

# The Power of the Powerless: Walking the Way of Truth



Fr. Roger J. Landry • Twelfth Napa Institute • July 28, 2022



# Christ, the Way, Truth and Life?

- We're called to unite ourselves to Christ the Way, the Truth and the Life at a time of relativism and rejection.
- Many want to walk their own way, live by their own truth, and define the meaning of life and the universe.
- Others think that Christ's way is toward a joyless dead end, his truth is a superstitious and hateful lie, and his life an empty promise of self-crucifixion.
- Both objections converge to oppose Christ as the Way, Truth and Life and those who follow him.



# A New Way, Truth and Life?

- At the same time, there has been an aggressive attempt to impose a new way of life, set of beliefs, and meaning via political correctness, wokeness and cancel culture.
- Science – Politicized and manipulated with regard to life, basic biology and anthropology, climate, the pandemic.
- Language – Forcing others to refer to people by preferred pronouns at draconian fines.
- Social Interaction – Bullied into accepting the premises of critical race theory and the 1619 Project
- The consequences for all aspects of life: work, school, culture, sports, bathrooms, even churches.



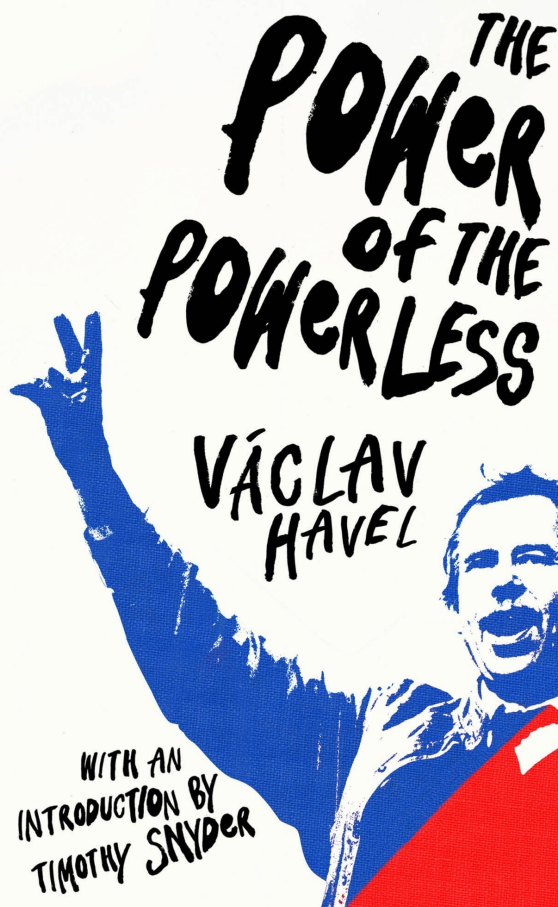
## Before The Ideologies of the Age

- The result of these oppressive, increasingly omnipresent ideologies make many fearful for their jobs, their families, the education of children, the country and civilization.
- Some feel intimidated and powerless before this organized, well-funded, occasionally ruthless juggernaut, whose leaders seem intent on using everything they can — government, education, business, culture, even mob attacks — to bully people into acquiescence, tolerance, acceptance and cooperation.
- Is resistance possible? Are the aims as inevitable as proponents threaten? What can be done in response?



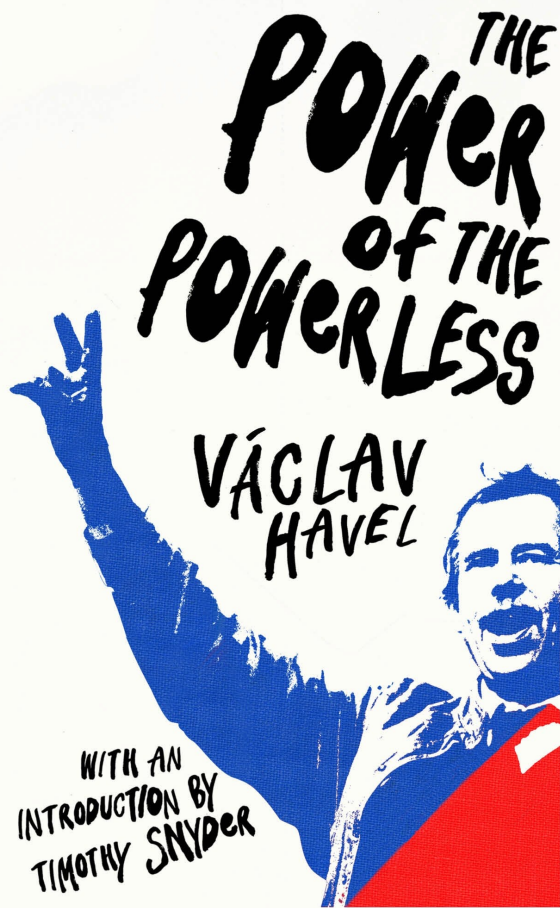
## Responses from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

