

TESTIMONY OF JOHN HOLECEK

Part I written for California Mission Magazine September 1998 / Part II written April 2001 / Part III written May 2003 / Part IV written 16 April 2006 / Part V written 3 & 4 January 2009 / Part VI written March 2012 / Part VII written November 2015 / Part VIII written February 2016 / Part IX written 30 April 2017 / Part X written March 2018, Part XI written October 2018 / Part XII written February 2024

FORWARD

This is a long document that might not be of interest to everyone. For my conversion story, read only the first four pages. I quit adding to the document in 2018 and today is 18 August 2022. Many God things have happened in the interim, but I got tired of hearing myself.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS / PART I

I am eternally grateful to my parents for raising me as a Christian. In 1955, at age eight, I walked down the aisle of the First Baptist Church of McPherson, Kansas, and gave my heart to the Lord. If you were to ask me to articulate just what I believed at that time, I would be at a loss, but this much I do remember: it was God who prompted that act of faith and who gave me the grace to respond. Since then I have been many times faithless, but God has always kept faith with me.

Already in my childhood, God was preparing me for conversion to the Catholic Church. Although Baptists treat communion as symbolic and celebrate it infrequently, my soul was always profoundly moved by communion services.

Faith was not nominal in our home—we had family devotions, prayer at meals and were active in the church—but I began to fall away during high school until finally, the summer after my senior year, I prayed, “Lord, I no longer believe in you enough to pray.”

Thus began my descent into darkness.

I had always been a good student, and college was no exception. I graduated *magna cum laude* from Kansas State University with a double degree in German and Economics. I spent a year on scholarship at the University of Munich, which proved to be preparation for future service to God, although I had no intention of serving him at the time.

During senior year spring break, I traveled to Mazatlan, Mexico, where I had a significant Catholic experience. By now my life had become one of too much alcohol and casual sex, and my time in Mazatlan was spent in total dissipation. One morning, after an all-night session of drinking, I passed by a church in the center of town. For whatever reason, I went inside, and a Mass was in progress. I took a seat, and during the course of the Mass, I was struck by the futility of my life. I began to weep, not discretely but with loud sobs that left me prostrate in the pew.

Here I was, the epitome of the ugly American, a child of privilege and comparative wealth, stinking of beer, stretched out on my back, weeping disconsolately. However, instead of being ignored or asked to leave, I was instead surrounded by a group of Mexican peasants, who, despite the barrier of language, did their best to comfort me. As the day progressed, however, I put this wonderfully visible sign of God's love and manifestation of Catholic faith out of my mind.

A general sense of despair had, by now, become my constant companion, and the summer following graduation, I suffered a mental collapse. At the urging of my parents and our family physician, I entered a private mental hospital. I did desire help, but I also hoped

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that a psychiatric hospitalization would result in a 4F draft classification, as the Vietnam War was then raging.

During the evaluation process, I experienced the limitations of modern psychology. The various tests and interviews seemed to be directed toward a fictitious person—one made up of a pastiche of various psychological theories—not one of flesh and blood. I sensed that no real help would be coming from this quarter, and so, to amuse myself, I gave bizarre answers and responses, which resulted in a diagnosis of schizophrenia, and I was put on Thorazine and a regimen of group therapy, work therapy, and psycho-therapy. I became a very cooperative patient because I wanted out, and after six weeks I did leave against medical advice. I departed as depressed and despairing as I had entered.

The next 12 years of my life were lived without hope. I was obsessively preoccupied with self, and sin was my master. During this period, I went on to film school at the University of Southern California and began working in the media. I met a woman and moved in. When she became pregnant, an abortion was procured without the slightest thought of the moral dimensions of the act. Eventually we married but were later divorced. I began living with another woman who also got pregnant and who also had an abortion. Had you asked me at the time if I were a good person, I would have answered yes. My friends would have said the same.

In 1981 I began edging my way back to God. I started attending Hollywood Presbyterian Church and joined on Valentine's Day 1982. Even so, I was locked in a mighty struggle, fueled, I believe, by the Devil's desire for my soul, which he had every right to—except that I had been baptized and had once believed. Now, even though I received instruction, I didn't know what I believed: I could not reconcile a triune God with monotheism, nor could I believe in a resurrected Christ. I did, however, have the will to believe.

Throughout these years, I suffered recurrent bouts of depression, and during this period, I experienced the most severe episode of my life. I begged God for deliverance, but none came. To protect what sanity I had left, I decided to spend some time with my parents.

While home, a television producer for whom I had worked in Boston tracked me down and offered me a short-term job at good pay, a direct answer to prayer as my financial situation was bleak—and I did thank God. Because some of the initial organizational work could be done by phone, I began work that very day.

By day's end, my spirits had lifted, and I was proud of all I had accomplished. Then, at supper, I had an attack whose symptoms were a combination of heart attack and panic attack: pain shot down my left arm; my heart began pumping with an incredible fury; and I was overwhelmed by anxiety.

I excused myself and went downstairs, followed by my parents. When I explained what was happening, my father gave me a Librium and then a nitroglycerin tablet, neither

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of which helped. He then decided to take me to the hospital, but I refused. “No,” I said, “we’ll pray instead.” By now I was weeping, as was my mother.

