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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

I know this is getting out to you a little late, but my last few weeks were interrupted with illness and then the sudden loss of my grandfather. Please keep him in your prayers. He led a very full and beautiful life! Henry and I were very blessed to be able to travel to MN for his funeral and as sad of an occasion as it was, I must admit that it was glorious to be able to see snow again! How I have missed it! It was also good to be home for a bit. There is just nothing quite like family.

Coming back to Texas it is easy to forget that Christmas is practically here! I literally wore flip-flops shopping yesterday.... Just haven't quite mentally adjusted to being a southerner yet obviously 😊 My nephew is adorable. The other day it was chilly (in the 50's or 60's) and he came in from being outside and announced to his mom that "It's like Minnesota out there!" Yeah...he obviously needs to visit Minnesota a few more times!

Thank you to all those who wrote me letters and emails or just mentioned that you had read and enjoyed the last issue. It made me so happy! I am still in the process of responding to the letters so please be patient with me, but you WILL get a response. There were not as many who entered the free book drawing as I was expecting but at least there were some entries and I am excited to announce that my great-aunt, Sister Rebecca, won! She will be receiving a copy of "Daddy-long-legs" in the mail soon.

You may notice a few changes already to this issue, so let me know what you think. I realize that the demographics of our readers is very broad and I don't know how to manage to cater to everyone, but I will continue to do my best. So if some issues seem more 'mature' or more 'juvenile', know that it is just me trying to reach all of our readers. Please continue to reach out with any news, comments, suggestions, etc. I would LOVE to hear from each and every one of you!

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas (filled with friends, family, hot chocolate and cookies) and a Happy New Year (without catching any of the stomach bugs or colds that are almost sure to be going around then). See below for tips on making good resolutions for the New Year if that is something you do. And if you haven't done it before, well, give it a try and let me know how it goes!

In the Immaculate Heart,

Therese Harrity

Challenge of the Month

Hopefully you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving! This month I challenge you all to take time to show your gratitude. Often Christmas seems to be thought of only as the time of receiving and the previous Holiday of Thanksgiving and gratitude seems nearly forgotten. Gratitude isn't just for one holiday; it should be a part of our daily lives. Here are two ways that I challenge you to show your gratitude this month:

1) Give an extra gift to someone you take for granted.

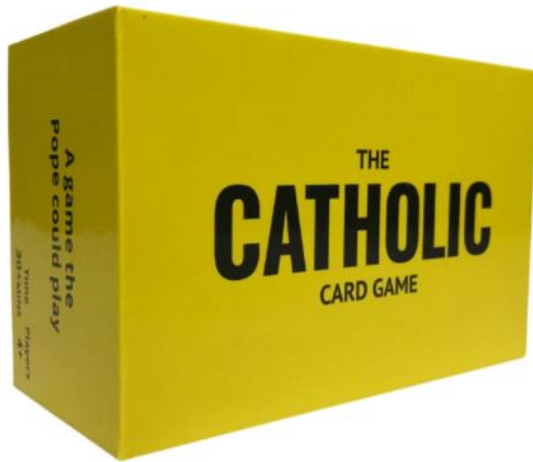
This could be your mom, your annoying sister, your teacher, your neighbor, your mailman, the guy at the gas station where you get your coffee every Monday, etc. It doesn't have to be a big gift, just a homemade card, \$1, \$5, Skittles, a Candy Cane ornament, etc. There are so many people in our daily lives and we can't thank them all but we should take the time to reach out to at least one 'extra' one this season. And it is okay if the gift is after Christmas, the season lasts 'til February 😊

2) Make a sincere and enthusiastic "Thank you!" when receiving a gift.

When you show expressions of gratitude for a gift it brings joy to the giver. Often, we are grateful and we just aren't always good at showing it. So be sure to give your parents/spouse/friends a special "Thank you!" when you open your gifts this year.

Pleasant Pastimes

Hello and welcome to a new section of CGF! I often hear people ask about what to do when you are bored or needing ideas of what to do at parties or with friends and family. As great as the holidays are they can leave you with a lot of free time on your hands that you need to fill. So, every- other issue will have “Pleasant pastimes” instead of “Pinterest on Paper”. Hope you all enjoy the ideas I share 😊 And if you have any to share with us, please email, call, text, or write me!



THE GAME FOR CATHOLIC ADULTS

While other party games make you feel like you need Confession after playing and other Catholic products are either too childish or too academic, the **Catholic Card Game** provides clean entertainment *without* sacrificing quality or fun.

