

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Summer Reading

One of the blessings (and curses) of being on a lot of mailing lists is getting a lot of mail. In my corner of the world, that includes one type of mail in particular: books. Publishers send me puffy manila envelopes crammed with books, usually with a religious theme. For now, they're stacked like cordwood in our den, next to the TV, taunting me. But here are a few:

Wish You Were Here by Amy Welborn. This book tells of Welborn's achingly wrought account of a trip she took to Italy with her young children in the weeks after her husband's sudden death from a heart attack. Amy captures the dread, loss, grief and unexpected twists of the road with a disarming candor and keenly observant eye. Writing about the hope of the resurrection—something both mysteriously tangible and forever elusive—she notes: "In the midst of the hope, the pieta remains. There is Our Lady of Sorrows, there is the mother standing at the cross, weeping, there are the friends, uncomprehending and regretful, there is the suddenly empty space and strange silence, there are the doubts scoffing from afar, challenging, *Where is your hope now?*" So we went off to Sicily to see." Trust me. Amy's journey is one you'll want to take. Pack extra Kleenex.

A Good Man by Mark K. Shriver. I was first compelled to read this book when I stumbled on an excerpt at the Huffington Post that had Shriver describing how his father Sargent planned John F. Kennedy's funeral. Sargent Shriver made it a priority to ensure that America's first Catholic president had a distinctly Catholic funeral. Searching for the right crucifix to put atop the casket, Sarge went home and pulled one down from his bedroom wall. After the funeral, he put it back, and it hung there the rest of his life. He later took it to Rome to be blessed by the Pope, and it was eventually placed inside the concrete tombstone marking the grave of Sargent Shriver and his wife Eunice. They don't make politicians like Sargent Shriver anymore. I wish they would.

Holiness for Everyone by Eric Sammons. Sammons writes with an elegant simplicity and this book looks prayerfully and practically at the spiritual teachings of St. Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei. I spent several weeks one summer working my way through Escriva's *The Way* every morning on the subway on the way to work, and its beauty and clarity captivated me. I have no doubt Eric will do justice to Escriva's timeless teaching, for I think it has much to teach every one of us. As Scott Hahn notes in the foreword: "Our share of Christ's sonship is not our work, but the work of God"—or Opus Dei.

Shirt of Flame by Heather King. Okay, Heather is another friend of mine who has written a sensationally good book. *Shirt of Flame* recounts her year following the live and writings of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Heather is a recovering alcoholic, a divorcee, a woman who has had multiple abortions—and a devoutly struggling, observant, hopeful, fumbling, irreverent, slack-jawed joyful Catholic convert. (I have such interesting friends!) She writes at one point: "As an alcoholic, I'd always been interested in the mind-body connection, in the way God sometimes seems to take us 'out of the world' for a period of time, possibly in order to work on our subconscious. I, too, had experienced situations from which there seemed to be no escape. I, too, had been in the grip of a kind of dark night that seemed impervious to all reason, all human help, all prayer. Grace is needed and yet grace also seems most likely to appear—as happened in my case—when, from the depths of our heart we cry out our misery and ask for help." You'll want to read more. And more. And read it again. She has a lot to say, and a lot to teach.

So there you go. Happy summer! And happy reading!

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