- We can learn a great deal from history, especially recent history, in response to militant ideologies. There are the heroes who arose against Nazism and Communism, like Blessed Stefan Wyszynski, St. John Paul II, Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, and many others.
- One of the most pivotal figures is Vaclav Havel (1936-2011), the playwright and essayist, multiply-imprisoned dissident, leader of the Velvet Revolution, the first and only President of a post-Communist Czechoslovakia and the first President of the Czech Republic.



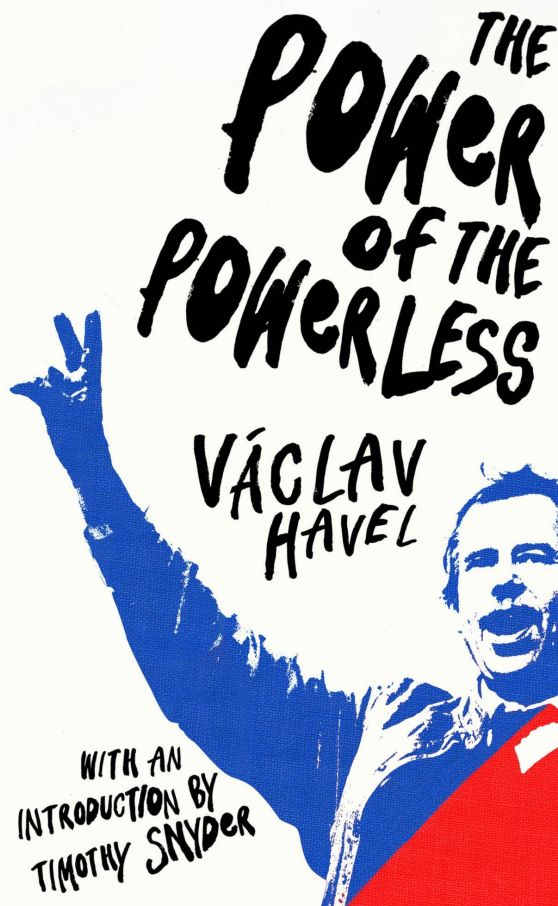
# The Power of the Powerless

- 80-page essay published in October 1978, dissecting the nature of the Communist state and ideology and proposing how to resist.
- It was originally meant for a book of Polish and Czechoslovak essays on the nature of freedom, in which other essayists would respond to his thought. Eventually published *samizdat* and solo. Translated into many languages soon and, in 1985, into English.
- It had an enormous impact and became a manifesto for ordinary people, dissidents, and opposition movements.
- It has a great diagnostic and prescriptive capacity for understanding how ideologies work and how to resist, respond and triumph over them.



