

## FEATURE

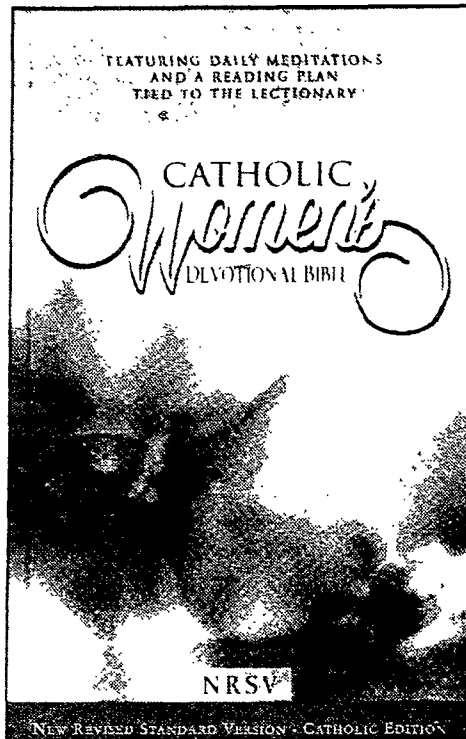
# Women's Bible blends Scripture passages, reflections

*Catholic Women's Devotional Bible*; by Ann Spangler, general editor. Zondervan Publishing House. 1824 pp., hardcover, \$24.99; paperback, \$19.99.

Reviewed by Angela H.P. Lenzo  
Guest contributor

Often, when starting a Catholic Bible study, the facilitator will need to begin with the basics. For example, the Old Testament is in the front, and the New Testament is toward the back. This is because many of us come from households who faithfully attended Mass, but only used the family Bible for recording baptisms and first Communions. So, while the church "forcefully and eloquently exhorts all the Christian faithful to learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 133), not many of us have been doing that reading on our own.

We know some of us have no more excuse. *The Catholic Women's Devotional Bible*, edited by Ann Spangler, is a welcome resource for any woman who wishes to read and pray with the Bible on a daily basis. The reader may prepare for Mass by following the lectionary guide in the back, or begin reading sections from cover to cover in the one-year devotional reading guide. And, though each book of the Bible is introduced by Spangler, providing useful background information and highlighting



main themes, the emphasis is clearly on "spirituality rather than study", as written in the introductory material.

Weekday meditations are drawn from a wide variety of mostly-Catholic authors, including Mother Teresa, Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Siena, Dorothy Day, Sister Wendy Beckett and Joyce Rupp. The topics range from women in ministry and disci-

pliship, to losing a child and widowhood. Amongst 2 Peter, chapter 2, we find a beautiful reflection by Gertrud Mueller Nelson comparing the waiting time of Advent with the waiting time of pregnancy.

"As in a pregnancy, nothing of value comes into being without a period of quiet incubation [...] Brewing, baking, simmering, fermenting, ripening, germinating, gestating are the feminine processes of becoming, and they are the symbolic states of being which belong in a life of value, necessary to transformation."

Elsewhere, in Romans 16, Marie Eloise Rosenblatt, RSM, and Ronald D. Witherup, SS, reflect on the names of women found in Paul's letters.

"One might object that these are but names about whom we know little, and thus they are insignificant. But, in fact, we would have to admit the same could be said for most of the twelve Apostles!"

This combination of poetic style and revisionist attitude captures the tone of the commentary throughout, especially when it comes to the "Women's Stories."

Each Saturday and Sunday, the reader is invited to reflect and pray with one of the women of Scripture. Scanning the list of women, we see a few familiar names: Eve, Ruth, the Three Marys, Elizabeth. We also see familiar women who have no names; the Widow with Two Coins, the Canaanite Woman, and the Woman with Hemorrhages. How many of us, however, know

much about Lydia, Paul's first convert in Europe and the first member of the church at Philippi? How about Salome, the Mother of the Sons of Zebedee, who also was a devoted follower of Jesus? Spangler takes these and other women and lifts them up, providing prayer-partners and spiritual role models for her readers to follow and learn from.

Perhaps the most delightful features of this Bible are the "Tradition" articles contributed by Louise Perotta. Focusing on such topics as purgatory, angels, sacraments and the Mass, the 50 short pieces succeed in closing the gap between Scripture and Catholic life and teaching. Because we draw our Catholic spirituality from tradition as well as Scripture, the inclusion of this material is both natural and welcome.

Overall, the *Catholic Women's Devotional Bible* lives up to its title. It is not for the academic, but for those who wish to deepen their relationship with the Scriptures in a more intimate, devotional way. It is not balanced in terms of gender focus, but instead is written to fill a specific need. The stories of women in the Bible have been consistently overlooked throughout the history of the church. Ann Spangler is helping us to hear those women's voices once again.

