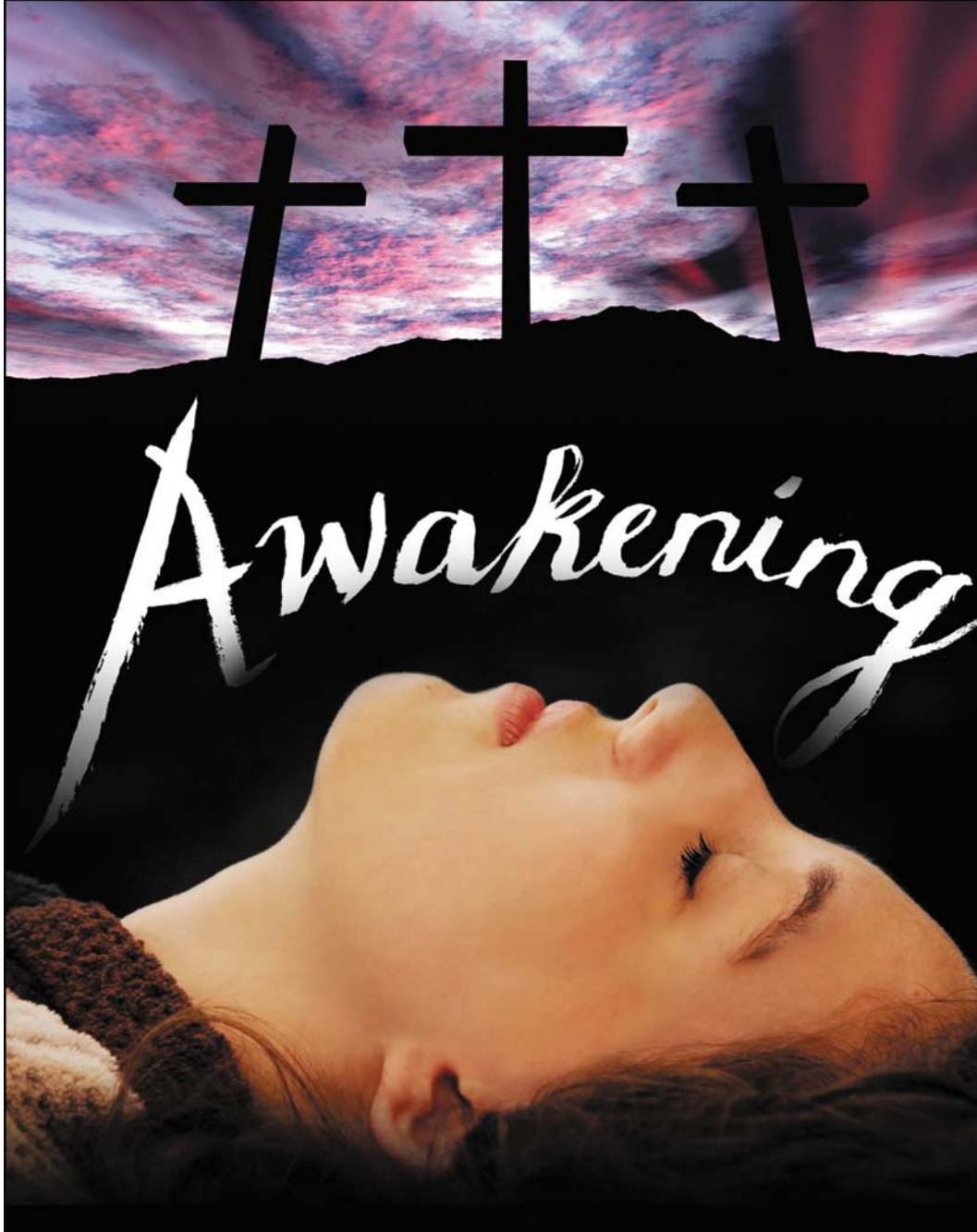


Book Club Notes
for



A CROSSROADS IN TIME BOOK

created by Claudia Cangilla McAdam

Book Club Notes
on

AWAKENING

CREATED BY THE AUTHOR
CLAUDIA CANGILLA MCADAM

The following materials are created for use with the book *Awakening: A Crossroads in Time Book* by Claudia Cangilla McAdam

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to first-century Jerusalem . . . as seen through the eyes of a twenty-first century American teenage girl named Ronni.