We sat down on the couch, held hands, and I sobbed, “Lord, you have brought me this far, and you won’t abandon me now.” And he didn’t; the attack immediately began to subside, and that night I slept peacefully.

The next day I pondered what had happened. Although I received no particular revelation, it seemed to me then, and still does, that God was saying, “I gave you a job when you asked, and you slipped immediately back into your old habits of mind and behavior. I have your life in my hand. If you want to serve me, do it!” So I surrendered myself, very imperfectly but as best I could, to the will of God.

And so began my ascent back out of darkness.

I started to receive answer after answer to prayer, and my faith solidified. I also sensed that I had been healed of depression, which has proven true. Although I had become a new creature in Christ, my character was slow to change. Again and again God attacked me at my most vulnerable point, pride, a process which is still ongoing. In 1983, through a direct intervention by God, I married a woman I met at church.

In late 1984, I was offered a job by Underground Evangelism, an evangelical Protestant mission working in communist countries. In deciding whether to accept, I discovered something important: One must act first in faith, supported by reason and the will, before receiving confirmation from God.

I took the job, and my wife and I were sent to Munich. What God had begun during my college years now bore fruit. Six weeks later I was sent on a trip to Romania and was arrested at the border and held for four days by the Romanian secret police.

This experience taught me two things: I was not the hero of the faith I thought I was, and Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Hebrews 13:8). I was delivered out of the situation according to Jesus’ words in Luke 21:15: “For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist.”

With the collapse of communism, I resigned in 1990 and was briefly without work, but in March 1991, I was hired by Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, California, to be the director of public information. That a rigorously Catholic college faithful to the Magisterium of the Church would hire a Protestant as its public spokesperson is truly a miracle.

Soon after taking the job, my wife informed me on a Sunday afternoon, with no warning, that she was moving out and divorcing me. Monday she was gone, and by Friday I had been served divorce papers. She had also taken all of our money.

I spent many hours in prayer, asking God to restore our marriage, and four months later I tracked my wife down in Indianapolis, and she agreed to come home. The experience was so difficult and disconcerting that we did not closely examine it. She described it only as “having gone crazy.”

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The first Sunday of 1992, we began attending St. Sebastian Catholic Church. My conversion was remarkably easy. I believe that any Christian who seeks truth and submits his will to God will eventually become a Catholic. Because my wife had been twice married, and I once, we were not accepted into full communion until the Easter Vigil 1995, after declarations of nullity were rendered against all three marriages.

In 1993 my wife had another episode of “going crazy.” This time she stayed in Santa Paula, and a group of us did an intervention and got her into a hospital where she was diagnosed as manic-depressive and put on lithium. Again, I was on my face before God, and after four months, she came home.

I always knew that 1996, my 50th year, would be momentous, but I had no idea just how momentous. In May, I gave six months’ notice at Thomas Aquinas College; in September my mother died and we put my father in a home; in October my wife had another attack and left me; and in November the lease on our house expired. On December 1, 1996, I had no job, no wife, and nowhere to live.

But I did have a job interview lined up, and in January 1997, I began work as vice president for public relations for the International Theological Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family (ITI) and director of Heart of the Church Foundation.

The ITI was established by Pope John Paul II in 1995 as a graduate school with a mandate to reach out primarily to students in the formerly communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Its president is Dr. Michael Waldstein, a 1977 graduate of Thomas Aquinas College. The chancellor is Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, Archbishop of Vienna, the man who was general editor of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The ITI shares a restored Carthusian monastery in Gaming, Austria, with Franciscan University of Steubenville, which was instrumental in establishing the International Theological Institute. Heart of the Church Foundation, whose offices are on the Franciscan University campus, is the fundraising arm for the ITI.

I cannot imagine a job more perfectly suited to my talents and experiences; I am immeasurably blessed in it—and, as it should be, I am inadequate to its demands, making me wholly dependent on God. Although this time my wife is not coming back, God has even here been merciful and has opened up my heart to the possibility of loving again.

I would ask everyone who reads this to please pray that I remain faithful to God’s call.

GOD’S FAITHFULNESS / PART II

*Again and again God attacked me at my most vulnerable
point, pride, a process which is still ongoing.*

FROM PART I

The first time I came across the daily prayer (reproduced below) of Cardinal Rafael Merry del Val, Secretary of State to Pope Pius X, I thought to myself, “I should be praying this,” but I didn’t have the nerve.

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O Jesus, meek and humble of heart! Hear me

Jesus deliver me:

From the desire of being esteemed
From the desire of being loved
From the desire of being sought after
From the desire of being honored
From the desire of being praised
From the desire of being preferred to others
From the desire of being consulted
From the desire of being approved
From the fear of being humbled
From the fear of being despised
From the fear of suffering rebuffs
From the fear of being calumniated
From the fear of being forgotten
From the fear of being ridiculed
From the fear of being injured
From the fear of being suspected

Jesus, grant me the grace to wish:

That others may be loved more than I
That others may increase in the opinion of the world and I diminish
That others may be employed and I set aside
That others may be praised and I overlooked
That others may be preferred before me in everything
That others may be more holy than I, provided that I am as holy as I can be

When I came across the prayer again after I had begun work as director of Heart of the Church Foundation, I decided to incorporate it into my devotional life. Some time later, I began reading St. John of the Cross, specifically *The Dark Night of the Soul* and *The Ascent of Mt. Carmel*.

