

Passion for Life

BY MARY BETH
 NEW KUMET

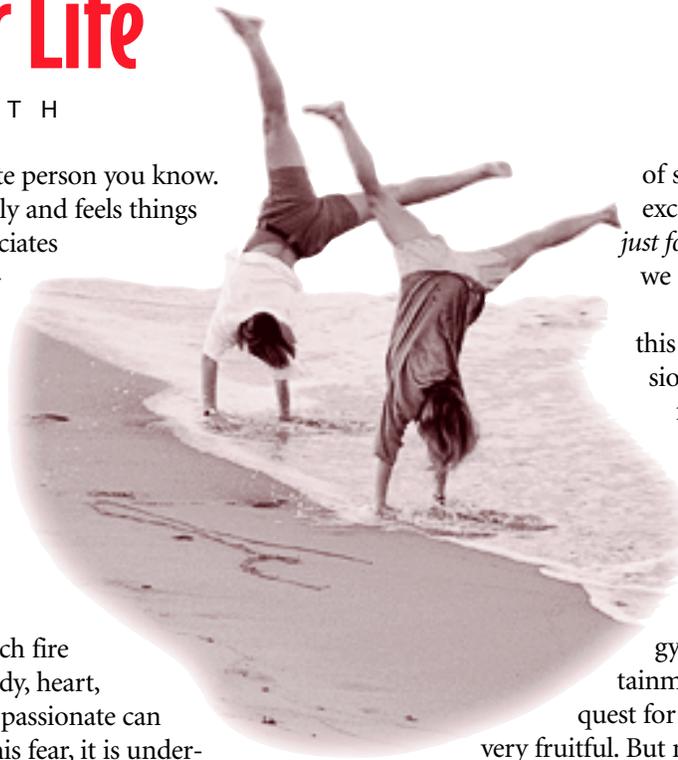
Think of the most passionate person you know. She probably loves intensely and feels things deeply. He probably appreciates real beauty in every surrounding. She has a genuine interest in every person she encounters. He brings spectacular joy into the most mundane gathering. People this passionate seem to lead richer, fuller lives than anyone else.

They also seem a little dangerous.

How can you withstand such fire burning constantly in your body, heart, mind and soul? A person that passionate can get passionately hurt! Given this fear, it is understandable that when it comes to passion, many people don't want to "go there." And yet, our Lord has told us that we must! To be eternally happy, we must live the fullness of his passion (Matt 16:24). So why are many people reluctant to pursue this passionate life? Perhaps the culture has so significantly reduced passion over the past 30 years that many of us have forgotten its truly Catholic meaning. In this new millennium, maybe it's time to stir up some true passion. Because without passion—fully, human passion—the Church cannot fulfill its mission to bring the presence of Christ into the world.

POPULAR PASSION

It only takes about five seconds to think of how the culture dishes out *its* popular version of passion. Ricky Martin selling Pepsi. Ally McBeal eying a new client. Middle-aged men driving "non-family" cars way too fast. Jamie Lee Curtis—in her black party dress—talking to a mechanic on her wireless phone. These passion proposals seem to offer the possibility



of something wildly exciting, something *just for you*. How can we resist?

In recent decades, this follow-your-passion mentality has facilitated the boundless exploration of human relationships, religion, science, fashion, technology, arts and entertainment. Some of this quest for passion has been very fruitful. But much of this "anything goes" has destroyed the very mystery and zest

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for life we seek. “Young women are no longer repressed,” stated a recent *Washington Post* headline, “just lonely, sad and angry.” Like the bewildered young adults on the television show, “Ally McBeal,” many people can’t understand why this exciting intensity, this popular passion, never seems to fulfill its potential.

SMUG MORALISM = NO PASSION

This fallout makes some Christians smug. Seeing the destruction that unbridled passion has unleashed upon the culture, many of these well-meaning people point to better values as the solution to the unhappiness they see around them. Yet by clinging solely to a guarded moralism, faith can become as passionless as those married couples in old sitcoms who always sleep in twin beds.

Sadly, this tepid Christianity allows the culture to lay claim to everything passionate and exciting. Many of our young people see this and miss ever making the connection between faith and their passion. In their minds, the Catholic Church is just an old-fashioned administrator, dowdy and unappealing. Frankly, passionate saints like St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross must be having a fit as they watch the Church, the beautiful—oh so desirable—Bride of Christ, being experienced by far too many people as a buttoned up, frowning Church Lady!