It's easy to play, relatable, and hilarious.

BUY THE CATHOLIC CARD GAME

This game is a HUGE hit! IF you have played ‘Apples to Apples’, well, this is like that just the Catholic version and I promise you it is SO MUCH FUN! This is the perfect game for all ages to play and is acceptable for any gathering (youth group, family Christmas parties, sleepovers, Sunday afternoon get-togethers, etc.) Small and compact this game is so worth the \$35. Designed and sold by a Catholic couple you will be laughing ‘til you cry as you play. (P.S. If you are my family, DO NOT BUY, this is your Christmas present!)

Build a Blanket Fort

I sure hope that all of you have already done this at some point in your life, but I doubt many of you have done it recently. Moms may object to having all of their dining room chairs stolen to be the tent support, but I am sure they will love how contained the noise and toys will be as siblings all get together to play quietly and carefully under their new construction. Blanket forts have a lot of benefits. The whole family can be a part of the construction and working together on something can help diminish arguments as well as build great memories.



And of course once it is built, it is the perfect place to cuddle with your new stuffed animal, blanket, or slippers and read your new book you got for Christmas or build that puzzle you just got, or play with your new dolly-outfits. Maybe mom will even lay down some towels and let you drink hot chocolate with lots of marshmallows and watch a movie from her laptop in the comfort of your fort. Or, perhaps you can convince dad to read you all a bedtime story as you all pile in carefully with a full gallon of ice cream and enough spoons to share!

Immortal Poets Society

EVERYONE knows the story of the Grinch who stole Christmas. And as obnoxious of a figure as he is, his story really does show that Christmas is more than just all the decorations and presents. Here is an excerpt from Dr. Seuss' story of the Grinch:

...So he paused. And the Grinch put his hand to his ear.
And he did hear a sound rising over the snow.
It started in low. Then it started to grow.
But the sound wasn't sad! Why, this sound sounded merry!
It couldn't be so! But it WAS merry! VERY!
He stared down at Whoville! The Grinch popped his eyes!
Then he shook! What he saw was a shocking surprise!
Every Who down in Whoville, the tall and the small,
Was singing! Without any presents at all!
He HADN'T stopped Christmas from coming! IT CAME!
Somehow or other, it came just the same!
And the Grinch, with his grinch-feet ice-cold in the snow,
Stood puzzling and puzzling: "How could it be so?"
"It came with out ribbons! It came without tags!"
"It came without packages, boxes or bags!"
And he puzzled three hours, till his puzzler was sore.
Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before!
"Maybe Christmas," he thought, "doesn't come from a store."
"Maybe Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!"...



God's Plan

By [Jack Zavada](#)

His choice was perfect,
Though none could believe
That a [lowly virgin](#) could ever conceive.
Then a godless emperor's public decree
Brought them to [Bethlehem](#).
How could that be?
They came to adore him, the great and small
To prove he would be
The Lord of us all.
From the tribe of Judah, in David's line,
A human like us,
And yet divine.



Hung on a cross as he himself said,
Then three days later
He [rose from the dead](#)!
No coincidence there, all flawlessly
planned,
Events orchestrated
By God's own hand.
And so in your own life as things come
to be,
God is behind them
Though you cannot see.
Events and people, distant and near,
Moving you there,
Bringing you here.
Every encounter since your life began,
A piece in the puzzle
Of God's careful plan.
To mold your character to be like his
Son,
To bring you home
When your life is done.

Delicious Disasters

Can you imagine Christmas without cookies and candy canes? I can't! Here are 2 of my favorite Christmas treats ☺

Chocolate Covered Pretzels

Super simple and soooooo good! That perfect balance of sweet and salty and a great excuse to use some of those super cute Christmas sprinkles!

- 1) Melt milk, white, or dark chocolate Almond bark (get in the baking section of a grocery store) in a saucepan on LOW heat.
- 2) Drop pretzels in. (you can do the big rods and spoon the chocolate over, or get the fun Christmas shaped pretzels.) Use a fork to lift them out and tap gently on the side of the saucepan to remove excess chocolate.
- 3) Lay on a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper and sprinkle IMMEDIATELY.
- 4) Let cool on counter or in refrigerator.
- 5) Taste test to be sure they are delicious. Must eat at least 3 to have a valid taste test :P



These are easy enough to have the whole the family help with. Try doing a sort of assembly- line style. One kid gets to drop in the pretzels, another forks them out, and another sprinkles them. Such good memories of making these with siblings during Christmas!