# The Post-Totalitarian System

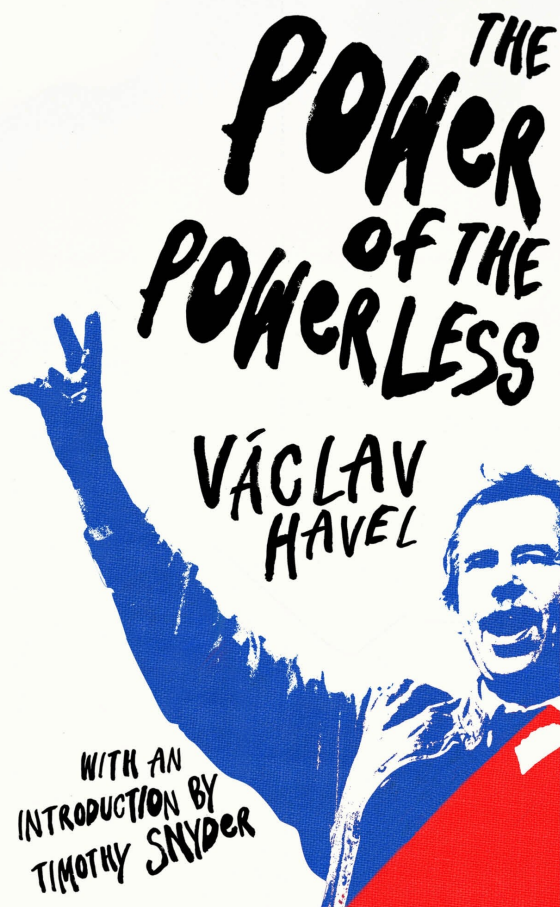
- The "post-totalitarian system"(PTS) – a new type of dictatorship in which real power was in an anonymous, highly-bureaucratized system buttressed by an ideology, a secularized religion, that sought to influence and control every aspect of life and provide an illusion of identity, dignity and morality.
- The price of survival in the PTS is the abdication of reason, conscience and responsibility.
- Life in the PTS was thoroughly permeated by hypocrisy and lies that suffused vocabulary. Captive to its own lies, the PTS needed to falsify the past, present, future, statistics, etc.



## Living Within the Lie

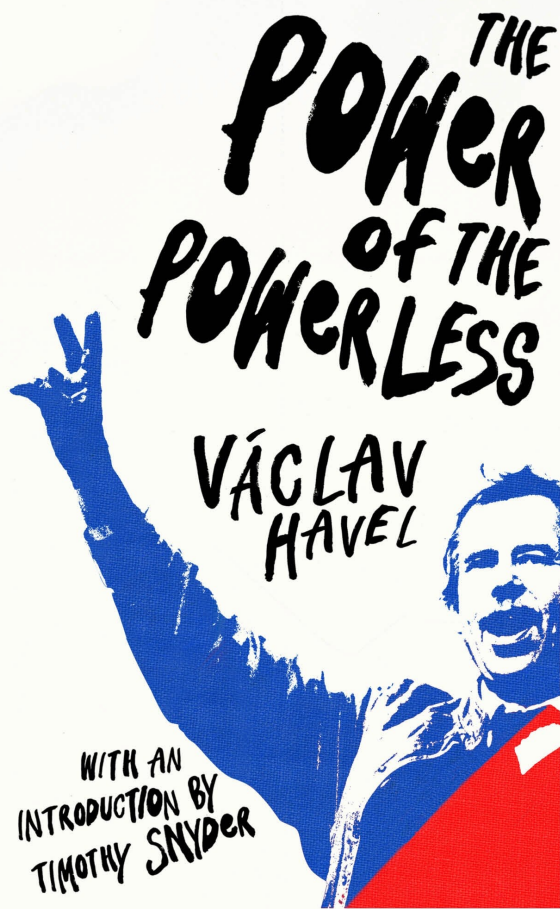
- To survive, people did not need to believe the mendacities, but to tolerate them, behave as though they were true, and get along with those who live by them. They had to “live within the lie.” The stability of the PTS came from people being willing to live within the lie.
- Modern man has a tendency toward toleration of such a system, to surrender his humanity, merge with the crowd, and “flow comfortably down the river of pseudolife,” because most men are unwilling to sacrifice their spiritual and moral integrity for the sake of material comforts and to not to take responsibility for anything higher than their personal survival.