God, of course, attentively hears and acts on every prayer. In the case of the humility prayer, he acted with alacrity. John of the Cross gave me the theological underpinning to accept what was to unfold as a blessing—assuming I was able—and the so-called hard sayings of Jesus and other New Testament verses added, as it were, a divine stamp of approval.

First, although I had genuinely fallen in love with a woman who seemed an ideal match, that love went unrequited. I was astonished at the depth of my hurt.

Soon after that (April 1999), I was fired from the perfect job.

It seemed clear that God was offering the opportunity to learn to love him just for himself.

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I spent the next several months designing, on a free-lance basis, the website for the International Theological Institute. When that was finished, I put my house up for sale, packed my clothes in my car and headed for McPherson, Kansas.

In the meantime, I had been offered the job of director of development for Catholics United for the Faith (CUF). As much as I respect the work of CUF, I declined, being more interested in a component part, Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS), which was in the process of being spun off as a separate ministry.

The fall of 1999 was blessed. By now my father was in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's disease, and I was able to visit him daily. I was also helping renovate my parents' condominium, to which my sister and brother-in-law will eventually retire.

In late December, I was offered a job as chief fundraiser for FOCUS, which I accepted, and in January 2000, I moved to Greeley, Colorado. On 10 June my father died. His passing was so extraordinary that my sister, immediately after he died, said, "Now I know for sure there's a heaven, and I'm going to do everything I can to get there."

In January 2001, I was fired from FOCUS for not having met the fundraising goals set by the president. On Valentine's Day, I moved back to McPherson, where I now find myself.

Throughout these and indeed all the circumstances of my life, God has shown himself faithful. My prayer is that I would be useful to him.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS / PART III

*We wait in hope for the Lord;
he is our help and our shield.*

Psalm 33:20

My original intent upon returning was to begin applying for jobs suitable to my experience, with no expectation of staying in McPherson. However, as I began sending resumes out, I realized I had no desire to once again start life anew in a strange place. I had always intended to retire in McPherson, so I made the firm decision to stay and see what develops, a decision which proved providential.

First, I began work as an assistant commercial baker at the Main Street Deli, a job that lasted from May until mid-December 2001. That same fall I organized a fundraiser for the McPherson Opera House Preservation Company, which eventually led to my being named Director of Development, effective February 2002.

On 18 May 2002, I married Merrily Pierson, a story worthy of a lengthy description.

I also organized a 4th of July Prayer Walk that brought together 200 people across denominational lines to pray for our city, county, and nation and which has become an annual event. Later that year, I formed an ecumenical pro-life prayer group that meets once a month.

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Since I've returned, I've become well integrated into the business, civic, social, spiritual, and intellectual life of the community. I am profoundly at peace and am grateful not only to God but also to all those persons, past and present, who have made and continue to make McPherson and McPherson County such an extraordinary place to live.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS / PART IV

*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;
blessed be the name of the Lord.*

Job 1:21b

After I returned home from the 2006 Easter Vigil, my wife Merrily confirmed her decision to end our marriage. Christ is risen!

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS / PART V

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I put my hope.*

Psalms 130:5

Since my Christian recommitment, each decade year of my life, often around my birthday—1986, 40th; 1996, 50th; and 2006, 60th—has been marked by something dramatic: in this case, as mentioned above, divorce with all its attendant adjustments. I also found, for the first time in my life, the birthday itself, the fact of turning 60, somewhat distressing.

Jesus said marriage is indissoluble and that a divorced person who remarries commits adultery. I hold this to be an eternal, God-given truth. However, the Catholic Church allows for remarriage if a marriage tribunal determines that a marriage, in fact, never existed. I know that to many this sounds like a fine piece of sophistry, but having been through the process three times now, I am, and always have been, convinced that it reflects the genuine will of God. In a letter dated 24 November 2008 from Reverend John V. Hotze, Judicial Vicar of the Catholic Diocese of Wichita, he wrote, "I am happy to announce that your petition for a Church annulment of your former marriage has been granted favorably. I hope and pray that you continue to grow in Christ's life, and that if you ever marry in the Catholic Church, you will be blessed with abundant love."

Abundant love is everyone's hope, and that is what God promises and has shown through Jesus Christ, and it may be that God's love alone is meant to be sufficient for me. I am somewhat distressed, however, that the Holecek name within our particular blood line dies with me unless a wife should give birth to a son, which seems, on the face of it, to be unfair to both the woman and the son. If God wants me to remarry (and have a son), he will have to engineer it as I'm making no effort to find a wife.