I hope you find this guide for reading groups to be helpful in unlocking some of the mysteries that comprise the Catholic faith as it stimulates thought and discussion for the book *Awakening*.

I wrote this book to not only tell what I hoped would be an interesting fictional story, but also as a means to engage readers more deeply in their lives in Christ as they enter the history surrounding his days during Holy Week.

You may be using this book as part of a class curriculum. You might be reading it as a book club member. Or perhaps you've just picked it up to savor all by yourself. Whatever the case may be, it is my wish that this guide might give you greater understanding and enjoyment of the book.

USING THIS GUIDE

The best way to run a course or a book club using this guide is for everyone to read the chapter or chapters to be discussed before the club or class meeting. The chapters are brief enough, however, that one or two might be read out loud prior to a discussion session.

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

For each chapter, this guide will direct you to read a short excerpt from the book and discuss what you think of it.

GOING DEEPER

Additionally, “Going Deeper” questions will spur you to think about certain questions in light of how they might apply to your own life today.

INSIGHTS

You'll find that I've included various insights—Scripture passages, quotes from Church Fathers, insights of modern scholars, or my own commentary on certain parts of the book. It's my desire to let you in on a bit of the thought process I went through in penning **Awakening**. I may throw out challenges that you might wish to

undertake in order to expand your experience with this book and with the Truth that lies behind it.

CLOSING PRAYER

Because God is the origin of all of our work and study, it is suggested that you open your meeting with a prayer (a couple examples appear below) and close your meeting with a prayer, as is Catholic tradition. You might select something you discussed in your meeting to use as reflection and prayer. A group prayer (like the Our Father or the Hail Mary), the reading of a psalm, or the offering of a prayer that you make up yourself can all be appropriate ways to end a session. For some chapters, I've provided suggested closing prayers.

FEEDBACK

If you have any questions about the text or if you just want to share your reaction to the book or the insights you gain through this guide, please email me at Claudia@ClaudiaMcAdam.com.

If you like what you've read, I urge you to recommend this book to others—friends, relatives, teachers, youth group leaders. May God bless you as you study this book and come to your own awakening.

Claudia Cangilla McAdam



OPENING PRAYER

You might want to begin your study each time by praying the following:

Father, may everything we do begin with your inspiration and continue with your saving help. May our work always find its origin in you and through you, reach completion. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reign with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen

Or this prayer:

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Leader: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love.

Group: Send forth Your Spirit, and we shall be created, and You shall renew the face of the earth.

Leader: Let us pray:

O God, Who, by the light of the Holy Spirit, did enflame the hearts of the faithful, grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise, and ever rejoice in His consolation, through Christ our Lord.

Group: Amen.



CHAPTER ONE

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 6) Why would anybody die for somebody they didn't know? I mean, I got the whole bit about salvation. Forgiveness of sin, getting to heaven. It was the sacrifice part that didn't make sense to me. Couldn't that have happened any other way? I guess I had a bit of Doubting Thomas in me. I believed in Jesus, I really did. I just never understood why He had to die. I always wondered why no one really tried to stop it. I would have. His death seemed so unfair. I just didn't get it. Nothing was worth dying for.

Ronni's last statement that "nothing was worth dying for" says a lot about her. Why do you think she might feel this way? Do you agree with her? If not, what IS worth dying for?

GOING DEEPER

Ronni's faith life is not very strong. Why might that be? Have you ever struggled with faith? What might help a person strengthen weak faith?

INSIGHTS

Ronni's mother frequently asks the Blessed Mother to intercede with her Son on behalf of Ronni's mother. Some people don't appreciate the Catholic understanding of Mary as Queen Mother, but it is a Biblically-based role, one that is evident in the reading of the Old Testament. In the Davidic kingdom where kings led the people of God, the queen wasn't the king's wife—many kings had more than one wife. Solomon, for example, had 700! The queen was the king's mother, of which (of course), there was only one. That's why when a new king is introduced to readers in the Old Testament, we are told right away who his mother is. It was her role to intercede with her son on behalf of the people. By appreciating the role of this queen-mother, or *gebirah*, we can see how this "can serve as a background for understanding Mary, the mother of the Messiah-King"* and, by extension, her role as intercessor for us.

