

Of saints, friends, books, and what's going on in my crazy life.

The Great Advent Giveaway!



Happy December, all! My friends at [Soli Deo Gloria Sacred Art](#) and I are teaming up to offer one winner a set of two Advent handcrafted wood blocks! The blocks are 4x4x2 inches, made of maple. The winner will get his or her choice of the angels or either of the Christmas Corners designs. Enter by 11:59 p.m. ET this coming Tuesday, December 5. To learn more, visit my [homepage](#).

"Don't doubt for a moment the love of God." --Blessed Catalina de Maria

The latest person to be beatified by the Catholic Church is Saturnina Rodriguez de Zavalia, more commonly known as Madre Catalina de Maria, who died in 1896 at the age of seventy-two. A lot of things about Catalina speak to me. First, she was given to emotional outbursts, especially during her thirteen-year marriage. After her husband died, she returned to her original vision of educating Argentina's girls... about writing and reading and about Jesus. One reason that dream had been put on hold was that all women religious in Argentina at that time lived in cloisters. Despite seven years of setbacks, she persevered and established the Handmaids of the Heart of Jesus, which continues to do her work in four countries today. Catalina inspires me in the way she didn't let her imperfections stop her from serving the Lord. I'll be blogging a bit more about her later this month.



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To learn more about women saints and blesseds, [see the Wednesday's Woman entries in my blog](#).

Friends in Faith: Mary Lenaburg



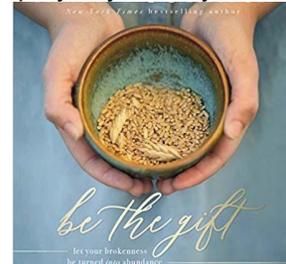
Mary Lenaburg lives her faith large and confident and humble. If those seem like contradictions, well, you need to get to know Mary. God has given her a special, special ministry: sharing the story of the way God loves each of us like crazy, even when we may not understand what He's doing. For twenty-two years, Mary and her husband (and their son!) were on a spiritual journey caring for and being cared for by Courtney, who suffered her first grand-mal seizure when she was only about a month old. Courtney never spoke in words, but her beautiful nature touched so many. I feel like I know Courtney from hearing and reading Mary's stories about her. Courtney went to heaven three years ago this month. Mary reminds me, both in her words and in the way she lives, that God doesn't make mistakes... and has a special plan for each of us, flawed as we may think we are.

Which of your friends inspires you?

On the Nightstand: *Be the Gift*

I had lunch recently with a friend, and as usual, my mind wandered off to all the things I had to get done that afternoon. Then she asked with a bright smile, "Have you prayed yet today? Can we pray together now?" Wham! And so we did, for about an hour, going through the day's readings and a couple of meditations along with some personal sharing. What I'm remembering about that day is not how much I got done, but how holy that time was.

Thinking of that led me to Ann Voskamp's *Be the Gift: Let Your Broken Be Turned into Abundance*, which will be my spiritual reading this month. It's about the way we bless others regardless of how broken we are. My friend's invitation was one of the greatest gifts I received last month, and it cost her nothing but time and the bravery to ask me to slow down. I'm hoping Voskamp's book will help me to remember to offer that gift to others.



What's on your nightstand?

It's the Most Wonderful Time...

I'll leave you this month with a paraphrase of something one of my parish's priests said in his Thanksgiving homily: "What if all I have tomorrow is what I gave gratitude for today?" I'll be attempting to think about that every night this Advent. Who knows, maybe I'll blog about that during the 5 a.m. *Simbang Gabi* novena that starts Dec. 16 at a church near me. My prayer is that you consider this lovely challenge amid the season's hubbub... and each day give thanks for the greatest gift of all. Happy Advent and Merry (Early) Christmas! --Melanie



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