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God's faithfulness is the overarching theme of this testimony, and I will be interested in how that works itself out in 2009. Since I became Director of Development for the McPherson Opera House Company, progress on the Opera House has been continual, and we are now in the final phase, the rehabilitation of the auditorium and the construction of the arts center beneath. To date, money has always been there as we needed it, but at this "Ahaving two years of operating funds), and I don't know where it will be coming from.

Assuming the funds are found (I hope and pray they will be as it is high time that this project come to an end, having begun in 1986), I am then faced with finding another job. I'm in no position financially to retire, nor do I want too. Concerning work, God has been entirely faithful (even including the firings, so he will provide something). I have many times in prayer "abandoned myself to divine providence," believing that "all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose." Nevertheless, my faith is not perfect, and I do worry, which I consider an affront to God. My most immediate spiritual goal is "to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength and my neighbor as myself."

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS / PART VI

Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again, rejoice!

Philippians 4:4

The funds were raised and the grand re-opening of the auditorium was celebrated on 28 January 2010, and I do have a new job: executive director of the Opera House. I have been asked a number of times how I managed to raise the necessary funds (which finally amounted to \$10,500,000). My answer, delivered with complete seriousness, is that I have a good prayer life. The completion of the Opera House was utterly dependent on the providence of God.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS / PART VII

...I believe. Help my unbelief.

Mark 9:24

Once again, I find myself in an unsettled state. On October 19, 2015, I resigned from the McPherson Opera House, not knowing where I should go next. On the 20th, I had an operation on my back, from which I am now recovering. I do trust in the Lord, but nonetheless I fret, even knowing God's faithfulness. We are admonished in scripture to not worry about anything, yet I worry.

I was much blessed by my tenure as executive director of the Opera House, both by the nature of the work and by my marvelous staff, who were truly God-given. In fact, at every turn God provided what was needed. It was a job at which I could exercise all my talents.

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So why give notice, especially with nothing to go to?

1) It began with a rumination on my future. I had intended to work until I was 75, saving most of my social security, which would have amounted to around \$100,000. Selling my house would have added another \$75,000. I would then move to somewhere on the Gulf Coast, where the cost of living is cheap. As I was most recently reviewing this—on October 14, 2015, to be exact—I thought to myself, “I don’t want to do this.” Then a notion popped into my mind, “Why not become a foreign missionary.”

2) After 14 years I had become somewhat weary of and detached from my job, and...

3) A strained relationship with the board which reached a fevered pitch in a meeting with the executive committee on October 15, 2015, confirming a decision to resign.

I included the following text for my report at the next board meeting held on October 19, 2015:

As a sincere Christian, I believe that “...in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28 NIV). My prayer during the last six months of my back problems has been “Lord, don’t let me miss the lesson I am to learn.”

What God has shown me is that I am much too attracted to the world and that my trust in Him is not what it should be. What you board members may not know is that after my Christian reconversion in 1982, much of my life was spent in full-time Christian work: first with Underground Evangelism, then Thomas Aquinas College, then Heart of the Church Foundation, and, finally, Fellowship of Catholic University Students. The time frame was 1984 through 2000. After a good deal of prayer and reflection, I truly believe that God is calling me back to full-time Christian ministry, specifically as a Catholic missionary in a foreign country. My level of commitment to this call is far beyond anything I have done before, with a willingness to sell all that I have and to die away from family, friends and country.

Given this call, I am submitting my resignation. I will work closely with the board to assure that the transition to a new executive director goes smoothly and to the benefit of the Opera House, which I dearly love.

I sent this same text to a number of professional and other contacts so that I could not back down. In reading it now, I am struck by the falsity of “After a good deal of prayer and reflection...” As noted above, the idea of becoming a foreign missionary was a quick and fleeting thought. It may or may not be God’s call and the willingness to “sell all that I have and to die away from family, friends and country” may only be false braggadocio.

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In any case, the response from friends, relatives, and professional acquaintances was overwhelmingly positive. I have since told others of my resignation with the more general proviso that I want to do whatever God wants me to do. This is a true statement. Several have asked me to reconsider because they see my resignation as a severe blow to the Opera House. Leaving, however, is a firm conviction.

Oddly enough, something has potentially opened up that pleases me. The McPherson Opera House is a charter member of the Kansas Historic Theatres Association; of which I have twice been president. I have been in a number of Kansas historic theatres restored and unrestored, and one that has always excited me is the Jayhawk in Topeka, which is completely unrestored. From the first time I saw it, I have loved the space and consider its rehabilitation crucial to the revitalization of downtown Topeka. I had met with the board several times with various suggestions to get the project going, but it never seemed to gain traction, that is until recently with the accession of Jeff Carson to the board presidency. On 3 November 2015, we had the following text interchange.

Jeff: I just heard you are retiring.

John: Not retiring. I want to get back to full-time Christian work. I don't want to retire, and I don't have the money to retire.

Jeff: Hah!!! (*Comment from John: "I don't think he believed me."*)

John: Who did you hear it from?

Jeff: Doug Jones. He is moving to Colorado btw. Topeka needs you for a lot of reasons.

John: Make me an offer. I was serious about Christian work.