*From the book **Queen Mother: A Biblical Theology of Mary's Queenship** by Dr. Edward Sri.

CLOSING PRAYER

A suggestion might be to conclude this session with the recitation of the Hail Mary or the Memorare:

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me.

Amen.



CHAPTER TWO

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 11) “I’m so sorry, Ronni,” Mark had said after the cops left that awful night. He let me sob against his shoulder, and he cried, too. Then he prayed with me. I never would have thought to do that. How could God have let this happen to Dad and Steven?

What insights does this paragraph give you as to the state of Ronni’s faith life? Discuss the different ways people might respond to tragedy based upon where they are on their faith journey.

GOING DEEPER

Ronni is angry that her brother and her father died in the act of helping a stranger. Do you think she would have felt the same way if they had been helping a toddler

who had wandered into the street? Why or why not? What action would you take if you came upon a dangerous situation in which someone needed your help?

INSIGHTS

Ronni mentions that her mother is always lecturing her with the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians. Here's the type of passage to which she is referring:

Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. I Cor 6:18-20

The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes how “Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte ‘a new creature,’ an adopted son [or daughter] of God, who has become a ‘partaker of the divine nature,’ member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit. (CCC 1265)

Jesus has paid the debt for each of us; we are his. St. Paul teaches that your body is important, and what you do with it *does* matter, because you will get it back at the time of resurrection.

CLOSING PRAYER

Use one of the previous prayers in the book or create one of your own.



CHAPTER THREE

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 17) . . . a white dove emerged, wings flapping. It flew closer and closer, and I could feel soft waves of cool air wash over my face with each beat of a wing. It settled on my shoulder, but continued to flutter its feathers, softly caressing my cheek.

While I could see all this, I couldn't physically open my eyes; they felt sewn shut. Weighted down by metal.

In order to keep a deceased person's eyes closed, they could be sewn shut or coins could be placed on eyelids. Why do you think the author describes Ronni's eyes feeling like something like this has been done to them?

GOING DEEPER

When Ronni's mother witnesses a miracle in the healing of her daughter, she immediately launches into praise of God. Do you think her reaction to an answered prayer is typical of most people? Why or why not?

INSIGHTS

After Ronni has taken ill, she notes in this chapter that "Slowly, my hearing engaged, and the sound of music reached my ears. Flutes playing somewhere outside. Mournful notes hovered around my head."

In Jesus' time, flute-playing was common at ceremonies of grief when someone died. Read this passage from Matthew's Gospel:

And when Jesus came to the ruler's house, and saw the flute players, and the crowd making a tumult, he said, "Depart; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. Mt. 9:23-25

CLOSING PRAYER

The psalm Ronni's mother utters when her daughter is healed is Psalm 103, written by King David. You might wish to recite some or all of it as your closing prayer:

Psalm 103

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—

who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The LORD works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.
The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger for ever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust.

As for mortals, their days are like grass;
they flourish like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.
But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting
on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,
to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.

The LORD has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all.
Bless the LORD, O you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,

obedient to his spoken word.
Bless the LORD, all his hosts,
his ministers that do his will.
Bless the LORD, all his works,
in all places of his dominion.
Bless the LORD, O my soul.



CHAPTER FOUR

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 28) I felt like I was having an out-of-body experience. How could I possibly be here? Was this really my home? The place was strange, but Mom and Mark were familiar. Had I lost my memory while I was sick? What was happening to me?

Seraphina later says that she is not only out of place, but also lost in time. Discuss what she means by that statement.

GOING DEEPER

So many things are familiar to Ronni/Seraphina, and yet many things are strange as well. Have you ever encountered a situation like this (perhaps being ill, waking from a nightmare, or seeing someone you hadn't seen in a long time)?

INSIGHTS

Emperor Tiberius does, indeed, appear in the Bible:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiber'i-us Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturae'a and Trachoni'tis, and Lysa'ni-as tetrarch of Abile'ne, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Ca'iaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechari'ah in the wilderness; and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Luke 3:1

John the Baptist was already at work in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, and if Jesus' baptism occurs at this time, it is the start of his three-year ministry, which would still be ongoing in the seventeenth year of the emperor.