THE SECRET OF FULL HUMAN PASSION

True, fruitful passion, the kind of passion we all crave, can only be found when we embrace the fullness of our humanity. This fullness is revealed deep in the Mystery of

Jesus Christ. Our Lord is the first One to follow his passion to the depth, height and width of life beyond the created world. Including the heaven and the hell of our hearts. Unlike people afraid to “go there,” Christ went everywhere.

How did he do it, and how can we go there with him? The key to the mystery is that Christ experienced his passion *within his Father’s will*. He lived his life on earth fully, intensely, but completely open to the possibilities of the destiny his Father had in store for him. He channeled his infinite passion into a fruitful obedience out of sheer love for the One who loved him.

For some people, this seems like an impossible paradox: How can we live an intense, passionate life with what appears to be a submission to all those constraining rules? Christ shows us the way by focusing our passion for life, not on mere rules, but on the Father’s will. When we yield to the path he has forged for us, when we listen to his Word, we will experience his infinite passion, his bliss and his peace. “Jesus, in his life, demonstrates a *passion for the individual*, an urgent desire for his happiness,” says Msgr. Luigi Giussani. From this true passion comes every kind of fruitfulness and joy.

In our current culture, living with the passion of Christ means loving one another—yes, a white-hot love beyond Ally McBeal’s wildest, wild imaginings—within the destiny the Father has set out for us in his Church. Following Christ’s passion in art, entertainment, science, technology, and all other areas of life within the Father’s will means pursuing a boundless frontier, *but only when it appreciates and respects the fullness of the human person at the heart of*

every discipline—whether it be in fashion or medicine.

When we follow Christ’s passion within the Father’s will, we neither miss out on the exciting life that fills us with mystery and true joy, nor do we crash in on ourselves and become sad and disillusioned. This is how true passion keeps our lives fresh and new in a path that reaches beyond the stars...to the very mystery of God expressed through the Father’s will for each person. ❖

Life After Sunday

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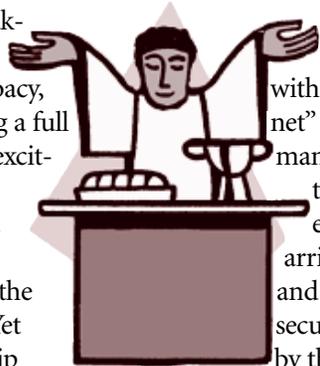
The Priesthood Feeds Our Passion

Many people mistakenly think that by choosing celibacy, priests cannot be living a full life that is passionate, exciting and alive. Christ knew it would be hard for some to grasp the choice of virginity for the sake of the kingdom. Yet through his relationship with the Father, the Lord has given us the key to this mystery.

This key is the priest, called to act “in persona Christi,” to sustain us with the greatest passion the world has ever known. While bodily passion is considered by many to be the ultimate human experience, it is merely a sign that points to something even greater. As enfleshed souls, our bodies cannot experience the fullness of our humanity if the infinite passion available to the spirit is diminished. The priest is a personal witness to the existence of a *passion not of this world*. Rather than giving something up, the priest—with his whole life—freely moves toward and embraces this great passion in relationship with the mystery of God.

WALKING ON WATER

During the past 50 years, one impressive movement of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church has been the formation of new communities of consecrated men and women who live and work in the world. In an age where virginity is so often misunderstood, this choice seems particularly insane. These celibates live out in the



world, consecrated to Christ alone, without even the “safety net” of habit or collar. In many ways, they reflect the lives of the earliest disciples who arrived in small towns and villages with no security, sustained only by their passionate love for Jesus of Nazareth.

This same risky “walk on the water” sustained only by Christ is the life that each priest is called to live. By following the Father’s will, each priest can love *each person the Lord has put in his path* with the heart of Jesus, and therefore without fear. Moreover, by giving his life to bring us the Eucharistic presence of Christ everyday, the priest embraces the Lord’s people—his Bride—with an even greater passion.

BRIDEGROOM AND FATHER

On Sunday, when the priest says “this is my body, this is my blood,” he is talking not only of the sacrifice of Christ, but also his *own outpouring* as he offers his body, his health, his weariness and frustration, the whole essence of his life, to the people in his care.

