

Inspired by Mother Teresa, gaining a brother for a day, the last of the Chinese New Year fun, and planning for Lent (7 Quick Takes)

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During my daily blogging this week, one night I found myself trying to decide whether to write about Sonic the Hedgehog or Mother Teresa. I ended up writing about Sonic, but it was because I wasn't sure I could do the Mother Teresa story justice. I'm still not sure I can. But I can't resist sharing it with you.



Flickr / Peta de Aztlan

We heard it for the first time at Mass on Sunday during our deacon's homily. He described how Mother Teresa went to a baker to ask for bread for a hungry child. The baker spit in her face.

"Thank you for that gift to me," she said, wiping the spit off her face. "Now how about something for the child?" I found several versions of the story online, including here, and in all of them the baker becomes a donor, giving bread to Mother Teresa as a result.

What I love about the story, besides the courage and love demonstrated by Mother Teresa, is how she manages to peacefully change the baker's heart. It's all well and good for us to tell our children to love their enemies—and of course they should—but this story about Mother Teresa shows that there is a way to do that without being a doormat. Now I just need to figure out how to do that myself so I can teach our children.

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We had some workers come to the house earlier in the week, and I came home from the office to let them in. I sized up the men quickly, felt good about them—and thought of the piles of work waiting for me back at the office.

"Look, I'm going to leave the check on the table, you're going to finish the work, and then you can just pull the door closed behind you when you leave," I said to the man in charge.

"Are you sure?" he said. "You don't even know me."

"We met what...30 seconds ago?" I said. "You're practically my brother. What's your name?"

"Rick," he said.

"Aha!" I said. "You are my brother. That's even my brother's name."

"But won't you want to see the work when we're done?" he asked.

"Let's be honest," I said. "Unless you leave a gaping hole, do you think there's any way I'll know whether you did a good job?"

He stopped to think. "OK, good point," he said.

I left and my brother-for-a-day and his co-worker did a fantastic job.

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A mother took some powerful photos of her daughters to convey some of the painful comments they hear from people who are either insensitive or worse. John and I have certainly heard variations on a few of these questions and comments, and they can be upsetting. The one that bothers me the most is "Are they really brothers?" which I have written about before.

I have to admit, though, that one of the things I found troubling about this piece was seeing the girls' faces. It may sound odd since I write about our family, but I always worry about our children's privacy and write very carefully. It seems a bit as if the girls are being used to make a point that's a valid point—one I agree with—but is it a point they would want to make themselves at their ages? That troubles me. Am I the only person who feels that way?

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When we were waiting to adopt, our social workers told us we would want to make friends with other families who were adopting. That made sense. We would want our child to know other children who were adopted, or other children from China. But it felt more like homework than fun.



Then we started meeting other adoptive parents and realized how much we had in common with them—even besides our children. One mother I met through our family blogs traveled to China with her husband to adopt their son six months before we traveled to adopt Leo. We realized we lived about two hours apart and got the boys together for a play date a few months after Leo was home.

Soon enough they were friends, and since then Daniel has joined the club, too. When we got together for our annual Chinese New Year meal at a restaurant midway between our homes last weekend, the boys loved hanging out together. It didn't hurt that their friend brought his tablet to share. The adults even got to converse.



As we drove home, we talked about what wonderful friends they are—and how great it is that our boys get along. After all, the parents are all such good friends, we'd be bringing the boys together anyway.

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On our way to meet our friends for our Chinese New Year meal, I spotted a Tuesday Morning. My mother and sister have been on a quest to find polka dot plungers, and they had seen some at a Tuesday Morning and failed to snatch them up. When they went back, there were none left.

I just knew there would be polka dot plungers in this store. I could feel it. John stayed with the boys in the car while I ran inside and checked every aisle—some twice—with no luck.

Then I turned a corner and—nope, still no polka dot plunger. But there was an outdoor St. Joseph statue. And it was only \$9.99. We have been talking about adding some religious statues to our yard, and I give St. Joseph a lot of credit for our jobs and helping us find our new home. And there he was.




I carried him proudly out to the car. Now we can have a St. Joseph statue installation ceremony on St. Joseph's feast day (March 19), if the ground isn't covered in snow.

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Just in time for Lenten any-day-but-Fridays, my favorite new recipe is this pepper steak. Everyone in our family eats it—and loves it. Well, the boys don't like the peppers, but they eat

everything else, so we'll call that a victory. I serve it over egg noodles, and it vanishes. And March starts this weekend! So it's time to bake soda bread again!

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Last year I invited readers to read one of Pope Benedict's books with me, and  that ended up making for a memorable and thought-provoking Lent.

This year I thought I might invite you to read Pope John XXIII's autobiography with me, since he will be canonized with Pope John Paul II at the end of April. Is anyone interested in joining me?

Oh, and while we're talking books, I just finished *Wonder*, a young adult book about a boy born with a deformed face and how he helps himself and others to discover deeper beauty and meaning. It's touching and uplifting.

See more quick takes at Jen's Conversion Diary, where my fellow Catholic Review blogger Patti and I continue to blog every day as part of Jen's "7 posts in 7 days" challenge.