CLOSING PRAYER

Use one of the previous prayers in the book or create one of your own.



CHAPTER FIVE

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 31) I had knowledge no one else around me had. I knew what was coming, what the people here would face. I knew that Jesus would be killed—but things didn't have to be that way, did they? Nothing is worth dying for, I thought. If Jesus could be saved, if he lived, how much more good could he do? How many more people would come to believe in him?

But should I stop the crucifixion? What would that do to God's plan of salvation? Could I possibly stop Jesus' death? I had no idea how.

Why does Seraphina think that stopping the crucifixion might be good? If she succeeds, what *will* that do to God's plan of salvation?

GOING DEEPER

Read an account of Palm Sunday in the Gospels (Matt 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; John 12:12-13) and imagine yourself as part of the crowd. Describe what you would be seeing, feeling, hearing, tasting, smelling. What would your reaction be to such a scene?

INSIGHTS

At Jesus' time, touching a dead body could prevent an observant Jew from worshiping. It is stated in Numbers 19:16 that "Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain with a sword, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days." This is why Mark prevents Seraphina from touching the grave of her father and brother. At the time of the Passover (when this story takes place), the roads of Palestine would be crowded with pilgrims coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Feast. To touch a grave would be disastrous. Therefore, it was the Jewish practice to whitewash the tombs during this time of year so that they could be easily seen and no pilgrims might accidentally come in contact with one of them and become unclean.

CLOSING PRAYER

When we think of becoming clean, we might want to turn our thoughts to the cleanliness of the soul, as a repentant King David did when he wrote Psalm 51, which might be used as a closing prayer:

Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to thy steadfast love;
according to thy abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,
and done that which is evil in thy sight,
so that thou art justified in thy sentence
and blameless in thy judgment.
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Behold, thou desires truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;

wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Fill me with joy and gladness;
let the bones which thou hast broken rejoice.
Hide thy face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence,
and take not thy holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of thy salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors thy ways,
and sinners will return to thee.
Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God,
thou God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of thy deliverance.

O Lord, open thou my lips,
and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.
For thou hast no delight in sacrifice;
were I to give a burnt offering,
thou wouldst not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God
is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God,
thou wilt not despise.

Do good to Zion in thy good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
then wilt thou delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on thy altar.



CHAPTER SIX

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 40) We were being carried along in a sea of bodies. Mark bumped into me, I lost my footing, stumbled away from him, and flung out my arms to grab something—anything—before I fell and was trampled to death. My palms landed on a pair of forearms, the fingers of my right hand grasping a small black calfskin box bound to the man’s left arm with a leather strap. . .

My eyes followed [the Pharisee’s] to the crusty, oozing patches on the backs of my hands. He drew himself away, pointed toward me, and began yelling, “Unclean, unclean!” . . .

“Call the guard,” the Pharisee ordered to no one in particular. “Call the temple guard! Take her to the lepers’ court.”

“It’s not leprosy!” I yelled. “Eczema. Eczema. Don’t you know anything?”

Seraphina’s eczema causes her problems in the Temple. How are disabilities and illnesses looked upon today, and do those things sometimes lead to the sufferer being treated in a certain way? Give examples.

GOING DEEPER

Mark references this Gospel passage: Mark 12:28-34 in which it is stated that to love God “with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” In our lives today, in what ways might we be presenting “burnt offerings and sacrifices” while disregarding what Christ *really* wants of us?