The Dark Night

Christ suffered keenly during his passion when he felt isolated from his friends and forsaken by his Father. This same dark night can be experienced by even the most passionate priests if they do not feel loved. As the Bride of Christ, family, friends and parishioners are called to deeply love and care for the presence of Jesus in his priests. This means becoming a real part of their lives, and allowing them to become a part of yours. This sustaining love will enable them to continue to pour themselves out for the whole Body. ❖

Just as in bodily passion, the end result of this spiritual passion is a new creation by the Father. In his *Theology of the Body*, Pope John Paul II says that Mary and Joseph, virgins for the kingdom, were the first witnesses to this great truth: “Mary and Joseph, who had lived the mystery of his conception and birth, became the first witnesses of a fruitfulness different from that of the flesh, that is, of a fruitfulness of the Spirit.” In this way, the priest is both Bridegroom and Father, a passionate participant in this great Mystery of love. ❖

A Day of Passion

“Sunday [is] the day on which the Church, showing forth more clearly her identity as ‘bride,’ anticipates in some sense the eschatological reality of the heavenly Jerusalem. Gathering her children into the eucharistic assembly and teaching them to wait for the ‘divine Bridegroom,’ she engages in a kind of ‘exercise of desire,’ receiving a foretaste of the joy of the new heavens and new earth, when the holy city, the new Jerusalem, will come down from God, ‘prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’.” — Pope John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, #37

A Passion for the Person

My Dad calls my husband a Renaissance man. A wonderful husband and father, Chris is also a journalist, gourmet cook, soccer coach, avid golfer and photographer. He has an edgy sense of humor that fills my life with laughter and great joy. What more could a woman want?

Let me explain about his dresser. He doesn't own one. Chris claims that the shelves in his closet are enough to hold his clothes. *They are not.* During the almost 17 years of our marriage, we have had little piles of clean clothes in various places all over our bedroom. Once after much pressure from me, Chris finally bought a dresser, and then put it in our son's room three months later. The piles remain. This does not seem to bother my beloved, but it drives me crazy.



KILLING PASSION

If I didn't love this man so much, this

Praying for Passion

If you and your spouse see each other only as Mother and Father, you may be missing out on an experience of Christ's passionate love for you as Bride and Bridegroom. Push aside the surface issues that divide you and try to move toward each other. Do something completely gratuitous for each other daily—even if it's only a prayer. Sustained by a life with Christ in his Church, just one spouse moving forward in this way can reignite the passion in even the most tepid love. ❖

daily irritation could kill passion! By the time you have been married awhile, you know your spouse all too well: every annoying habit, every quirky trait. Yet if your life together becomes focused only on "issues," you can lose your original experience of this beautiful person who once so completely captivated you.

Sadly, too many couples respond to this reality in worldly ways: they either accept what they think is inevitable and co-exist with little or no passion; or they pursue their passion somewhere else. This place is not always in the arms of an other. It might be work, a hobby or some other pastime that makes them feel alive. Still, there is a terrible sorrow deep in their hearts. A passion for the person—*this person who was for them*—has somehow died.

THE BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM

In his beautiful play, *The Jeweler's Shop*, Karol Wojtyła (now Pope John Paul II), explores this challenge of sustaining passionate human love. Two of his characters, Anna and Stefan, are deeply unhappy. Married for many years, they have ceased to experience each other as cherished bride and bridegroom, but only as mother and father of their three children. For the playwright, this shift is significant. Anna and Stefan have allowed their intimate life as a couple to be eclipsed, leaving them sad and dissatisfied.

What solution does the Pope propose? In the dialogue, a character named Adam tells Anna

to start watching for a new Bridegroom. A hopeful longing, a new passion, fills her heart. Yet, when she finally sees this long-awaited One, he lives in the face of the husband who makes her heart cold. (Gulp!) "How am I to prove



to you," Adam later explains to her, "that on the other side of all those loves that fill our lives

there is *Love!*" With trepidation, Anna is challenged to make the first move back toward the Bridegroom in her bridegroom, to open herself up to an infinite passion that can rekindle the love in her finite marriage.

Christ is the Love behind our love. United with him, we can embrace the imperfections and quirks of the people in our lives and love them with a passionate heart. Even those way-cute ones who won't put their clothes in a dresser. —

MBN ❖



The Bridegroom With No Dresser Replies

I have no idea what piles of clothes Mary Beth is talking about. —Chris Newkumet

The Passion at St. Joseph's House

It might be difficult for some people to see the passion in the hard, physical work done every day at St. Joseph's House. Yet, the home of the LaHood family is a place of passion, indeed.