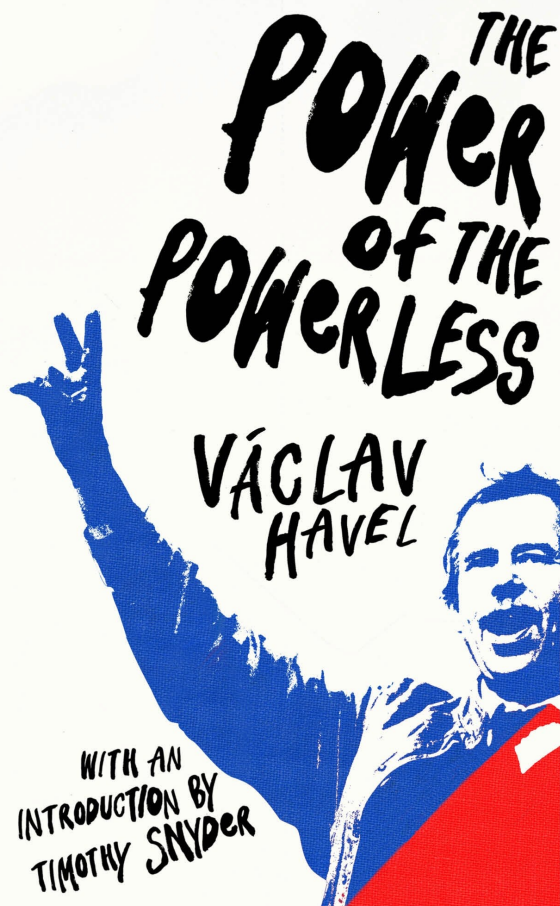
# Living Within the Truth

- The remedy, the revolt, the power of the powerless, is to begin to live within the truth.
- To resist manipulation, straighten one's backbone and refuse to sacrifice one's human identity and dignity.
- To say aloud what one thinks and admit to oneself and others that the emperor is naked.
- To regain one's own sense of responsibility and behave like a human being.
- To live in solidarity and with concern for others.
- It's marked by a high degree of "inner emancipation" and courage.
- It normally begins in the pre-political "hidden sphere" and then comes into the light.



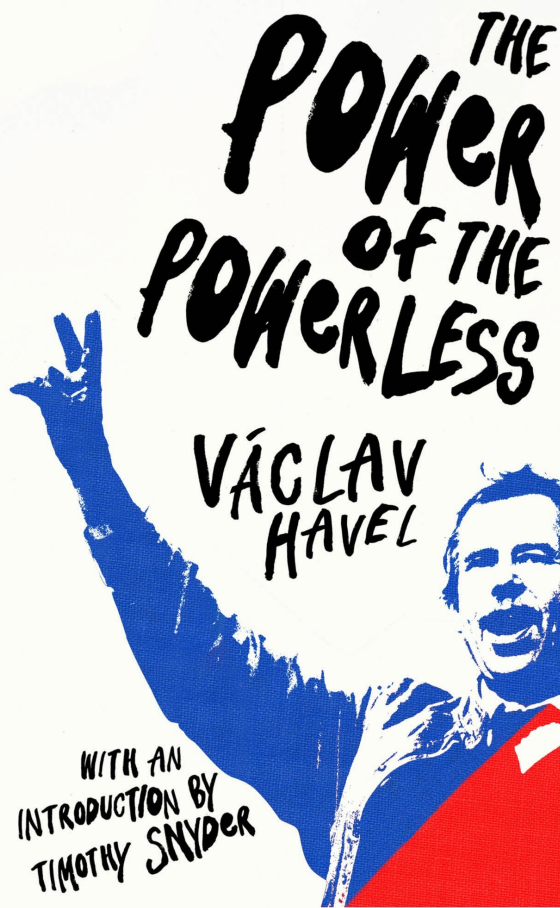
## Public Witness to the Truth

- The fundamental threat to the PTS, built on ideologically living within the lie, is living with the truth, which exposes the PTS' emptiness, weakness and readiness to disintegrate.
- Living with the truth can come from philosophers, historians, sociologists, teachers, clergymen, painters, musicians, like the Plastic People of the Universe, or the Charter 77 created by Havel in response to it.
- Dissidents are those who live the truth publicly, who may suffer more, but whose sufferings may also be better noted. They not only do not live within the lie but begin to serve the truth purposely, articulately and coherently.



