

## Why GOD FIRST Is Considered a “Radical Spirituality” (Part 3)

**GOD FIRST** is a radical spirituality because, while it is deeply rooted and anchored in Catholic tradition and teaching, its purpose is to take us beyond the mere adherence of law and unwanted obedience. It provides through scripture, formation, prayer, and sacrament, a direction that is desired — a discernment of true freedom.

Too many people consider themselves Christian but fail to understand and grasp the meaning of his teaching in their lives. The Ten Commandments, and any laws the Church so deemed absolute, are all that matters for these ‘believers’. The mentality too often is, “If I observe the ‘Thou shalt nots...’” then I’m on my way to heaven. This raises the question, “Where is my heart?”

Observance of laws does not mean that I see them as good and make them my own. It means I do what I’m told to do (for the most part). Jesus said he came to fulfill the law and the prophets. Was it in making sure that the people did not steal? Or was it to give depth to the law, which moves us to understanding the rational and purpose — to a change heart and mind in accordance with the will of God?

**GOD FIRST** is a call for us to become aware of the desire of God for us to breath with the heart of God, to live lives that reflect our union with Jesus Christ, the Word spoke and lived. When Jesus taught “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength,” it was taken directly from the Jewish tradition. It was to be seen as the fulfillment of the prescribed laws. For them, it was part of the ‘agreement’ established between God and the people. For the believer today it means taking on a oneness with God in all things; to recognize that we carry within us, God’s divine nature.

When Jesus further taught, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” it was meant as completion of the covenant. “God does this (or that) and expects me to do it, therefore I do.” Today’s believer, armed with the teaching of Jesus Christ, is meant to go beyond our one-to-one relationship with God to include the one-to-one relationship God has with every person. The believer is to live the life God shares with every person. It’s no longer a pick-and-choose lifestyle. Radical for Jesus’ time, and ours.

**GOD FIRST** means putting **GOD FIRST** — in every aspect of life. In this way, there is no need for worrying about the laws, whether they be the Ten Commandments or other laws of biblical tradition, or laws expounded by the Church. Loving God completely and loving our neighbor as you would yourself goes beyond law. What

God would do is now what the believer is to seek in every aspect of life. Anything less falls short of the perfection that is of God and which is desired for us when called to share in eternal glory. But we cannot write God’s will. Ours is to enter into prayer to discern God’s will.

Nor can we simply put the laws of the Church to the side. They are meant to help us fulfill the teachings of Christ found in the gospel. We need to see these laws as guideposts, moving, us to contrite hearts and lives filled with the offering of life, especially to the poor.

*“Sacrifice and offerings you do not desire, but a heart contrite and humble, O Lord, you will not spurn.”* We find this fulfillment happening with the person who seeks to live the Beatitudes.

No one rejoices with laws, even the most traditional of us all. They limit us, are restrictive, binding. However, not to have laws of some sort would be an open invitation to chaos, with each person justifying himself/herself according to the interpretation he/she wishes to assign an event or activity. Most, not all unfortunately, agree with this rationale. There are always those who wish to write their own laws and hold others accountable to them.

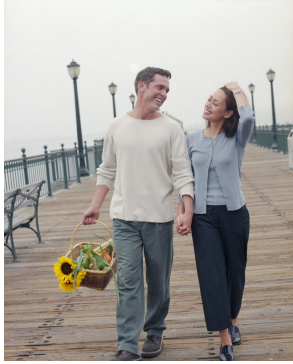
When we are freed from laws, rules, regulations, we rejoice. We bathe in the freedom gained. St. Paul calls this as our way of “living according to the Spirit rather than the flesh.”

So too it is for the person who is freed from law by the acceptance of the way of Christ’s life — taking on the ministry and mission of our Lord with desire and conviction. We find ourselves free to live life as it was meant. Our union with our God is not restricting, binding, limiting. It, instead, opens new vistas for our seeing just how generous our God is toward us.

Our spiritual formation, prayer development, and our sacramental life, should draw us away from the mere observance of the law. These gifts of spiritual formation, prayer development, and sacramental life should move us into a fuller celebration of God’s life and constant presence, allowing us to imitate more and more the giving and example of Jesus Christ.

