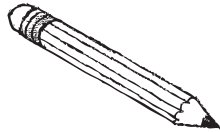


Holy Homework

PUTTING OUR INTERIOR FAITH
INTO EXTERIOR PRACTICE



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DEDICATION

To my parents, Albert and Lillian, and to my godmother, Linda—
my first teachers who instructed me in life's holiest homework:
the virtues of faith, hope, and love.
Thank you.

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God bless you all.



Fr. Robert Pagliari, C.Ss.R., Ph.D.

For more than forty years, Fr. Robert Pagliari has dedicated his life as a Redemptorist priest to an array of ministries, including teaching, preaching, parish administration, and editing manuscripts for Liguori Publications, Doubleday, and the Crossroad Publishing Company.

As a professor, he has taught in-class and online courses for undergraduate and graduate students at universities and seminaries in New York, Virginia, Florida, Connecticut, and Louvain, Belgium, where he served as chairman of the homiletics department at the American College. He completed a bachelor's degree in philosophy and master's degrees in speech, psychology, theology, and religious education. He is certified in computer programming and Gestalt psychotherapy and holds an earned doctorate in communication from the University of Denver. His published audio, video, workbook, and textbook collections titled *Fourteen Steps to Dynamic Preaching* appeared in English in 1993. The book was later purchased and translated by Spanish and Indonesian distributors.

Fr. Bob served on the board of directors for Heartsong Inc., a music and art therapy program for differently abled children. He conducted support groups for the parents of children with special needs and was appointed director of the Department for Persons with Disabilities for the Archdiocese of New York.

In 2002, he began writing a monthly online column for *Catholic New York*, the newspaper of the archdiocese. This book is a selection of those compositions. In 2004, he resumed teaching theology and communication courses for St. John's University. Relevant Radio welcomed him as a monthly guest to the broadcast of their *Morning Air* program in 2008.

In his spare time, Fr. Bob enjoys a leisurely round of golf.

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Preface

The Origin of *Holy Homework*

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the woman who accosted me after a Sunday Mass in 2007. I did not know her name then and I still don't know her today. Here's what happened. On the Friday prior to the Sunday in question my college students had been grilling me about what they should study for the upcoming exams. I remember assigning several items of homework and assuring them that if they reviewed and prepared well they were likely to receive a good grade. Two days later as I was nearing the end of my homily I still had that college homework assignment fresh in my mind, and suddenly I heard myself adding a twist to my pulpit talk. I blurted out, "for HOMEWORK..." and then added a small task for the congregation to do which reinforced the point of my message.

As was my custom, I stood at the back of church as the folks were leaving and noticed one middle-aged woman hanging back as if deliberately waiting to speak with me. I was correct. When all the other worshippers had gone, she was still standing there with an obviously stern look on her face. As I offered her my hand and a friendly smile she asked if I had ever heard of branding. I shook my head no. Branding, she explained, is a marketing technique which helps people identify products easily and immediately.

She offered the example of Campbell's soups, which all shoppers can recognize the moment they enter the canned-goods aisle of any food store. I remained silent, nodded my head to indicate that I understood

the concept but kept wondering why she was lecturing me about marketing strategies. Then she got to the point. She said adding homework to the end of my talk was poor branding. She claimed everyone has a negative reaction to “homework” and that I should never have used that word, especially in the context of a church sermon.

I thanked her for her point of view, which felt more like a dressing-down, and she turned on her heel and marched away without so much as an “if, and, or by your leave.”

For the next five days I replayed her scolding over and over in my head. Then as I was putting the finishing touches on my homily for the subsequent weekend, I was suddenly struck with a happy compromise and possibly innovative twist to the chapter on branding in textbooks for the future.

The next Sunday at the end of my homily I paused for a moment and announced, “for HOLY homework...” then added a new task for the congregation to perform which would underscore the point of the Bible readings. Needless to say, I have attached holy homework assignments to all my homilies ever since.