Peanut Brittle

This recipe takes a little more skill and time but in my opinion is the best thing to come home to after midnight Mass!

Ingredients:

1 cup Butter	2 cup Sugar
½ cup Water	1 cup Light Corn Syrup
1 pound Spanish or Virginia peanuts	
1 teaspoon baking soda	Candy thermometer

- 1) Dissolve sugar, syrup and water in a medium sized saucepan. Bring to a boil.
- 2) Add the butter. Cook til the "Soft Crack Stage" on the thermometer.
- 3) Add the peanuts. (Your arm will be tired of stirring by now but keep going and don't let it burn!)
- 4) Cook to the "Hard Crack Stage". It should darken a little in color.
 - 5) Quickly add the baking soda and stir thoroughly.
 - 6) IMMEDIATELY pour onto 2 greased cookie sheets and tilt them to spread the mixture out to about ¼ inch thickness.
 - 7) Let cool on the counter.
 - 8) Break into about 2 in. pieces. Be sure to taste test at least 2 for best results.
 - 9) Enjoy!



New Year's Resolutions

So, maybe you think you are not the resolution sort of person. Maybe you aren't. But the reality is that we humans aren't good at just 'naturally' getting better with time. As a general rule, we are really quite lazy and are experts at making excuses for ourselves. There are 2 main reasons that I think it is important for EVERYONE to make resolutions:

- 1) We have to examine ourselves to see where we need to improve. This examination leads to better self-knowledge which is extremely healthy to develop. In our busy lives we don't always take time to sit and just look at ourselves objectively.
- 2) We create a goal and work towards it, giving us some clear direction in our life. Life can be so changing. We may be in a new grade, about to graduate, changing jobs, getting married, having another baby, moving houses, etc. and we constantly have to rearrange our daily schedules and priorities. With so much change having at least one stable goal that does not change can bring stability to our lives. And if your life happens to not be busy, you just flip burgers from 8am - 5pm every day, well then this gives you something you can see progress on in your mundane life.

Okay, I hope I have convinced you at least a little to try and make a resolution or two this year. Before you do though, consider some of these tips below. These are from my own experience, others' advice and the internet.

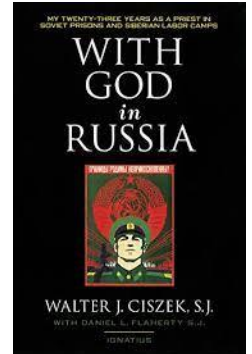
- 1) **Keep them simple, not extreme.** For example, you may want to eat a healthier diet. Going from pizza rolls or ramen every night with a Snickers bar for a midnight snack to only fresh vegetables and meat.... Well, I would call that extreme. Try simply planning one or two healthy meals a week.
- 2) **Make them specific.** If you want to exercise more, don't just make your resolution 'Exercise more.' That could mean work out once every six months and that would be more than you were doing previously when that isn't really what you meant.... Try instead "Workout for 15 minutes every week." When you set specific goals you can be sure you are or are not meeting those goals.
- 3) **Be patient with yourself.** If you set a goal to workout 15 minutes every week and in the first month have only done it once, don't give up! Be patient with yourself. Try to find ways to help yourself reach your goal and don't just decide you are a failure and give up. Likewise, if you haven't managed to settle on a resolution by New Year's day, don't give up and say you missed it and will try next year, just keep working on making those resolutions and start when you can.
- 4) **Reward yourself.** Positive reinforcement is wonderful! If your goal is to complain less often and to make an examination every day at noon to help eliminate your spirit of negativity, then give yourself a chocolate each time you do you examination.
- 5) **Have some sort of accountability.** This can be as simple as just writing them down and posting them somewhere you will see them every day when you go to start your day. Or you can confide in a friend, roommate, parent, or sibling and ask them to help encourage you to fulfill them and hold you accountable. Whether you read them everyday to yourself and hold yourself accountable at night, going over whether you strove to accomplish them or not, or you ask someone else to check in with you periodically and keep you on track, accountability is one of the biggest influences on whether you will keep your resolutions this year.