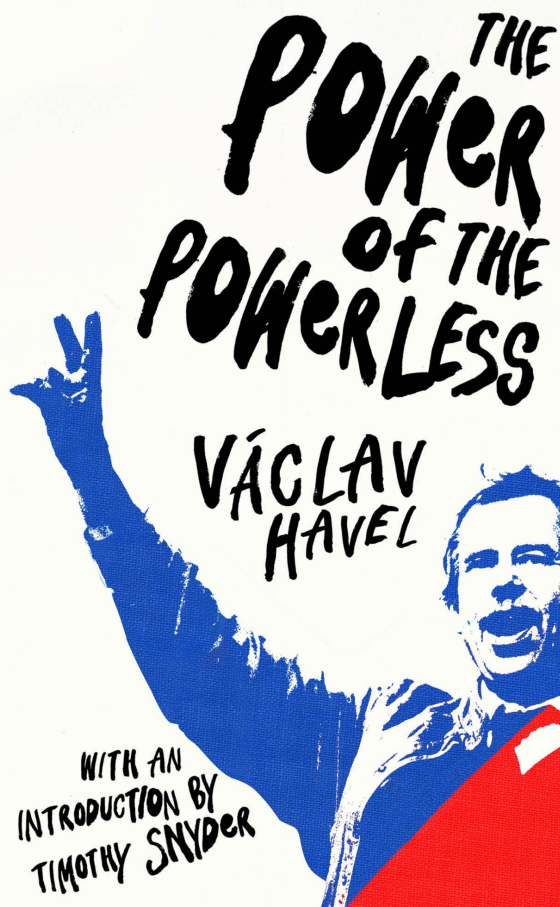
# The Culture of the Truth

- Eventually once enough people begin to live within the truth, a “second culture” can form, featuring some organization and institutionalization, pointing to where the truthful life can be lived.
- This second culture can demonstrate that living within the truth is a real human and social alternative, which can raise the confidence of others, shatter the world of appearances and unmask the real nature of the power that flows from freedom and responsibility.



## Havel's Warning to the West

- Democratic societies are founded more on mistrust than mutual confidence, on collective irresponsibility flowing from an illusory form of freedom than responsibility. A moral reconstruction is needed, rehabilitating trust, openness, solidarity, love.
- Consumerism – more precisely, the dictatorship of consumption, production, advertising, commerce, technology and flood of information – can make those in democratic societies live according to convenient, comfortable untruths because they don't want to risk losing material well-being for spiritual and moral values.



## Lessons from Havel

- In the midst of ideological pressure or suffocation with regard to metaphysics, anthropology, ethics, epistemology, cosmology, the power of the powerless is to cease living within the lies, to stand athwart cultural insistence to conform, and to live within the truth.
- It's a courageous choice to live freely in accordance with reality, even if one should suffer the loss of goods, the esteem of the crowds, one's liberty or even and ultimately one's life.
- We need to diagnose what's really going on with the toxic ideologies being poured into social drinking water and resist the pressure to align our thoughts, words and actions to them.
- We likewise have to beware of the seductive power of consumerist well-being and technological dependency that can make us vulnerable to living according to the lie and to sacrificing higher goods (our reason, conscience, responsibility, identity, dignity and morality) for comfort and convenience.



# The Way, the Truth and the Life

- Havel's description of the power of the supposedly powerless – living within the truth – is not original. It's the heart of the Gospel, the words, witness and way of Jesus.
- Jesus came to give “witness to the truth,” (Jn 18:37) to indicate to us the “truth that would make us free” (Jn 8:32) and to call us to use that freedom to choose to follow Him the Truth incarnate along the Way that leads to the fullness of Life.
- For Jesus it wasn't enough to know the truth, but we needed to choose to “live the truth in love” (Eph 4:15), in season and out of season.



## Jesus' Way of Living the Truth

- We see in Jesus the great testimony of the power of the powerless against the prince of the world, of the truth against the "liar" and the "father of lies" (Jn 8:44).
- Jesus' way is not easy and certainly not popular. It's a "narrow path," a route of the beatitudes, ultimately a way of the Cross, featuring self-giving love rather than self-gratifying egotism.
- To follow Jesus on the way is to walk a path of continual conversion, to seek to live in the real, real world, aligning one's life to him.



## Human Means of Growth in Living the Truth

- Refusing to lie in an age of deception, spin, euphemisms, false news, half-truths
- Speaking the truth, even when unpopular.
- Not seeking the approval of others.
- Giving fraternal correction with charity and receiving fraternal correction with humility.
- Not bearing "false witness" by accommodating to the clearly fraudulent ideologies of the age.





