

Of saints, friends, books, and what's going on in my crazy life.

Ashes to ...

So there's this thing about Ash Wednesday. Some people get teeny little crosses. Some people get big ones. Me, I seem to always get a big blob or thumbprint, regardless of where I go. And, as a result, I get helpful comments the rest of the day about having something on my forehead. I try to consider it an invitation to evangelize!

This year, I'm giving up wastefulness--of time, money, food, and worry. I hope to remember to focus on the Lord's amazing bounty instead.

Praying that your Lent is full of contemplation and discovery--and opportunities to bring Christ to family, friends, acquaintances, and total strangers.



"God sees, God provides!" --Blessed Assunta Marchetti (1871-1948)

I'm especially fond of saints who expected their lives to go in a particular direction, only to find God had other plans for them. (That may be because it's happened to me so often.) Assunta wanted to be a contemplative Carmelite nun, but it was decided the family's limited resources would go to help her older brother Giuseppe become a priest. Then, when Assunta was twenty-four, Giuseppe invited her, their mother, and two of their friends who had joined a religious community to come with him to Brazil. Nearly 1 million Italians relocated there between 1880 and 1900, and the immigrants had great needs.



The women said yes... but within five years, Assunta's brother and two friends had died, and her mother had returned to Italy. Assunta stayed, serving as a nurse, cook, and teacher to the immigrants as well as mother superior of the congregation that became the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo (Scalabrinians). Her story reminds me that God suffices, more than suffices, in every situation, even when we may feel abandoned by others.

To learn more about other women saints and blessededs, [see the Wednesday's Woman entries in my blog.](#)

Friends in Faith: Allison Gingras

Allison Gingras seems to be everywhere, all the time. She has a wonderful [radio show](#), [A Seeking Heart](#). She [blogs](#). She leads retreats. She's facilitating an [online Lenten book club](#). She loves and cares for her family. Allison never stops seeking... or giving... and does it all with a beautiful, loving heart.



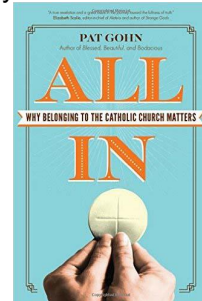
I can't even remember where we first encountered each other virtually, but one of our connection points has always been our mutual draw to spend time with Jesus in adoration chapels. Small wonder, then, when we both were at the [Women in the New Evangelization \(WINE\)](#) conference in suburban Minneapolis last weekend, without any preplanning, we found ourselves alone together in a small prayer space in front of a

tabernacle! Allison reminds me that to give to the depth we're called, we also must keep our own souls full by prioritizing quiet time with God.

Which of your friends inspires you?

On the Nightstand: *All In: Why Belonging to the Catholic Church Matters*

I'm so excited to read this book I can hardly stand it. First, [Pat Gohn](#) rocked my world with her book *Blessed, Beautiful, and Bodacious*, which introduced the concept of spiritual motherhood to me. She's become a friend and a spiritual writing mentor. Second, I was "away" from the Catholic Church for most of my adult life, and for a long time resisted the pull to return. Pat, a lifelong Catholic and the editor of *Catechist* magazine, isn't one to pull punches about her own personal struggles... or about how they helped her emerge with an even stronger faith. I'm looking forward to a thoughtful, impassioned, beautifully written book from a Spirit-filled woman.



What's on your nightstand?

March Madness

My alma mater, South Dakota State University, probably won't be going to the Big Dance this year, but I'll be busy hopping around like our jackrabbit mascot anyway.

This weekend, a friend and I will be at the [Church of the Good Shepherd](#) in Alexandria, VA, for the Spiritual Resource Fair, talking about October's Future with Hope Women's Conference (more on that another time), and I'll bring along some copies of my books to sell and sign.

The following weekend, I'll be moderating a panel on Christian writing and doing some manuscript evaluations at the wonderful [Bay to Ocean Writers Conference](#) in Wye Mills, MD.

The weekend after *that*, I'll be attending a [Faithbooking](#) retreat in Virginia's beautiful Shenandoah Valley. I'll probably spend more sleeping and thinking than creating a remembrance of my faith journey, but I'm still really looking forward to the time in that thin space.

May God bless you exceedingly! --Melanie

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