In a nutshell, that is when and how *Holy Homework* was born. And although I have never read a volume on marketing, I heartily thank this courageous woman, whoever she is, for sparking a brand name that may fit alongside soups for those souls who don’t mind taking home some additional nourishment after Sunday Mass.

Gratefully,
Fr. Bob Pagliari, C.Ss.R, Ph.D.

P. S.: For those who read this preface, and if you wouldn’t mind an extra smidgen of “holy homework,” please offer up a prayer on behalf of this angelic woman. I’ll never forget whatshername, and I can’t thank her enough for the branding she inspired.

*Happy
New
Year*

Lord,
help us resolve to be happier
and holier people this year!



A Miraculous Change in New Year's Resolutions



Three years ago, I was invited to a seminar that addressed issues related to the pastoral care of the sick. Although this educational update was intended primarily for hospital chaplains, all the members of the clergy were welcome, so I was happy to attend. Among the many informational items presented was a Harris poll that examined patients' attitude toward prayer. Our seminary training, of course, had prepared us for the fact that people who are ill expect to pray when a church member visits them. But what we discovered from the study was that most hospitalized patients would also welcome the opportunity to pray with their physicians, especially if they're scheduled for a surgical procedure.

I left the seminar wondering whether doctors, who appear to be more concentrated on physical healing than on metaphysical miracles, would be open to this idea. Then, just two weeks ago, I discovered a nationwide investigation of physicians that indicates how very open they would be to the idea. This survey, conducted by the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, reported that 74 percent of American doctors believe in miracles.

This finding is especially interesting since a separate national inquiry conducted by *Newsweek* found only 72 percent of the general public believed that people who face death in accidents could be saved by a miracle. Could it be that our health professionals have a stronger faith than some of their ailing clients?

When we think about New Year's resolutions, miracles rarely come to mind. The majority of Americans are content to make simple promises like exercising more or spending less time at the office. And that's what this month's resolutions should be: simple, straightforward, doable goals, not grandiose, superhuman aspirations. But then again, if every person in the world made this simple resolve: to treat those around them, those closest to them, with a little more kindness, a little more compassion, and a little more love, the global result would be more astounding than any medical miracle we could imagine.

Wishing you and yours a blessed new year filled with daily, simple miracles.

Once each week during the next four weeks, let's select a health-care professional—a doctor, nurse, dentist, pharmacist, etc.—and send an anonymous note to his or her office. This can be a brief, old-fashioned thank-you card with the promise of a prayer. No signature, no return address, just an out-of-the-blue, totally unexpected token of appreciation and Christian support to make that professional's day a little brighter. We may discover that miraculous resolutions can begin with us.

[illegible]



The New Year's FOG



When we hear the word *fog* in connection with the new year, what leaps to mind immediately? Is it trying to remember where we left our mobile phone after calling all those fellow revelers at the stroke of midnight? Is it trying to forget that yet another 365 days has sped past us in the blink of an eye? Is it trying to recall the inventory of resolutions we swore we would be faithful to last year, if only we could find that laundry list?

The phrase “New Year’s FOG” does not refer to hangovers, aging, or regrets. However, it does relate to resolutions—but only three of them.

These resolutions are:

Forgiveness

Optimism

Gratitude, or “FOG” for short. So why should these virtues be among our top picks for New Year’s resolutions?

- 1) There are only three items here, and in terms of resolutions, less is more. Research assures us that the fewer promises we pledge for the New Year, the more likely we will be to follow through on them.
- 2) These three items are good for other people. Some virtues are directed inward, like faith and hope, for example. But the nature of these three behaviors is outgoing rather than self-focused. We tell others we are sorry. We are upbeat when we are around others. We say “thank you” to others.
- 3) These three items are good for us too. Although science and religion rarely seem to join forces nowadays, the medical community has indicated that these three character traits in particular are especially healthy for us.

Besides the many psychological benefits that come from being forgiving, positive and grateful, there are physiological pluses as well. Apparently those who practice the FOG oaths also benefit from a reduction in blood pressure, an increase in daily energy reserves, and an improved immune system. Not to mention the many spiritual profits for the soul!

[illegible]