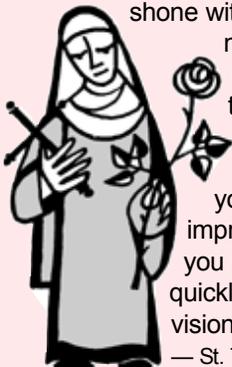
For the past 17 years, Dan and Cubby LaHood have linked their passion for Christ to the multiply-handicapped children they bring into their home. It is their life's work to talk with, feed, lift, wash and love these wheelchair bound little ones with cerebral palsy, mental retardation and varying health problems. As licensed non-profit providers, Dan and Cubby give both day and respite care for up to eight children a day. Some of them spend the night. Some stay for the weekend. In all, there are 22 local children who come at different times to share the family's home and life. With three of their own children growing up in the midst of this passion, Dan and Cubby pour themselves out everyday as they care tenderly for Christ's Body.

"The gift of life, God's special gift, is no less beautiful when it is accompanied by illness or weakness, hunger or poverty, mental or physical handicaps, loneliness or old age," an ailing Terence Cardinal Cooke of New York once said. "Indeed, at this time, human life gains extra splendor as it requires our special care, concern and reverence. It is in and through the weakest of human vessels that the Lord continues to reveal the power of his love."—MBN ❖

Prayer of Passion

O Jesus, who in your cruel passion became the 'Reproach of Men and the Man of Sorrows,' I worship your divine face. Once it shone with the beauty and sweetness of the divinity; now for my sake it has become the face of a leper.... O Jesus, whose face is the sole beauty that ravishes my heart, I may not behold here upon earth the sweetness of your glance, nor feel the ineffable tenderness of your kiss. I consent to this, but I pray you to imprint in me your divine likeness, and I implore you so to inflame me with your love that it may quickly consume me, and soon I may reach the vision of your glorious face in heaven! Amen.

— St. Therese of Lisieux



A Passion from Childhood

I have a memory of youth. In fact, those days of second grade remain as clear and vivid as any memory I possess.

An early Fall day, windy, blue sky, children. Some of my classmates playing at recess on a blacktop that rolls to the road beyond. I am chasing someone, a light blue, now a dark blue blur. I'm getting closer; he must be slowing down. He turns, laughs, swings his legs forward parallel to the ground. Now he pivots on his legs and throws his silver poles forward and he's gone. He's circling a group of startled children.

"I'm an Indian, and I've got you surrounded!" The children scream and scatter. "I'll race you to the fence," he says. "No," I say, win, Danny Alexander." Back he slides into his desk, and I crutches in the corner.

Francis' leper, Mother Theresa's dying beggar, Mike Kirwan's homeless men [in Washington, D.C.]: all destinations of return. A heart could pass by once, twice or more—who knows how many times—till alone with their thoughts which turn to prayer they are led back to kiss, to console, to feed.

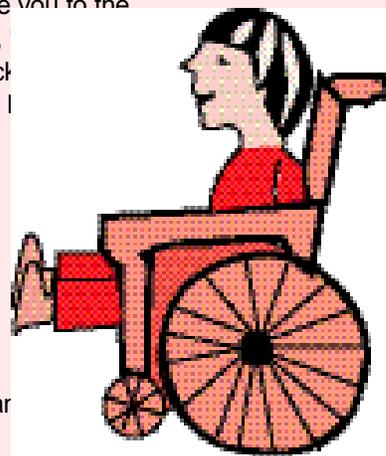
It is passing strange that the Creator of the Universe reveals himself in those the world disdains. God is Humility as well as Love. There he is on silver crutches, in a wheelchair, on a cross.

When we returned to school the following September,

there was something Sister had to tell us. Where is Danny, I thought? Then I knew what she was going to say. A Sister of Charity, spiritual daughter of Elizabeth Seton, led me to Danny, gave us a place to be friends and cried when she told us he died.

Now my wife and I are Lay Missionaries of Charity. We run a day care and respite care home for handicapped children. We call it St. Joseph's House. Mother Theresa's lessons were always simple. Count on five fingers, "you did it for me." ❖

—Dan LaHood, St. Joseph's House, Silver Spring, Maryland



Passionate Parishioners

BY JOHN M. CAPOBIANCO

Have you ever felt like you have become an object of disdain for your fellow parishioners? Sometimes the mistreatment cuts deep. After all, these are the people who are supposed to support you in pursuing the infinite love of Christ, and instead they make you feel unwanted, unappreciated and downright insignificant. This treatment is enough to sap the passion out of the most fervent believer. It may happen after you have climbed out on a limb to build a bold new parish project, or recognized an injustice and attempted to identify the truth in love to a fellow parishioner.