INSIGHTS

Regarding the possibility of Seraphina being considered unclean, here are some relevant passages from Leviticus: *Anyone who develops a contagious skin disease must go to the priest for an examination (Lev 13:9) and As long as the disease lasts, they will be ceremonially unclean and must live in isolation outside the camp (Lev 13:47).*

Hezekiah's Tunnel still exists and can be walked through today. In 701 B.C., King Hezekiah of Judah was facing an impending siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib. King Hezekiah of Judah realized the need to safeguard Jerusalem's water supply. He sealed off the opening of the Gihon Spring that lay outside the city wall, and cut a 1,749 foot-long tunnel (1/3 of a mile) through solid rock to bring the Gihon waters by gravity to flow under the wall of the city and into a storage basin, later called the Pool of Siloam. Water continues today to flow through the tunnel, and the level can range from covering a person's ankles to reaching mid-chest height. The passage grows narrow in places, to just a bit wider than a man's shoulders. The height ranges from about 4 ½ feet to 6 ½ feet. When David conquered the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem 300 years before Hezekiah's Tunnel was in place, it is believed that either David or his men (or both) entered the city through a vertical shaft running from the Gihon Spring into the city.

CLOSING PRAYER

Use one of the previous prayers in the book or create one of your own.



CHAPTER SEVEN

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 49-50) Seraphina questions Mark: “*You don’t think that touching me makes you unclean, do you?*” . . .

He met my gaze. “No.” To prove his point, he tugged on a ringlet of my hair that had escaped my veil, lengthening it from my shoulder to half-way down my back before letting it go to spring back up. “And I don’t think that touching the dead makes me unclean either. Yeshua lays his hands on the bleeding, on the dying . . . on the dead. His touch makes them clean, whole, alive. They don’t make him unclean. He told us once that it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. Not what goes in. Or what he touches.”

Think of one's speech as "what comes out of a man." How can what a person says make that individual "unclean" or sinful? Give examples of how what we say can do damage.

GOING DEEPER

Seraphina realizes that she has misjudged Tabby because Tabby not only risked her own life so that Seraphina could escape, Tabby also sat with her while she was ill. Have you ever misjudged someone? What were the consequences? What lessons can be learned from such an experience?

INSIGHTS

One of the 613 laws laid out in the Old Testament is the following from Deuteronomy 22:5. "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God." But Mark gives Seraphina his cloak without reservation, noting that the Pharisees were apt to take these laws far too literally, and in fact, they went to great lengths to impose even tighter restrictions on actions so that the people didn't even come close to committing an error.

CLOSING PRAYER

Since much of this session's discussion centered on how what we say can affect another person, you might close with the following prayer, drawn from some of the passages in Proverbs, chapters ten, twelve, and thirteen:

Heavenly Father, your Word has shown us how,
in a righteous person, proper speech can be
a "fountain of life," and on the lips
of one who has understanding, "wisdom is found."
Help us to become prudent in restraining our lips
so that our speech can "feed many,"
for "the mouth of the upright delivers men"
and "from the fruit of his words, a man is satisfied with good."
"He who guards his mouth preserves his life."
We implore you for your guidance
as we properly use the gift of speech
to bring goodness, not evil,
as we strive for everlasting life.

We ask these things through your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



CHAPTER EIGHT

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 56) Seraphina tells her mother that she believes she lived in the future, a statement which draws an angry reaction from her mother:

“What if I really did live in the future?”

She slapped her empty hand against the table, making me jump at the suddenness of it. “Stop saying that!” Her lips pressed themselves into a thin line.

“Why? What if it’s true?”

“Do you want people to think you are demon-possessed?” She gave up trying to peel the egg and set it on the plate next to the cheese. She had a point there. People with mental problems weren’t always treated kindly even 2,000 years in the future. These days, they could be banished. Or stoned to death.

“No more talk of this,” she instructed. “Understand?”

Why does Seraphina’s mother want her daughter to keep quiet? What is it that she fears for her daughter? For herself? How have (or haven’t) things changed in the last 2,000 years for people with mental problems? How do we think about or treat those suffering from mental illness?

GOING DEEPER

The Scripture passages inside the mezuzah are Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21. Read them and explain their importance to living the life God desires for his children.

INSIGHTS

In writing this book, I looked at many situations we know about through the Gospel stories. One of those instances is the Passover visit of the Holy Family to

Jerusalem where Jesus is inadvertently left behind. I can only imagine the panic of Mary and Joseph. When the two of them left the larger group traveling back to Nazareth and returned to the city to hunt for their son, I wondered what they must have experienced. They would have needed somewhere to stay—perhaps they would have enlisted the help of family or friends in Jerusalem. In this book, I imagined that they had been offered lodging by a family which included the girl who would become Seraphina’s mother. I wove that detail into this story as a way to establish the strong feelings shared by Seraphina’s mother and Mary. It’s a relationship that the Blessed Mother desires to have with each one of us.

