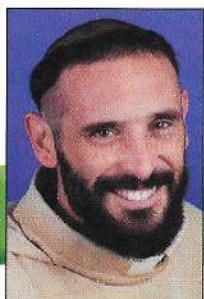


# Altruism: The biblical antidote to anxiety

## Guest Columnist

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One could say that modern Western culture considers hitchhiking to be insane (from the Latin: “in-sanus,” meaning “not-healthy.”) For most, simply entertaining the idea – filled as it is with so many ‘unknowns’ and so many factors seemingly beyond our control – spins their imagination helplessly toward the worst of their nightmares.

Insane as it may seem (to the world), through the “lens” of Jesus, hitchhiking may be seen as an analogy for the trust we all need in God in order to *receive* or *offer* help, grace and blessing. Indeed, altruism (putting others before ourselves) is our biblical antidote to anxiety and fear (cf. Matthew 7:12; 26:38 / Luke 22:42-43); just as Mary soared up to “the hill country” to help her cousin Elizabeth, we as Christians are encouraged to step out of our darkness in search of an “authentic high” (Luke 39-55).

Discerning well whom to “open the door” of our heart to is not a specialized skill restricted to us hitch-hiking friars – clearly we all need to learn this art in our life. On the one hand, not everyone who offers us a “ride” necessarily has the best of intentions... The Lord commands: “Do not ... throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, and turn and tear you to pieces” (Matthew 7:6). ... on the other hand, wise Christians fear ignoring Christ when he knocks at our heart, and we must not allow our health, wealth or anxiety for our wellbeing prevent us from reaching out to those he puts in our path.

With all these conflicting fears, how can our poor souls discern when (and how much) to open our hearts? Through this following meditation taught by Friar Volantino, founder of our community, we see the answer clearly spelled out within the Gospel with Mary who “ran in haste to the hill country” in wisdom and in charity to help her cousin in need (cf. Luke 1:39).

Firstly, we know that Mary was a woman of biblical prayer. The *Magnificat* she later sings is almost entirely constructed from Old Testament Scripture. We can deduce that she discerned God’s will mostly through Scripture. Scripture is our “map” to happiness. The more it is authentically lived, the more interior freedom (Matthew 13:6, John 8:31-31) we gain.

Secondly, upon arrival, Mary did not open her heart immediately; instead, she waited for signs. The first was

the sight of her cousin’s pregnant womb. Before opening our heart to anyone, we need to read the *visible signs*. For us, it could be an image, rosary or clothing that indicates that the “child Jesus” may be growing within the hearts of those we meet. It is true, though, that “looks can be deceiving,” so before opening our hearts we need more ...

Thirdly, Elizabeth’s *verbal recognition* of the divine project carried within her helped Mary understand that this encounter was willed by God - for us, it could be our neighbor saying: “Thanks be to God we met!” etc. - for, as we know, “from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34).

Finally, Mary witnessed Elizabeth’s child leap for joy: so our confirmation may be sealed with a divine joy springing up within the “womb of our heart.” It is only then that Mary opens her heart to Elizabeth and sings her *Magnificat*.

Having said all this, we must note that Mary not only helps materially but, most importantly, she carries within her the Word of God. If we sincerely seek God’s will and frequently receive both confession and Communion in order to become – like Mary – living tabernacles (Revelation 12:17), ➡



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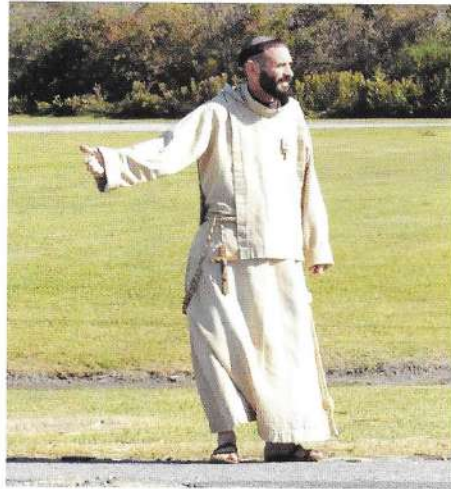
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then when we carry the Word of God to our neighbor, we can be assured that the Lord will provide for us materially and spiritually— keeping us both safe and healthy, according to his will.

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “Heal the sick!” The church ... believes in the life-giving presence of Christ, the physician of souls and bodies. This presence is particularly active through the sacraments, and in an altogether special way through the Eucharist, the bread that gives eternal life and that St. Paul suggests is connected with bodily health” (CCC 1509).

St. John Bosco exhorted his spiritual children to visit the sick with the words: “If you get into the state of grace and refrain from committing mortal sins, I promise that not one of you will contract cholera ... (Don Bosco, Teresio Bosco, Salesian Family Publication, pg. 223). And St. Francis of Assisi is



famous for ministering (unharmful!) among the lepers, confident in the fact that “the Lord himself led me among them” (Francis of Assisi, Celano First Life 17, in Omnibus of Sources).

If it should even happen, however, that like the martyrs we are ill-treated while doing good, then we may say

with the Apostle: “I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24).

Within the litany of ‘self-isms’; self-preservation, self-reliance, etc., it is often hard for us to be selfless. We read: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Act 20:35). Indeed, through the “lens of Jesus” it is very *sane* to live a spirit of *self-sacrifice* out of love for others. Though most of us may not be called to hitchhike, all of us are called to die to our fears of losing *one’s-self* (cf. John 12:24), like so, the result will truly be an authentic “high.”

(Father Antonio Maria Speedy, of the Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary, is involved in specialized ministry and serves as chaplain to the diocesan Office of New Evangelization).  
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