Read me or Rue It

My most recent project here at the school in Dickinson is to improve their library. It has been a long process but such a rewarding one! We made a wish-list of books to add to the library and shared the list with the parish, asking for books for the Academy for Christmas and we have gotten such a generous response! Books really are such an important part not only of education but also of character development and I can't wait to see the students unwrap the 100 or so books we have gotten 😊 Here are a few I am most excited about adding to the library here:

With God in Russia

Father Walter Ciszek, S.J., author of the best-selling *He Leadeth Me*, tells here the gripping, astounding story of his twenty-three years in Russian prison camps in Siberia, how he was falsely imprisoned as an "American spy", the incredible rigors of daily life as a prisoner, and his extraordinary faith in God and commitment to his priestly vows and vocation. He said Mass under cover, in constant danger of death. He heard confession of hundreds who could have betrayed him; he aided spiritually many who could have gained by exposing him. This is a remarkable story of personal experience. It would be difficult to write fiction that could honestly portray the heroic patience, endurance, fortitude and complete trust in God lived by Fr. Walter Ciszek, S.J (Amazon Summary)

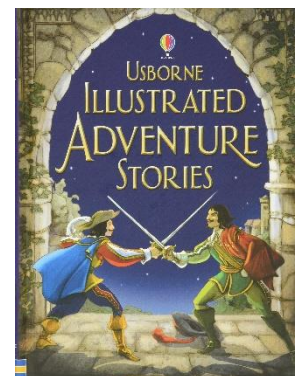


Anne of Green Gables

Many of you have heard of the red-headed girl with a strong temper and a flare for the dramatic. This series follows Anne from her young, spontaneous years to her college days filled with life choices, to her married life with its joys and sorrows, to her happy golden years watching her children grow and find their own ways in life. Anne is a woman worth imitating and I HIGHLY recommend you read this series and learn from her mistakes and her wise choices. She is a very realistic example of how to grow to become a 'valiant woman'.

Adventure Stories – Usborne

Perhaps you are unfamiliar with the Usborne brand of books but they are some of the best educational books for kids. My mom was a consultant for them for years and we LOVED all of their books! I will never forget paging through the catalogue marking all the books I wanted to buy with my Christmas money. I still have those books today and my nieces and nephews LOVE them! This particular book retells famous adventure stories such as the Three Musketeers with fantastic illustrations. Suitable for middle schoolers, these stories will also enthrall younger children and are a great way for adults to learn the stories of many classics they may not have read.



Happy Reading!

(P.S. Your New Year's Resolution can always be to read more or to respond to CGF with ideas, thoughts, feedback, etc.)

Girls, You're Important

Nail Polish

Nail polish can very noticeably improve the appearance of your hands. That is why you use it. You want to look your best, and to be your best. Keeping your nails beautiful requires time and effort. But you do not mind the time or the effort if your hands look more beautiful. You even consider caring for them no work at all. In fact, you may find it a pleasant pastime, doing them at times when you would otherwise be idle.

Many things in your life are similar to nail polish. They are not absolutely necessary to life, yet they seem necessary in order to make it complete. They also take time and effort, yet you do not mind, because they improve you; and you want to be and to appear at your best. In this book you will find many suggestions and points that will add to your outward or inward attractiveness.

What you want to do is look upon all the little things that make your life complete as helps. Anything that would make you a less likeable girl you will avoid. You will use makeup, you will study and learn, you will go to various places – all to improve yourself.

Although many things in this world can be turned to a bad use, they can and ought to be used for a good purpose. Nail polish is certainly nothing bad. Few people would even think that it could possibly be used for a bad purpose. Practically every girl uses it to improve the appearance of her hands. She intends it to be for her good.

But there are other things not quite so simple as nail polish. These too we will consider.



You will use makeup, you will study and learn, you will go to various places – all to improve yourself.

Short and to the point, huh? Now, your parents may have a rule for when you are allowed to use nail polish and that is a good thing. I am sure they are waiting til you are mature enough not only to not make a mess with it but also to not encourage vanity and silliness. As girls it is important to know how to look nice. Beauty is a gift God gave to us and He expects us to share that beauty with others. Your parents, teachers, friends, etc. will be there to help you learn to use beauty products in such a way as to accentuate your God-given beauty and not simply cover it out of insecurity or a desire to 'fit-in'. Too often though we are only willing to take time to improve our physical looks and forget the rest... "You will use makeup, you will study and learn, you will go to various places – all to improve yourself." As girls, our role is not just to be beautiful and know how to tastefully dress and apply cosmetics, we must also study and learn, broaden our minds that God has given us. And last but certainly not least, we are meant to gain experiences, to go places and learn from doing and seeing. There will be more on those topics to come, but for now, enjoy painting your nails 😊