## Human Means of Growth in Living the Truth

- Anchoring our freedom to the truth, rather than living freedom as if it means doing whatever we feel like rather than what we ought.
- Living the “grammar” of truth in human relationships.
- Nourishing friendships with those who are truth-tellers and truth-doers.
- Cultivating a spirit of mortification with regard to material goods and growing in the capacity to sacrifice.
- Rejoicing in the truth.



## Supernatural Means of Growth in Living the Truth

- Personal Prayer – in silence and solitude seeking the truth
- Conscience – Informing and living according to the voice of God whispering within.
- Regular Confession – in which we face the truth about ourselves, our thoughts, words, actions and failures to act, and plead for God’s help.
- Word of God – by which Jesus wants to “sanctify us in the truth” (Jn 17:17).
- The Mass – in which we learn from Christ himself and the Church how to worship in “spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23)



## Supernatural Means of Growth in Living the Truth

- Life according to the Holy Spirit – in which the “Spirit of Truth” seeks to “lead us to all truth” (Jn 16:13) in action.
- Charity toward neighbor – in which we recognize in depth who our neighbor really is, made in God’s image and likeness, reverence and serve them.
- Redemptive Suffering – Recognizing that the Cross is the “power and wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24), the true power of the powerless.
- Accepting the possibility of martyrdom – The first Christians were not baptized until they were ready to be martyred. Martyrs are the supreme witness to the inviolability of truth, preferring to give their life rather than deny God, the truth about Him and us (like Bl. Stanley Rother, whom the Church celebrates today on July 28).



## Living the Gospel: the True Power of the Powerless

- The whole message of the Gospel is a description of the power of the powerless.
- The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that starts small and grows big, like a pinch of leaven that lifts up the whole dough.
- The true and definitive revolution began with a 14-year-old girl's fiat and grew as a vulnerable child within her womb, born in a stable, hunted by assassins, evicted by a mob from his hometown, ultimately hated, arrested, tortured, and crucified by the powers of his day. But he rose again on the third day, showing the ultimate power over life and death.
- It continued through the selection of 12 "nobodies," 11 of whom, after betrayals, gave witness to the truth, despite persecutions, until their own death. They gave rise to generations of martyrs, saints and ordinary people, living and transmitting the truth down to our own day.



# Living the Gospel: the True Power of the Powerless

- We are the spiritual heirs of the Jewish slaves against Pharaoh and his armies and charioteers, of David against Goliath, of Gideon with his 300 against the Midianites' 35,000, of Elijah versus the 850 priests of Ba'al and Asherath, of Esther versus Haman, of the three young men against Nebuchadnezzar, of the Maccabees against the Greeks, of Christ versus the Sanhedrin, Pilate and Herod, of Stephen against Saul, and of Paul against his Jewish persecutors and Roman executioners.
- It was St. Paul who recognized, "When I am weak, then I am strong!" (2 Cor 12:10) and how "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13).
- That one who strengthens is the one who refused to ask his Father to send "twelve legions of angels" (Mt 26:53), but who ultimately overturned worldly power structures through meekness, humility and truth, infusing courage into disciples in every age, including our own.



# Living the Gospel: the True Power of the Powerless

- To live the truth Christ reveals and enfleshes is the ultimate power of the powerless. It is the ultimate revolution against the lies of every age.
- St. John Paul II, who himself lived within the truth despite Nazi and Communist occupation and ideologies, wrote an encyclical on the “Splendor of the Truth” (1993) that summarizes for us the humble but definitive strength with which Christ has sent us out to empower the world:
- “It is urgent to rediscover and to set forth once more the authentic reality of the Christian faith, which is not simply a set of propositions to be accepted with intellectual assent, but a lived knowledge of Christ, a living remembrance of his commandments, and a *truth to be lived out*, ... an encounter, a dialogue, a communion of love and of life between the believer and Jesus Christ, the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (cf. *Jn 14:6*).

# Living the Gospel: the True Power of the Powerless

- In response to the many lies and ideologies of the age, let us recommit, one choice at a time and with the overall commitment of our life, to follow Christ the Way, to believe and proclaim Christ the Truth, and to embrace, love and introduce others to Christ the Life, ... to whom be "glory, and honor, and power" (Rev 5:12) forever and ever.





