

Spirituality for sign-conscious New Orleans drivers



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My family and I recently returned to New Orleans, and we've been awestruck by the size of its potholes. More broadly, we agree with long-time natives that driving here can be both maddening and harrowing.

Also striking about New Orleans is its distinctive geography, which, when viewed from a Catholic perspective, affords drivers an opportu-

nity for prayer not available elsewhere.

Consider how other major U.S. cities are organized along a grid of numbered streets that allow for easy calculation of distance and direction.

Things here are more challenging. Only the most seasoned New Orleanians can take an address and figure their proximity to it. Moreover, north, south, east and west don't really work here where the West Bank's Algiers is situated east of the East Bank's Uptown.

In terms of spirituality, one of the most enduring images for describing the Christian life is that of traveler or pilgrim. The journey of our lives

resembles not the rectilinear layout of other cities but the mysterious twisting and turning of our own.

Again, unlike many other cities, most of our streets are named not numbered.

According to John Churchill Chase in his "Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children and Other Streets of New Orleans," early developers capitalized on fads for all things classical (hence Coliseum Street) and French (and so Napoleon Avenue). Similarly, they must have had good Catholics in mind for streets like Piety, Annunciation, Dominican and all those named after the Church's saints.

To use traditional Catholic language, our streets can

function like sacramentals. They can convey a sense of God's presence and elicit a prayerful response.

So, Piety is not just a street; it's also a virtue that promotes devotion to God and parents. Annunciation doesn't just traverse Uptown; it can also remind us that, like the Blessed Mother, our vocation is to respond faithfully to God's call. Besides being a street, Dominican also names a religious order and, more generally, evokes the richness of Catholic tradition. The saints through their street namesakes surround us like a cloud of witnesses.

Whatever else it might be, driving here can be a spiritual experience for Catholics because we value the material. We discern Christ's presence in the eucharistic species, which in turn trains us to notice it elsewhere in the created order, even in the most mundane places.

So, be alert! Our streets can declare that, indeed, life is a mystery. Yet we are called to pray and love God and neighbor, even while driving!

Tom Ryan is the new director of Loyola University New Orleans' Institute for Ministry. He can be reached at tfryan@loyno.edu.



September 30, Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Readings:

- 1) Amos 6:1a, 4-7
- Psalms 146:7, 8-9, 9-10
- 2) 1 Timothy 6:11-16
- 3) Gospel: Luke 16:19-31

By Sharon K. Perkins
Catholic News Service

At this time of year, our household, along with hundreds of others in America, is consumed with children's activities as programs begin anew. For my eighth-grader, these consist of a new school term, soccer season and, this year, confirmation preparation. Each has its own set of registration forms, permission slips, participation fees and schedules of meetings and practices. Given the way these things work and the busy-ness of our family's life, it's pretty easy to take the path of least resistance and treat preparation for the sacrament as simply

one more extracurricular activity. Unfortunately, having observed other families in my situation, it seems that the enthusiasm for competitive sports at any level often far outweighs that for sacramental catechesis.

Without picking on overextended parents, criticizing particular parish programs or denigrating youth sports programs and their benefits, I must admit that the idea of "competing" for the faith and "laying hold of eternal life," featured in the reading from 1 Timothy, makes me pause. What would it be like if Christians really and truly "laid hold of" the gift of faith and its sacramental confession made "in the presence of many witnesses," with the same fervor that we bring to our many entertainments and creature comforts? What if the complacency of consumerist America, like that of the Zion of Amos or the Palestine of Jesus, were supplanted with zeal for the justice and mercy of the Lord? What if I personally allowed that kind of enthusiasm to break through the barricade



"Compete well for the faith. Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called when you made the noble confession in the presence of many witnesses"

— 1 Timothy 6:12

of my own narrow concerns?

The word "enthusiasm," according to its Greek roots, means "in possession by a god." I've also heard it explained this way: "en" + "theos" (in God) ending with I.A.S.M. (I am sold myself). May we be so thoroughly "sold" on God's reign and so possessed by God's spirit that the daily disposition of all our time and resources — from children's soccer practices to caring for the poor in our midst — truly becomes the stuff of eternal life to which we lay claim.

QUESTIONS:

In what ways have you become too complacent or absorbed in your own narrow concerns to appreciate the gift of faith you've been given? What is God calling you to become more enthusiastic about?



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