POSTERIOR PAIN

Has your passion for the mission of the Lord lead others to accuse you of being “too liberal” or “too conservative” or “someone with an agenda” or “obsessed about _____” (insert your passion) or “unable to let go” or just plain someone who causes a lot of posterior pain about a certain cause? Maybe you sense that your mere presence at a parish event rubs some people the wrong way. Don’t despair. It’s not time to leave the parish or start all over again in some new faith. Nor is it time to become passionless and fix your gaze on someone other than Christ. It’s certainly not time to start showing your fangs and returning cruel accusations with counter attacks. It’s simply time to recognize you are part of an elite group of Christ’s friends. I call them the *Passionate Parishioners*.

Passionate Parishioners live life in the parish wide open. They are eager to give from the heart in such a way that they allow Christ to love through them with true passion. In this way, they are the ones who make a parish truly alive. St. John of the Cross says there are four true passions: sorrow, hope, joy and fear. Passionate sorrow afflicts the soul; passionate hope flies toward an absent object; passionate joy inflames the heart like fire; and passionate fear is the night when the soul has still not reached the state of spiritual marriage, an intimate union with God.

TOO PASSIONATE?

When you develop this true passion, and begin to give your heart to build up his body, Christ will tweek people through you. Count on it. Do not be surprised! He will touch their sorrow through you. He will give them hope and joy while you rejoice.



And if they begin to fear you, or mistreat you (because they are not where Christ wants them to be or are afraid to go

there), do not allow disdain to derail you. Veteran Passionate Parishioners know what it means when their passion for Christ and his people is dismissed, or misconstrued or outrageous accusations are hurled towards them. Some people are simply not ready for this level of union.

So what do you do when your passion for Christ and his Church is too passionate for others? When their glimpse at this level of intimacy with the mystery fills them with fear? Simply let them be. It is the passion of the mystery that will attract, beguile and perhaps even woo them! Perhaps they will experience it through you, perhaps another Passionate Parishioner will finish the attraction that the Lord has begun through you. When this happens, real passionate friendships develop and this forms the bond of an amazing parish experience. The parish becomes a real place of encounter with the love of Christ. It is the place where he comes to infuse in us his Body and Blood so that we may see his face in the real flesh and blood friendships in our midst. In the midst of these friendships, Christ helps us to live his passionate union of love in our parish. ❖

REJECTED SAINTS

During the past 2000 years, countless saints have been a source of genuine disdain to the people around them. St. Jerome of Antioch, a great Doctor of the Church, was particularly noted for this! “His own reputation was attacked; his bluntness, his walk, and even his smile were criticized,” says the Lives of the Saints. “But when the Christian faith was threatened, Jerome could not be silent.” ❖

Your Passionate Presence in the World

During the media coverage of the death and funeral of John Cardinal O'Connor of the Archdiocese of New York, it was fascinating to listen to the commentators reflect on his life. One fact that they kept bringing up during discussions with various guests was this paradox: how could the Cardinal frequently seek out and care for homosexual AIDS patients at Catholic hospitals, while at the same time vigorously confirming the Church's teachings on virginity in relationships between homosexual people?

The commentators recognized—and were confounded by—the fact that John Cardinal O'Connor, a self-described “simple parish priest,” loved the person, while acknowledging the fullness of the sin. Like Christ on the Cross, he shirked from neither.

This is the passion of Jesus

Christ—a passion for the person that yields humbly to the law of the Father. It is a way of life that many people in the world find hard to follow. Even “religious people” can miss the mark. Some have a passion for the person but gloss over the depth of the sin; others condemn the sinner. Period.

A PASSIONATE EMBRACE

If we have any confusion about how to live with others out in the world, we have only to look at the passionate love of Christ for the people he encountered in his ministry on earth. They were all sinners—some of them notorious. Yet in a foreshadowing of his full embrace from the Cross, Christ hugged, kissed, touched and healed *everything* in the people he encountered.