## Welcome!

I warmly welcome you to this website, put together at the insistence and with the assistance of friends.

During my diaconal ordination, Cardinal Edmund Szoka gave me the following instruction from the Ordination Rite as together we gripped the Book of the Gospels:

*"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are.  
Believe what you read.  
Teach what you believe.  
Practice what you teach."*

Those words have never lost their resonance.

Since that day -- October 8, 1998 -- I have tried to live up to that commission to be a "herald of the Gospel," by striving to teach what the Church believes, to practice what I preach to others, and to spread with joy and enthusiasm the truth Christ has entrusted to His church -- in and out of season, in and out of the pulpit.

This website is a chronicle of those attempts. You may also follow postings of articles, homilies and teachings on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

You can also subscribe to the podcast of daily homilies, lectures and talks through Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts.

It constitutes the "five loaves and two fish" (or even less!) that I have placed into the hands of the Lord as an attempt to feed a hungry crowd, confident that, if He wishes, He can multiply and supplement that meager offering to nourish many more (Jn 6:1-14).

In Christ,  
Fr. Roger J. Landry



### Most Recent Homilies

God's Comfort and the Conversion Required to Receive It, Second Sunday of Advent (B), December 6, 2020

Accepting, Following and Announcing Jesus without Offense, Second Sunday of Advent (EF), December 6, 2020

Walking the Way of the Kingdom Jesus Indicates, First Saturday of Advent, December 5, 2020

Running to Meet Our Light, Strength and Salvation, First Friday of Advent, December 4, 2020

Listening to and Acting on the Long Awaited One's Words, First Thursday of Advent, December 3, 2020

Going Hungry to Meet Christ in a Three-Fold Banquet, First Wednesday of Advent, December 2, 2020

Childlike Eyes to See, First Tuesday of Advent, December 1, 2020

Singing the Song of the Lamb, 34th Wednesday (II), November 25, 2020

Turning to the Lord Who Comes to Judge the Earth, 34th Tuesday (II), November 24, 2020

Following the King and Lamb Wherever He Goes, 34th Monday (II), November 23, 2020

### Most Recent Articles

Our Duty and Salvation, The Anchor, November 27, 2020

Living the Reality of the Kingdom of Christ, National Catholic Register, November 19, 2020

The Knights Our Age Needs, The Anchor, November 13, 2020

Remembering Andrew Walther, November 7, 2020

Just a Parish Priest, The Anchor, October 30, 2020

Coming to Know the Original Three-Dimensional Carlo Acutis, The Anchor, October 16, 2020

A Good Shepherd Full of Christian and Priestly Virtues, The Pilot, October 5, 2020

Returning to the Sacrament of Divine Love, The Anchor, September 18, 2020

The Pastoral Malpractice of Liturgical Abuse, The Anchor, September 4, 2020

The Chosen, The Anchor, August 21, 2020

### Most Recent Talks

Receiving the Lord Jesus as Mary and Joseph, Advent Day of Recollection for the Leonine Forum, December 5, 2020

Novena in Preparation for the Immaculate Conception, Leonine Forum, November 28 to December 8, 2020

Blessed Michael McGivney and the Call to Holiness, McGivney Festival Young Adult Prayer Vigil, October 31, 2020

Apprenticeship in the Art of Living, Duc in Altum Virtual Schools Summit, October 28-30, 2020

Preaching on Marital Love and Accompanying Couples toward the Full Embrace of the Church's Teaching, Diocese of Gary Clergy Convocation, October 20, 2020

The Divorced and Remarried, Challenges and Triumphs in Pastoral Care, Diocese of Gary Clergy Convocation, October 20, 2020

The Heart of the New Evangelization: Meeting, Knowing and Loving Jesus Back, New Zealand Evangelion's In his Name Virtual Conference, October 10-11, 2020

Christian Anthropology: The Human Person in the Modern World, Leonine Forum Opening Lecture, October 8, 2020

Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching, UNSRC Catholic Club, August 27, 2020

Making Better Confessions, Catholic Information Conference, July 24, 2020

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