CLOSING PRAYER

You might want to read aloud parts of the Shema, which is the prayer contained not only in the mezuzah affixed to the doorpost, but also placed in the phylacteries. It is the first prayer that a Jewish child might learn, and one that holds great meaning for us still today:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.



CHAPTER NINE

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 61-62) Mark hefted the pitcher onto his shoulder, splashing water over the edge, and retraced his steps toward his aunt’s home. Before he left the square, two men stopped him, questioning him about something. I recognized them as two of the men who had been standing at the foot of my bed yesterday when Jesus healed me. One was the young guy; the other was the scruffier-looking older one. I was too far away across the square to hear what they were saying to Mark, but Mark listened for a minute, nodded and beckoned for them to follow him. And off they went, Mark leading the way with the water, droplets jumping from the pitcher

and splashing to the ground where they trailed the trio like asterisks on the dusty flagstones.

Men generally did not fetch water in the first century—that was women’s work. The author has given a reason why a man might be carrying a jar of water. Can you think of some other reasons why he might do so? Read Mark 14:12-15. How has the author drawn upon this particular Gospel passage to write the scene about Mark bringing water to his aunt?

GOING DEEPER

Seraphina tries to be a peacemaker in her dealing with Barabbas, she but doesn’t succeed. Has there been an instance in which you have tried to smooth relations between people? Were you able to accomplish what you wanted to do? Explain.

INSIGHTS

Yes, Bar Abbas’ name really does translate as “son of the father,” and some ancient manuscripts do give his name as “Jesus Barabbas.” In this story, I wanted to provide an imagined scenario in which Barabbas would commit a crime and be arrested. It only made sense that Ronni/Seraphina, would know that if she could keep him from being arrested, he wouldn’t be available for Pilate to release to the crowd . . . and, therefore, he might release Jesus instead. Thus, the motivation for her action.

CLOSING PRAYER

Use one of the previous prayers in the book or create one of your own.



CHAPTER TEN

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 72) *“I mean it, Tabitha. Promise me. You won’t come within a hundred miles of [Mt. Vesuvius]. Promise me!” I hadn’t realized that my hands were on her biceps until I’d given her a stern shake. Her face grew solemn.*

“But, why?” she asked rubbing the spots on her arms which I had gripped.

“Just promise!”

“All right, I promise,” she said, her voice barely a whisper.

“Good.” I had seen those pictures in my history book of the molds made of the bodies that were incinerated in Vesuvius’ ashes. People screaming. Families clinging together. Lives stopped in mid-motion. Would Tabby remember my warning? Would she become one of those caught in the volcano’s fury? An acid taste burned in the back of my throat, and no matter how often I swallowed, it wouldn’t go away.

Even after Seraphina warns Tabitha to stay away from Vesuvius, she still has a bad feeling she can’t shake. Why? If you knew what the future held, what, if anything, might you try to change?

GOING DEEPER

Seraphina battles with her feelings of jealousy about Tabitha’s and Mark’s relationship. People can be jealous or envious of others for a number of reasons. How do you handle feelings of that sort?

INSIGHTS

Why the reference to Vesuvius? A few reasons, actually. I remember reading, as an elementary school student, about the 79 A.D. eruption of Vesuvius. The pictures in my textbook have stayed with me all these decades later. As an adult, I have had the opportunity to twice visit Pompeii and Herculaneum, and I marveled at the extensive effects of the volcano’s eruption and the wonders of what has been

uncovered in those cities. (Something specific I learned in Pompeii will come up again in chapter twelve.) Finally, I wanted there to be an instance in this book when Seraphina could warn someone she cares about (other than Jesus) of impending doom which may threaten that person's life, and the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius seemed the ideal thing.

CLOSING PRAYER

Use one of the previous prayers in the book or create one of your own.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 73) A set of outside stairs climbed to the second floor of a building. Mom led the way, and I followed her up the stairs and through the open door. Crossing the threshold, I stopped at what I saw, frozen to the spot, my mouth hanging wide open. I wouldn't have been more surprised to have seen the Wicked Witch of the West standing there.

