

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Redeemed

Heather King was a waitress and alcoholic who never believed in much of anything, and spent a lot of her youth waking up from booze-induced blackouts to find that the person sleeping next to her was a man she barely knew.

Miraculously, mysteriously, all this led her to the last place she ever imagined she'd end up: the Catholic Church. The book "Redeemed" is the story of that journey.

And what a journey it was. And is. Along the way, Heather got married and got a career, as a lawyer. She made money, and it made her miserable. In time she decided to do what she really wanted. She became a writer.

I first stumbled across her name through a mutual friend of ours, James Stephen Behrens, another writer and a Trappist monk. James always raved about her work and encouraged me to read her. I'm glad he did. Her voice is rich and funny and real. And her story, I think, resonates. This is St. Augustine for the 21st century, a "Confessions" that unfolds under the palm trees and amid the bumper-to-bumper traffic jams and interpersonal collisions that are Los Angeles.

Heather King finds the angels of the City of Angels in unexpected places, doing unexpected things: watering their lawns, taking dance classes, bagging groceries. She sees something in the tedium of daily life that is transcendent. Sometimes, even, holy.

"Redeemed" is steeped in both humor and heart-break, equal parts reverence and irreverence, but with some glorious writing and insights that, at times, can leave you breathless.

She describes going for long walks around LA, and finding her way into churches. "I started going to Mass," she writes, "and saw scattered throughout the city, in the midst of clamor and chaos, were sanctuaries of quiet: oases of dark tranquility smelling of incense and wax. Through shoot-outs and stabbings, mudslides and earthquakes, jittery nights and adrenaline-charged days—all over the city candles burned in red glass above the Body of Christ, the deepest, most hidden mystery of all."

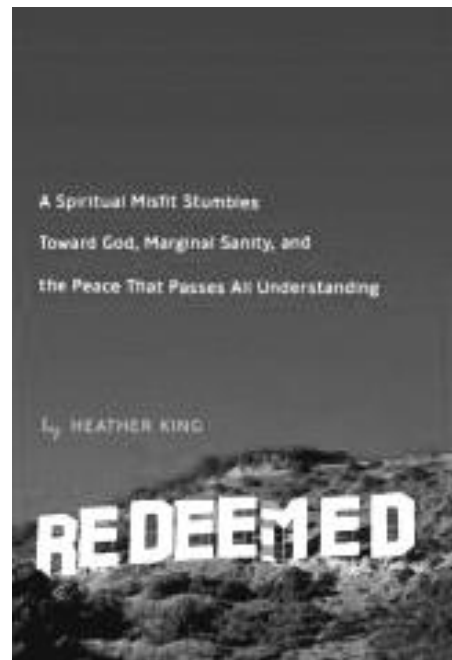
Then there's this simple, pointed take on the Son of God: "A guy who hung out with lepers, paralytics and the possessed: this is someone I can trust."

There's anguish in the book—a marriage that unravels, a cancer diagnosis, the continuing struggles of a person trying to find her way in mid-life with little more than a computer and her own convictions. But Heather has something to say, and says it wonderfully.

At one point, she sums up how small acts of kindness give the world meaning, and hope. "We don't know where, if at all, the seed falls," she writes. "After a while, we don't care where it falls. We begin to sense that nothing is wasted, no act goes unseen ... the small act doesn't bring success, it brings peace. It may not bring riches, but it brings at least an occasional moment of acceptance. It might not change anybody or anything else. But it changes us."

That, Heather King suggests, is what also saves us—and what leaves us, at last, redeemed.

Deacon Greg Kandra ©2014



For more editions of "A View from the Pew"
visit ourladyqueenofmartyrs.org