Jeff: Our Theatre is across the street from the Catholic church and a stone's throw from homeless shelters. We're eager to get traction next year by hiring a PT maybe FT Executive Director to steer this thing along. We've raised over \$800,000 this year since I took over. Downtown renovation is almost complete and a BUNCH of real estate has been gobbled up in downtown. We'd have a lot of fun my friend.

John: Interesting. Keep me in the loop. I'm having Thanksgiving in Topeka. Maybe we could get together Friday for a little bit. Maybe lunch at the Celtic Fox.

Jeff: Sounds perfect.

John: I'll be in touch.

Truth be told, I would love to raise the money for the rehabilitation of the Jayhawk and do whatever else was required. Although the timing seems providential is this from God or mere coincidence?

Here has always been my plan, even before this text exchange. Work through December. Spend New Year's Eve at the Spiritual Life Center in Bel Aire, and then spend a week at the Monastery of Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek in Oklahoma. I have no particular expectations of what that week will bring.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS / PART VIII

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;

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in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5

The year 2016 is proving to be interesting.

First was the New Year's Eve retreat at the Diocesan Spiritual Life Center. The teaching was on various interesting scientific facts concerning the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Juan Diego's tilma. At the end of the presentation, the facilitator did something she had seen done elsewhere. In a hat, on folded pieces of paper, were the names of various saints along with a teaching attributed to that saint. The facilitator said, "Don't worry about it. The saint will choose you." I drew Fr. Alexander Men, a bio of whom is below:

"Alexander Vladimirovich Men (Russian: Александр Владимирович Мень; 22 January 1935 – 9 September 1990) was a Russian Orthodox priest, theologian, Biblical scholar and writer."

"Men wrote dozens of books (including his magnum opus, History of Religion: In Search of the Way, the Truth and the Life, the seventh volume of which, Son of Man, served as the introduction to Christianity for thousands of citizens in the Soviet Union); baptized hundreds if not thousands; founded an Orthodox Open University; opened one of the first Sunday Schools in Russia as well as a charity group at the Russian Children's Hospital.[1] His influence is still widely felt and his legacy continues to grow among Christians both in Russia and abroad. He was murdered early on Sunday morning, 9 September 1990, by an ax-wielding assailant just outside his home of Semkhoz, Russia."

He rightly chose me: my DNA is Slavic and German; I worked for a mission that supported persecuted Christians in Communist countries, traveling several times to the U.S.S.R., and, like Fr. Men (although it's not mentioned above), I am very desirous of unity between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. Here below is the spiritual lesson I am to meditate on for the year:

"How are you to know if you are living according to the will of God? Here is a sign: if you are distressed over anything, it means that you have not fully surrendered to God's will, although it may seem to you that you live according to His will."

I do believe this and try to live thusly. I also love St. Teresa of Avila's admonishment, "Be absolutely certain of this; today is God's will for your life."

This was followed by a seven-day retreat at the Clear Creek Monastery in Oklahoma, one of only five monasteries in the world that strictly adhere to the Rule of St. Benedict. The retreat aspect is entirely self-directed as spiritual direction is not offered and interaction with the monks is limited. One can take part in the daily liturgical activities as one chooses. Below is a list of the monks' daily activities:

Rise:	4:50 a.m.
Matins:	5:15
Lauds:	6:15
Low Mass:	6:50

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Prime:	8:00
Lectio Divina:	9:00
Terce, High Mass:	10:00
Study or Work:	11:15
Sext:	12:50 p.m.
Recreation:	2:00
None:	2:35
Manual Labor:	3:00
Vespers:	6:00
Silent Prayer:	6:30
Lectio Divina or Conference:	7:00
Compline:	8:25

I usually did Prime, Terce, High Mass, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline, most of which I found to be generally incomprehensible as all the liturgy is in Latin.

My primary goal for the week was to embrace Mary as mother and powerful intercessor and to better understand her role in salvation. I made some progress on this, but my devotion to Mary, compared to many of the saints whom I most admire, is very weak.

I got back from the monastery on 10 January, and, on the 13th, I had an appointment with Dr. Camden Whitaker who performed back surgery on me on 20 October 2015 (partial laminectomy on L5, full laminectomy on L4). I complained that I was still experiencing a great deal of pain. After I described the location of the pain, I was told, "That's not your back; it's your hips." They arranged an appointment with Dr. Damion Walker, who specializes in hip surgery, for the 18th. X-rays revealed badly damaged hips with the recommendation that I have total hip replacements.

The next day I was leaving for the March for Life, so I told the surgeon I would let him know on my return. If there ever were a March for Life in which to participate, this one was it. Attendance was dramatically down from the usual 500- to 600,000 who generally march due to a massive snow storm predicted to blanket D.C. on the afternoon of the event, and snow it did. The snow did not deter the joy and solidarity of the marchers. God save this nation from the abomination of abortion.

Snowed in, those responsible for the 600 persons who came from the Diocese of Wichita postponed our departure for two days. During those days, I was impressed beyond measure by the reaction of the students: so full of energy, so full of faith and good will. These are truly America's finest young people, to whom our current president has nothing to say. Such a tragedy.

Upon my return, I scheduled my first hip replacement for 17 February. I hope to have my second surgery some six weeks later. (I had the left hip done on 6 April.)