Angela Lenzo is faith formation coordinator for St. Mary of the Assumption Parish in Scottsville and a graduate of Nazareth College.

## Son wrestles with widowed father's spiritual journey

*The Father and the Son: My Father's Journey into the Monastic Life*, by Matt Murray. HarperCollins Publishers. Hardcover, 260 pp., \$25.; paperback, 272 pp., \$13.

Reviewed by G. Wayne Barr  
Guest contributor

Imagine you are an adolescent and, one day, your widowed dad proclaims that he has a religious calling. The initial shock might prompt you to smirk derisively, "You're kidding, right?" But what if he acts in a manner unfitting a retired, stoic behaving, successful middle class bureaucrat by carrying rosary beads and bursting into tears when receiving the Eucharist?

For Matt Murray and his three siblings, imagining such a father was not difficult. James Murray's quest for piety is described in stark honesty by his son Matt in *The Father and the Son: My Father's Journey into the Monastic Life*. But it is not just about a father's desire to discover God. It is also about a son's crisis of faith in his father and God.

In a family without a secure religious footing, Matt describes his father's 12-year journey to reinvent himself after the death of their mother, his wife. From an occasional Catholic to an awakening within that inspired him to disavow his possessions and eventually seek God in a Benedictine monastery in Illinois. Yet, the wonder and

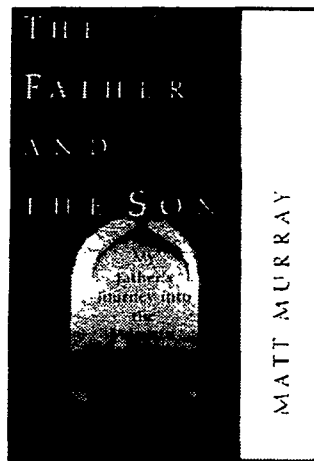
confusion his father was experiencing in his path to enlightenment was disquieting to Matt. Aside from the difficulty in appreciating his father's conversion, what Matt found upsetting was his father's detached behavior toward him and his brothers and sister whose identity as a family unraveled after their mother's death.

"He remained a nice, kind man... But he was a sad, strangely distant figure too, a man whose stasis kept him from reaching out to me or letting me below his surface."

The distance marked by his father's demeanor and his newly found faith became more pronounced as Matt went off to college. They rarely saw one another. However, upon graduation, Matt's attitude towards his father began to change. Thanks to a bitter taste of reality, the success he assumed college would bring did not materialize. As Matt became increasingly frustrated, finding his career path unfulfilling, his father was discovering peace and a spiritual joy within a contemplative lifestyle.

"It seems my father and I had traded places," he writes. "He had once been lost in a quagmire of crisis, while I raced ahead with a plan and a destination. Now he was settled and happy while I was sputtering."

But Matt's struggle was not in vain. Out of his disappointment came a desire to explore his father's past; to understand how his father came to this point of spiritual



serenity. Might it provide a clue to his own unhappiness and a means to escape it?

Reared in poverty during the 1930s in Schenectady, N.Y., James Mur-

ray was subject to the whims of a melancholic father. James was a solitary, subdued individual who, like his son, dared dream of becoming a writer. In the 1950s, he went off to New York to write the next great American novel. Instead of finding fame and fortune, fate provided a more lasting prize in the form of a brunette by the name of Michele.

Interviewing friends of his parents, and through his father's love letters and his mother's journals, Matt analyzes his parents' relationship. The match was perfect. Her creative success was promising. Unfortunately, her life was cut short by cancer.

After recounting his parents' past, the difficult period of adjusting to his mother's

absence and the years of wrestling with his father's faith, he begins to see him in a new light. Through his own coming-of-age anxieties, he is able to empathize with his father. Resentment turns into relief — there was solace in knowing that his father's journey was fraught with wide bends and sharp curves as well. In a touching, final scene, Matt visits his father who is now an ordained priest as well as a monk.

"I not only love him, I like him, too. There is no doubt he is at peace with himself and the world... Isn't that some sort of evidence?"

Murray's memoir is a pilgrimage worth sharing. Aside from a mixture of sad and lighthearted moments, it reminds us that our individual paths are never clear-cut or straight but full of unexpected turns. But out of these unforeseen sorrows or constraints can arise a greater sense of gratitude if we allow ourselves the faith to be open. The father's quest to discover God allowed his son to discover his father. Though Matt Murray wrestles with his father's beliefs, his search and honesty in telling his story is testimony to his emotional — if not, spiritual — maturity.

G. Wayne Barr is an oblate of Mount Saviour Monastery and works part-time for SUNY Empire State College in Corning.

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