If Christians are only “keepers of the law” then the world will

ZEST FOR LIFE

“We cannot even think of understanding Christianity unless we begin with its origins as a passion for the individual. Jesus’ understanding of humanity induces him to drive men forcefully back towards their origins, towards what will give meaning and zest to life, toward religiosity. Without that, what remains of man? Vanitas vanitatum: the emptiness of everything.”

— Msgr. Luigi Giussani, Origin of the Christian Claim.

never experience the fullness of Christ’s passion. *This passion must come through you.* Otherwise, the world will know only a thin Christianity. The Gospel challenges each of us to a deeper discipleship, to bring people Christ’s passion for life, his hunger and thirst for the person—yes, even that very sinful person—into the public square. The lover of Jesus lives life intensely, passionately in truth. He does not cling to ideas; he clings to Christ in the presence of the people around him. ❖

HAS NO ONE CONDEMNED YOU?

In the beautiful Gospel story of the woman caught in the act of adultery, Jesus administers the Father’s law with mercy and love: “Has no one condemned you? She said: No one, Lord. Then, said Jesus, Neither do I condemn you.” (Jn 8:9-11). “The sin is not whisked away by a magic trick, simply vanished into empty space,” observed 20th century mystic Adrienne Von Speyr, “it has disappeared only because the Lord was willing to take it on and to commit himself for it, and this, not merely once and for all and in a general way, but for each individual case afresh. He has taken on himself this sin of this woman, and he is willing to bear it. The woman does not know where the others have gone or what has happened in them. All she knows is what has happened in herself. She understands one thing: she is alone, together with the Lord, and without sin.” ❖



From the Mystical Monsignor.....

PASSION VS. OBSESSION

Passion is understood as a totalizing engagement, a loss of self on behalf of that which you are passionate about. The more passionate the person, the more human. The human heart desires infinite love, infinite beauty, infinite truth. This is what we passionately seek. But because the heart is divided, we have problems with passion.

Everything that exists is worthy of passion. That's what life is. Passion is harmonious when it corresponds with the truth. If you see an object that you have a passion for, if you are not grasping this object in its truth, you cannot be fully passionate about it. This would be the passion of a divided heart, a passion that is only a partial grasp of the truth because you are manipulating, forming the object to fit your self. This is not passion, but obsession.

ALL THE WAY TO THE TRUTH

The way that you change this into a real passion is to go all the way to the truth of the object, in search of the object into a right relationship. The process whereby one goes beyond the distortion of the object that is attracting you to the truth so you can passionately surrender yourself, that process, is called sacrifice.

Sacrifice is the interior operation of the heart that will not distort reality but will go all the way to the truth of it. It is only because of Jesus Christ that this process can be done. It is possible only because of his sacrifice, therefore because of his passion. In Christ, I grasp the truth of the other and I can therefore be totally passionate without any fear or reservation. I can have a passion for everything in its truth, a passion for all that is human.

Outside of Christ, passion becomes obsession. In Christ, passion for humanity reaches its ultimate truth.

—*Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete,*
U.S. Ecclesiastical Advisor for Communion and Liberation, an
international movement in the Church. ❖

Ponder In Your Heart

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This feature of Life After Sunday has been developed at the request of small groups that want to explore the theme of each issue. —The Editor

What is your definition of passion? (p. 1 and 2)

- Who is the most passionate person you know?
- Is their passion for life linked to Christ or the proposal of the world?

Are you able to link Christ's passion in the Eucharist on Sunday to the passion you experience during the rest of the week? (p. 3-7)

- Read Matt 16: 21-28.
- Do you believe this Word is for you personally?

Do you know a passionate priest? (p. 3)

- How do the priests in your parish show their passion for the Bride of Christ?
- How can you bring your love and care to priests who may have lost their passion?

Is there any passion in your life at home? (p. 4 and 5)

- How do you show passion for the people in your family?
- Does your love for Christ bring fire to your most intimate relationships?

Do the people in your parish appreciate passion? (p. 6 and 7)

- What "issues" are people passionate about?
- Do these things get linked to the passion of Christ for each person?

What can you do to bring the passion of Christ to the world you live in? (p.7)

- How can Catholics embrace both the person and the fullness of sin?
- What can you do to bring a full-bodied passion to the world's perception of a watered-down Christianity?

Want to be part of a small discussion group but don't know how to get started? Check out our proven method! www.lifeaftersunday.com/gathergroup.shtml

Check out our suggested uses for parish life!
www.lifeaftersunday.com/parishlife.html