In the meantime, things have solidified with the job as executive director for the Jayhawk Theatre in Topeka. After I've recovered from the hip surgeries, I plan to move to

TESTIMONY OF JOHN HOLECEK

Part I written for California Mission Magazine September 1998 / Part II written April 2001 / Part III written May 2003 / Part IV written 16 April 2006 / Part V written 3 & 4 January 2009 / Part VI written March 2012 / Part VII written November 2015 / Part VIII written February 2016 / Part IX written 30 April 2017 / Part X written March 2018, Part XI written October 2018 / Part XII written February 2024

Topeka to begin work. Truth be told, I am very excited about the prospect of taking another historic theatre from death to life.

Concerning my spiritual state, I have experienced deep grief over sins committed in the past; not guilt, I'm forgiven, but grief. As of now, I seem to have passed through that stage. My approximately three months of recovery should give me ample time to further consider...I'm not sure what. As the over-arching theme of this testimony is God's faithfulness, I can only say, "God be praised!"

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS / PART IX

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself."

Luke 10:27

When asked, I tell persons that I have two interests only at this stage in my life: 1) God, and 2) raising the money necessary to rehabilitate the Jayhawk Theatre. Of course there are little subsidiary interests, but they don't consume me as the above two do.

Concerning God, I want to love Him and neighbor more and love his mother more (and myself less). I pray toward that end every day. Am I progressing? Well, yes, a little. Saints are forever emphasizing the importance of a spiritual director; St. Teresa of Avila was especially adamant in this regard (I recently finished her *Interior Castle* for the third time). I may have found a director as of two days ago 28 April 2017. I attended a conference on Catholic Culture at the Diocese of Wichita's Spiritual Life Center in Bel Aire. Friday evening's speaker was Msgr. Stuart Swetland, whom I had met in 2000 when I was with FOCUS and he headed up the Newman Center at the University of Illinois. I really don't remember much about the meeting other than we met. After his presentation at the conference, which was on the importance and necessity of all Catholics to be missionaries and was quite good, I introduced myself and out of my mouth, unbidden by me, came "Do you do spiritual direction?" and he averred that he did. He's currently president of Donnelly College in Kansas City, Kansas, which is an hour's drive from Topeka. This has the feeling of a God thing; we'll see. (We did see. He never got in touch. 6/25/17)

Speaking of God things. I'm living in the Jackson Street Lofts which were carved out of the school associated with Assumption Church, which is directly north of the Capitol building. There is a daily noonday Mass that I attend, as does Governor Sam Brownback as well as the State Representative from the 85th District (Wichita) Chuck Weber, who led a breakout session at the Catholic Culture Conference. He's a wonderful Catholic. He recognized me from daily Mass. So my spiritual life is well taken care of.

But wait, there's more. The lofts are directly across the street from the Jayhawk Theatre and one-and-a-half-blocks from Gizmo Pictures, of which Jeff Carson, the Jayhawk board president, is co-owner. I have never worked with a board president (or any board member) with whom I am more compatible. It is truly a blessing.

TESTIMONY OF JOHN HOLECEK

Part I written for California Mission Magazine September 1998 / Part II written April 2001 / Part III written May 2003 / Part IV written 16 April 2006 / Part V written 3 & 4 January 2009 / Part VI written March 2012 / Part VII written November 2015 / Part VIII written February 2016 / Part IX written 30 April 2017 / Part X written March 2018, Part XI written October 2018 / Part XII written February 2024

Jeff is an atheist, and I told him that he will see enough divine intervention in getting the Jayhawk rehabilitated that he may well become a believer. When I give a theatre tour, I always begin with “God loves historic theatres because it’s a miracle any of them get done.” As I mentioned earlier, divine intervention was certainly the order of the day for the McPherson Opera House.

We need a miracle here in Topeka. We are the largest downtown capital campaign (at least \$12 million), and we are in competition with Go Topeka, which intends, in its first phase, to raise \$9.5 million. As an aside, I am quite impressed with the level of talent among those who are committed to developing downtown as well as the rest of Topeka. There is a real energy here.

The McPherson Capital Campaign was launched with a totally unexpected \$1.15 million gift. I am anticipating the same here. For my fundraising plan to work, we need miracles as my model is not a traditional one.

I handle stress fairly well, thanks be to God, but I’ve been very exhausted this year. Again the lives of the Saints are instructive. Many of them had wretched health but accomplished great things “for nothing is impossible for God.”

GOD’S FAITHFULNESS / PART X

the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord

Job 1:21

Once again, change. Below is my 2017 Christmas greeting (see the three following pages).

