumb look on your face as we pulled out of the driveway. Terror and selfishness. Thinking about it make me sick.

*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'* "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Matthew 25:35-40

This is how Christ's teaching becomes trapped in an institution that buggers little children and then systematically hides it.

I let people take advantage of me, over and over again. Lie about me. Accuse me of things I didn't do. Take my money. Over and over. And you give me shit for it every time. What did Christ do, Mom? What did Saint Francis do? Why do you think people do those things to me? Because they are like you. Selfish. If I defend myself, protect myself, care for myself, at all, that is being concerned with self.

"Be the change you wish to see in the world."

Mahatma Gandhi

Either someone someday would choose to do those things for me, things I will not do for me, out of love for me and not themselves, or they would not. Either way, that was always the test. Is there another human being in the system, anywhere? Can anyone else be divine, or has the virus taken hold so deeply the apocalypse has already happened and this nonsense is just a tedious denouement?

Just imagine.

Can you just imagine if Christ's mother Mary was like you? Yammering in poor Christ's ear every step of the way? "Don't do this, what will people think of the family?! Don't do this, you'll get hurt. Don't do this, you'll leave me all alone. Me. Me. Our family. Me Us Me Me."

After probably feeding him stories when he was young, as you did to me, about how special he was? And teaching him about "God"? A flaming sword of slow death flashing every which way, sending mixed signals designed to drive him up a freaking wall? Making good deeds into evil ones?

Maybe Mary was like that. Maybe that's why Christ volunteered to be crucified. Just to stop listening to his mother's never-ending hypocritical bullshit, up to and including her sitting there doing nothing while Christ dies on the cross. Boo hoo. I'm sad. But I'll stay here and bystand, thank you very much, if so I am surprised he lasted into his thirties. I can't believe I myself made it to fifty-two.

*While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*

Matthew 12:46-50

*"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He*

*loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother! Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"*

John 19:25-27, Matthew 25:41

*But the burning, the bodiless whisper in my ear.*

*Keep it up.*

*"you then asia"*