

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Grace (Eventually)

In her book *Grace Eventually*, Anne Lamott tells the continuing story of her own struggles with faith and doubt and life.

I've written about her before, and talked about her shimmering sense of humor and consoling, down-to-earth spirituality. Her earlier books—*Traveling Mercies* and *Plan B*—were funny and sometimes poignant confessionals. *Traveling Mercies*, in particular, remains one of my favorite books on faith, and one I often recommend to people who tell me, dismissively, “I don't read books like that. I don't want to be preached to.” You will if the preacher is Anne Lamott: a single mother and recovering alcoholic and drug addict who sees the world realistically, painfully, hopefully and—most importantly—hilariously.

Here she is, describing a depressing episode that set her on a binge of eating junk food:

“I was so lost. I couldn't follow the bread crumbs back to the path of mental health, because I'd eaten them all. So I ended up eating junk until bedtime. I can hardly describe how I felt when it was over: like a manatee alone in an aquarium. It is hard to remember that you are a cherished spiritual being when you're burping up apple fritters and Cheetos.”

But Lamott serves to remind all of us that we are cherished spiritual beings—despite the muck and the mess of living.

She snaps herself out of her food binge with prayer:

“My pastor Veronica says that believing isn't the hard part, waiting on God is.... So I prayed impatiently for patience and to stop feeling disgusted by myself, and to believe that God, just a bit busy with other suffering in the world, actually cared about one menopausal white woman on a binge.”

Back in bed, I remembered an old sermon of Veronica's in which she said that when we are with other people, they should be able to see Jesus' love in our faces. Sometimes, I think Jesus watches my neurotic struggles and shakes his head and grips his forehead and starts tossing back mojitos.”

I don't mean to make Lamott sound too quirky—like the result of a strange experiment blending the DNA of Erma Bombeck and Joel Osteen. She can be infuriating, especially in some of her politics.

But she does have the courage of her convictions, and she brings to the spiritual life a sense of mission, and purpose, and endearing imperfection. She may be one of the few spiritual writers out there who unabashedly admits that she doesn't have all the answers, and that she is searching for someone, anyone, who might provide at least a clue. It's a joy to join in that search with her, and savor some of the people she meets along the way: her son Sam, her Presbyterian pastor Veronica, her Jesuit pal Father Tom.

Lamott's continuing struggles are the struggles of all of us who are trying to make sense of a senseless world—a world without enough peace, without enough charity, without enough sanity. I, for one, am glad she's adding her voice to the human choir, and sharing her stories in these books. She's a reminder that grace is out there, waiting for us, if only we take the time to ask for it, and look for it.

With time and effort and faith, we can all find that grace (eventually).

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