TESTIMONY OF JOHN HOLECEK

Part I written for California Mission Magazine September 1998 / Part II written April 2001 / Part III written May 2003 / Part IV written 16 April 2006 / Part V written 3 & 4 January 2009 / Part VI written March 2012 / Part VII written November 2015 / Part VIII written February 2016 / Part IX written 30 April 2017 / Part X written March 2018, Part XI written October 2018 / Part XII written February 2024

*The Second Most Dangerous Prayer
in the World*



*If prayed with sincerity of heart,
God will act dramatically
and quickly.*



Next page for the prayer

TESTIMONY OF JOHN HOLECEK

Part I written for California Mission Magazine September 1998 / Part II written April 2001 / Part III written May 2003 / Part IV written 16 April 2006 / Part V written 3 & 4 January 2009 / Part VI written March 2012 / Part VII written November 2015 / Part VIII written February 2016 / Part IX written 30 April 2017 / Part X written March 2018, Part XI written October 2018 / Part XII written February 2024

O JESUS, MEEK AND HUMBLE OF HEART ! HEAR ME

Jesus deliver me :

From the desire of being esteemed
From the desire of being loved
From the desire of being sought after
From the desire of being honored
From the desire of being praised
From the desire of being preferred to others
From the desire of being consulted
From the desire of being approved
From the fear of being humbled
From the fear of being despised
From the fear of suffering rebuffs
From the fear of being calumniated
From the fear of being forgotten
From the fear of being ridiculed
From the fear of being injured
From the fear of being suspected

Jesus, grant me the grace to wish :

That others may be loved more than I
That others may increase in the opinion of the world and I diminish
That others may be employed and I set aside
That others may be praised and I overlooked
That others may be preferred before me in everything
That others may be more holy than I, provided that I am as holy as I can be

Daily prayer of Rafael, Cardinal Merry del Val, Secretary of State to Pope St. Pius X

TESTIMONY OF JOHN HOLECEK

Part I written for California Mission Magazine September 1998 / Part II written April 2001 / Part III written May 2003 / Part IV written 16 April 2006 / Part V written 3 & 4 January 2009 / Part VI written March 2012 / Part VII written November 2015 / Part VIII written February 2016 / Part IX written 30 April 2017 / Part X written March 2018, Part XI written October 2018 / Part XII written February 2024

Pride is the root of all sin.

JOHN'S STORY

In early December, circumstances led to a certain discontent that I was being under appreciated. Recognizing that these thoughts were rooted in pride, I determined to do something about it. All of scripture and the lives of the saints illustrate humility as a prime virtue. This led me to revisit the prayer on the previous page, one which I had prayed before.

From personal experience and the experience of others to whom I have recommended the prayer, I knew that God answers this prayer speedily with real consequences.

Thus, it was no surprise to me that shortly after praying, I was fired from my job as Executive Director of the Jayhawk Theatre in Topeka. Praised be God, who is faithful and true.

The immediate future is fixed. On Monday 18 December, I'm having a total replacement of my left knee in Wichita. I will then rehab at my sister's condominium in McPherson. I had originally planned to return to Topeka on 2 January. I may stay a little longer because I need to find a place to live. I intend to return to McPherson at the end of January.

I have neither the desire nor the money to retire. What I'll be doing and where I will be doing it, I have no idea. I told God, "You do the heavy lifting here."

I do wish everyone who gets this a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year!



TESTIMONY OF JOHN HOLECEK

Part I written for California Mission Magazine September 1998 / Part II written April 2001 / Part III written May 2003 / Part IV written 16 April 2006 / Part V written 3 & 4 January 2009 / Part VI written March 2012 / Part VII written November 2015 / Part VIII written February 2016 / Part IX written 30 April 2017 / Part X written March 2018, Part XI written October 2018 / Part XII written February 2024

I've been in McPherson a little over a month now, and, as usual, God has things well in hand. I'm living in a duplex, built in 1965, that perfectly suits me. It was important that I returned when I did because I was able to be helpful to my sister and brother-in-law who went through a serious bout with illness.

Not having to work has given me a great opportunity to concentrate on Lent. I'm focusing on two things: 1) Mary, and 2) health.

As a Protestant convert, I was (and am) fully onboard with all Catholic teaching. However, even though I accepted the Marian doctrines—Immaculate Conception, Assumption, Mediatrix of all graces, etc.—I did not have a deep devotion to her. This is probably typical of Protestant converts. However, a hallmark of Catholic saints is a great love for and dependence on Mary; St. John Paul II's apostolic motto "Totus Tuus" being a recent example (*See page 12 for a previous attempt at greater love for Mary.*) I did make a Marian consecration on 8 December 2016, and I'm currently reading Louis de Montfort's *True Devotion to Mary*

Concerning my health, I'm actually very healthy; I don't get colds, don't get the flu. I mentioned being exhausted on page 14. I think that stems from all I've been through in the last two years: four operations; quit one job with nothing lined up; got a new job and moved to Topeka; after 16 months I was fired and moved back to McPherson. I've always worked out, but with the extra time I now have, I'm able to be more rigorous in the hope of increasing my strength and stamina back to pre-operation levels.

Given my current situation, Pope Francis' prayer intention for March is very apropos.

EVANGELIZATION – FORMATION IN SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

That the Church may appreciate the urgency of formation in spiritual discernment, both on the personal and communitarian levels.

I like Alexander Men's and Teresa of Avila's answers to discerning God's will referenced on page 11. Several times in my life, opportunities have arisen about which I have needed to make a decision and for which I have prayed for God to reveal his will. Never has he done so before I made the decision, but after having made the decision, he has confirmed it as his will, sometimes quite dramatically.