**GOD FIRST** will always remain a radical spirituality for us, as it mirrors God’s giving — a contradiction to the world which encourages our holding to, and grasping of as much as possible, instead of giving everything — all. That’s what God does today, as has been his will throughout all of history. **GOD FIRST** is finding the freedom within ourselves to give completely to God.





## GOD FIRST Speaker Series

### *Spirituality and Prayer Development for Couples*

**Wednesday, October 25, 7:00PM  
St. John the Baptist Church**

*If there is to be one aspect of life that supports the commitment made in the sacrament of marriage, it is in the prayerful support of the partners. A couple praying together strengthens the bond of marriage, opens doors to solid communication and dialogue, and provides a foundation for the life of the family. Couples growing together in spiritual oneness and prayer can only be a blessing for each other and those in their lives.*

*This does not come without struggle and work. There is a lifelong sharing which changes throughout the years, and with the many situations faced in a marriage. Prayer, scripture reading, encouraging a sacramental sharing, are just some of the means for a couple to give life fresh meaning every day in a way that renews rather than threatens. Admitting the need for God in the marriage relationship is a sign of real strength.*

### **Deacon David and Kathleen Gruseck, Presenters**

Deacon Dave Gruseck and his wife Kathleen are now members of St. Christopher of the Lake Parish in Prospect, PA, after spending the majority of their married life in St. Athanasius Parish in the North Hills community of West View.

Kathleen and Deacon Dave have three children and seven grandchildren. After 30 years of teaching in the Pittsburgh Public Schools where he also served as assistant football coach and head baseball coach at Oliver High School, he took early retirement, allowing for more time in active ministry. Kathleen, a retired nurse, is trained in providing spiritual direction, a ministry she continues to practice.

Ordained in 1999, Deacon Dave currently has responsibilities of word and sacrament to the parishioners of St. Christopher Parish, and ministry of service for the Butler Deanery. Kathleen has been involved in a vast majority of activities associated with parish life throughout the years — music, CCD, RCIA, and more. Together they have worked as presenters for Marriage and Engaged Encounter Weekends, have directed many parish programs including one-to-one marriage preparation in parishes.

In providing insight into the spiritual formation and prayer of a couple, they bring with them a wealth of understanding and growth in their lives and ministry. Their lived-out experiences as a couple enhances their message.

*Couples are encouraged to attend this evening together. This should not stop a person from attending if the partner cannot be present. Please come — it will give you something to share later on.*

*The evening is free and all are welcome to attend. A social and time for sharing follow this one-hour presentation.*

### **BABY SITTING**

*Baby sitting will be provided for the evenings for couples on Wednesday, Oct. 25. However, those wishing to use this service must call the rectory by 1:00PM on SUNDAY, OCTOBER 22. This allows us time to secure a sufficient number of sitters and know what location will best serve our needs. We also need to know the ages of the children as this also determines the number of sitters required. Thanks!*



**Who made  
God boring?**

**A Tyrant?**

**The 'Limit'  
placed on  
living life?**

The spiritual formation and prayer life of an adult (ages 18 to 40ish) can help God come alive, and our faith freeing and rewarding, rather than a limitation of how life can be lived. Faith and God can enhance life very much. Join us.

**Monday, October 16  
7:00pm  
St. John the Baptist  
Church**

***Nationally-known  
musician / speaker  
Jamie Dillon  
will provide the insight  
and possibilities.***

Jamie's background is not an unfamiliar one to many young adults. *"I went to college and got a degree in Respiratory Therapy and moved up to be a department assistant while in graduate school. When I earned my degree in Community Health Administration I moved over to the Education Department. I had also started my own consulting business. I did a lot of public speaking in those days. Things were going really well in my career, but I wasn't happy..."*

Jamie entered into youth ministry and moved into parish, diocesan, national and international ministry for Youth and Young Adults, being the only female American Musician to lead catechetical sessions and perform at World Youth Day XX in Cologne, Germany. Her full background and list of accomplishments in the field of Christian music and ministry can be found on the web at:  
[www.jamiedillon.com](http://www.jamiedillon.com)