Right now, I have an inclination to develop a door-to-door Catholic evangelization program that could be established in any parish. I developed such a program at St. Sebastian Parish in Santa Paula, California, a number of years ago while I was working at Thomas Aquinas College.

I have the structure and support materials -in mind, and the name "The Disciples Rejoiced" popped into my mind unbidden. That door-to-door evangelization is according to God's will seems clear to me, but am I the one the establish a nationwide program? At this point, that's not clear.

TESTIMONY OF JOHN HOLECEK

Part I written for California Mission Magazine September 1998 / Part II written April 2001 / Part III written May 2003 / Part IV written 16 April 2006 / Part V written 3 & 4 January 2009 / Part VI written March 2012 / Part VII written November 2015 / Part VIII written February 2016 / Part IX written 30 April 2017 / Part X written March 2018, Part XI written October 2018 / Part XII written February 2024

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS / PART XI

You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you.

Matthew 15:7

This section should be titled "John Holecek, fake Christian," I'm printing again the Fr. Alexander Men quote and my subsequent comments:

"How are you to know if you are living according to the will of God? Here is a sign: if you are distressed over anything, it means that you have not fully surrendered to God's will, although it may seem to you that you live according to His will."

I do believe this and try to live thusly. I also love St. Teresa of Avila's admonishment, "Be absolutely certain of this; today is God's will for your life."

For a number of years, I have prayed the following every morning: "Jesus and Mary, this day I offer you my body and soul, memory, will, and imagination, and all that I have and own in service to you."

I'm going to anthropomorphize God for a moment. "Well John, I'm going to take you up on the 'all that I have and own' part of your prayer and have you lose your income."

Praised be the God who answers prayer!

So, as my limited savings dwindle, I'm fretting (somewhat). I appreciate, however, being caught out as a phony and am dealing with it. The spiritual side of my day is pretty full: Morning and Evening Prayer, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, a Rosary, Mass readings of the day and daily Mass, Bible reading, seven different sources for the saint of the day, adoration (not every day), and lots of mental prayer.

This is not a case of piling devotion upon devotion, hoping to win God's favor; rather I feel compelled to do it and am edified thereby.

I do have Social Security and am making a little bit of money. I am helping to raise \$150,000 for the Omega Project Women's Center here in McPherson, for which I receive a commission that I have kept low because of my respect for the project and for Rev. David Case, the director. Also, and this was fortuitous, I am repping MT Heartland Handpiece Express, a business in Lawrence that refurbishes dental handpieces. I have visited all the dental clinics in Wichita, Hutchinson, and Salina. Truth be told, I have greatly enjoyed driving around and engaging the front office personnel. There's no real money in it, though. For every handpiece that comes in due to my work, I get \$10. I also have a contract with Wichita Grand Opera to fundraise. However, due to restrictions to which I agreed and which I understand, this may not be a reliable source of income.

Here's what I would like to happen.

As mentioned above, I have an interest (a very great interest!) in door-to-door evangelization. I have established a "The Disciples Rejoiced" website: <https://thedisciplesrejoiced.org/> and am now working on support materials for the site. I have approached both our Bishop, Bishop Carl Kemme, and our Vicar General, Rev. David

TESTIMONY OF JOHN HOLECEK

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Lies, about introducing door-to-door evangelization throughout the Diocese. I would need some modest rate of pay for this.

I have also approached Thomas Aquinas College about recruiting students and soliciting donations in the Diocese of Wichita, which I think is one of the most fertile grounds in the United States for finding students and donors who would support TAC. Again, a modest wage would be necessary.

I also put up a business website, <https://allgoodworks.com/>, which does a pretty good job of presenting me in a somewhat quirky manner. My good friend Larry Bennett, who is very knowledgeable about marketing, asked several cogent questions:

1. Who is your target audience?
2. What is the desired outcome of publishing this website?
3. How will you drive traffic to the website?

...to which I answered, “This is going to sound stupid, but I have no idea what this website is intended for. It’s strictly a stream-of-consciousness affair.”

GOD’S FAITHFULNESS / PART XII, ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

It’s been six years since I added anything to my testimony. If you’ve gotten this far, you are probably as tired of reading it as I am of writing it. It’s not that nothing has happened, and I wish to some degree that I had chronicled it. However, had I, it would have seemed a bleak picture, for much has occurred that, in the eyes of the world would seem dismal. Praised be God.

In late September 2021, I got an email with a quote from St. John of the Cross, “Unless you are willing to suffer, you cannot enter into union with Christ.” I told God that I was willing to suffer, but I did not say that I wanted to suffer.

On October 2, 2021, I was fine. On October 3, 2021, I was not. I was struck down in pain and am still in pain, accompanied by various other maladies. God is trying to make me mindful solely of him and not of myself. It’s a process, but I trust God’s faithfulness. Because it is so dramatic, I have chronicled the journey in great detail elsewhere.

In January 2023, I began work as a special-education paraeducator at the McPherson Middle School. This is a call from God, an authentic ministry, and I am being greatly blessed in it.