***Bring a friend to this dynamic evening.  
This presentation, as all our GOD  
FIRST speakers, is open to all.***

# GOD FIRST

## A Personal Reflection

*“Therefore, I tell you, don’t be anxious for your life: what you will eat or what you will drink; nor clothes for your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food, and the body more than clothing?...Which of you, by being anxious, can add one moment to one’s life-span?...Seek first God’s Kingdom and His virtuous being, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore don’t be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day’s own evil is sufficient.”* Matthew 6:25, 27, 33, 34

Some years ago when I told my mom and dad that I wanted to become a nun, my dad’s immediate response: “You’ll always have food to eat, clothes to wear and a roof over your head.” My family consisted of six children, two parents, and two grandmothers. My grandmothers pitched in helping mom with housework and us kids but dad’s meager salary obtained from coal mining had to be stretched to provide food, clothing and a roof over our heads. Yes, dad and mom must have spent many a day and night anxious about food, clothing and a roof over our heads. And we always had food, clothing and a comfortable home, not knowing how little money there was to provide. If they worried, mom and dad never shared their worry with us.

I often think about this from my early years at home — religious life has been built upon this concept of not worrying about food, clothing and housing in order that we can be free to seek the Kingdom of God by the service given to the people of God. How can this be? How can our communities find the resources needed to meet our needs — all of our salaries are combined to provide for the needs of each, together with trust in God. Some sisters need more while others need less. But all things are held in common. Oh yes, we have our times when total reliance on God is all that is left to see us through — and God does!

Do I worry at times, with fewer salaries due to fewer members or aged members — of course, I do.

In Jesus’ day, anxiety was everywhere, as it is today. The people standing on the mountainside when Jesus delivered this Sermon on the Mount were much the same as you and me. They had to deal with the problems of paying bills, feeding their families, pleasing their employers, raising their children, family health problems, etc. Jesus gave them, and us, a cure for anxiety. He dealt directly with the cause and cure for the wearied mind and heart. Jesus flatly says, **do not be anxious**. Was He serious? How can we not be concerned, considering the many things with which we have to deal?

We must not be filled with worry **because there’s more to life than things**. Jesus speaks of folks being overly restless over food, clothing, and length of life. He reminds us again that **life is more than food and the body more than clothing**. In other words, worry is futile because life is more than things. It is much more than the material. It is more than the physical. It has an eternal dimension to it that is beyond us. So many people are simply not convinced of this fact. Many of them are Christians. But if we really believe that God is in charge, and that He loves us and will meet our needs in His own mysterious way, then we can relax in faith. If we for some reason do not believe that God will take care of us, then we will be unable to relax. We will feel that it is up to us to take care of our needs, physical, emotion, and even spiritual. We’ll really be busy and have no time to **seek first His kingdom and His righteousness** or serve the needs of others.

Finally in verse 34, Jesus tells us **not to be anxious about tomorrow**. In other words, we can only live in the present — in today. This should be obvious, but to many it does not matter. They know that **tomorrow** is coming and they are **determined** to worry about it.

— Sr. Janet Barnicle, OSB



## Remembering Points taken from “Spirituality & Prayer for the Later Years”

*Time is the greatest commodity for those in the later years of life, even as more and more grandparents continue to parent their grandchildren — watching them after school, running them to practices and games, etc., etc. These moments of ‘time’ are also prayer time, as can be all moments in life. It is the person in the later years of life who has the ability to see this more and more.*

*“May you see your children’s children,” comes from the psalms and is recognized as a blessing from the Lord. And what person doesn’t want this?*

*The richness of these experiences is not necessarily found in what we can give these grandchildren, but in who we are to these grandchildren, and what we offer them that will have depth in their own lives.*

*Recognizing this gift becomes the greatest prayer possible, and we soon find ourselves realizing that our lives — including our prayer — whether we remember all the words or not — is our practicing the presence of God.*

*For the person entering into, or already celebrating these later years of life, realizing God’s presence in every moment of the day becomes a way of life that affects how life is seen, what value is placed upon the aspects of our lives, and how valuable is the time we have share.*

*The material possessions may be treasured, the keepsakes might bring back memories. But the treasure of sharing life in the presence of God takes priority.*

*Making life a prayer that unites us in the presence of God helps us accept the limitations often found in the later years of life — limited income or mobility, declining health, loss of friends, or aloneness. This life of prayer helps us recognize that there is never a moment in time that we are ever alone.*

*God is present.*