The author frequently alludes to *The Wizard of Oz* in this book. Can you think of other references in previous chapters? Why do you think the author is making this connection?

GOING DEEPER

At the meal are a man and his wife, Cleopas and Mary. Read the account in Luke 24:13-35 of two disciples traveling to Emmaus on the day of the Lord's resurrection. One of the disciples is named. The other is not. Who do you think the unnamed person could possibly be?

INSIGHTS

Seraphina's mother has her chop up green leaves called *eryngo*. (The correct pronunciation of this word also comes in handy if you happen to meet the Beatles')

drummer: *your-ring-o* – “You’re Ringo!”) These are the bitter herbs that made up part of the first Passover meal when the Israelites were fleeing Egypt. *They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it* (Ex 12:8).

In the “Going Deeper” question above, you’ve already been directed to read the Emmaus road story. Cleopas’ wife Mary makes another appearance in the Gospel of John: *But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas (or Cleopas), and Mary Mag’dalene* (Jn 19:25). Who was this Cleopas? We don’t know for sure, but some people propose that he was Jesus’ uncle—the brother of either the Blessed Mother or St. Joseph.

CLOSING PRAYER

Use one of the previous prayers in the book or create one of your own.



CHAPTER TWELVE

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 82-83) “Take and eat,” he said. “This is my body which will be given for you. Do this in memory of me.” He broke off a piece and handed it to John. A larger piece he passed to his left for the others to share, but a small portion remained in his hand. He turned to me and held it up between his thumb and first two fingers, offering it to me.

Tears flooded my eyes, blurring the scene in front of me. The brown morsel he held blended with his hand; I couldn’t tell where his fingers ended and the fragment began. It was all the same.

What insights does the above passage give you with respect to the Eucharist?

GOING DEEPER

Seraphina has discussions with both the Blessed Mother and with Jesus. What does Mary tell her, and how can you incorporate that advice into your life? What does

Jesus say to Seraphina (and to us) that can bring comfort when we are faced with the loss of a friend or loved one?

INSIGHTS

Ancient peoples were dependent upon an oral tradition for passing along information and history. They didn't have the books, let alone the technology we have in this day and age, in order to store and recall things. They used their memories, and their memories were very well trained.

Knowing that, it's not difficult to understand how all of the psalms would be committed to memory. Even in our day, it's easy to believe that people can know and recall the words to 150 songs, right? Therefore, it shouldn't come as a surprise that the people of Jesus' day could jump into a psalm and sing the entirety of it.

In chapter three, Seraphina's mother launches into a psalm when her daughter is healed, and everyone else in the room joins in. The same thing happens in this chapter.

At the conclusion of the Last Supper, the attendees sing Psalm 136, "The Great Hallel" psalm. "We get the word *hallelujah* from 'hillel,' which means 'praise' (and) 'yah,' Yahweh: *hallel-u-jah*," says Scott Hahn, well-known author, speaker, and professor of theology.*

Also in this chapter is the other reference to Pompeii which I promised above in the discussion of chapter ten. The reflective rocks that separate the larger stones in the roadway Seraphina uses to exit Jerusalem are something that I noted in the roads of Pompeii when I visited there. At night, these rocks would be iridescent, reflecting the moon's light. The Romans had a highly developed road system, and it seems logical that during their occupation of the Holy Land, some of the techniques used in Italy would be employed in the lands they conquered.

*Scott Hahn, "Eucharist, Holy Meal," from *Answering Common Objections*, St. Joseph Communications.

CLOSING PRAYER

It seems appropriate to use the first nine verses of Psalm 136 for a closing prayer:

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,

for his steadfast love endures for ever.
O give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures for ever.
O give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his steadfast love endures for ever;
to him who alone does great wonders,
for his steadfast love endures for ever;
to him who by understanding made the heavens,
for his steadfast love endures for ever;
to him who spread out the earth upon the waters,
for his steadfast love endures for ever;
to him who made the great lights,
for his steadfast love endures for ever;
the sun to rule over the day,
for his steadfast love endures for ever;
the moon and stars to rule over the night,
for his steadfast love endures for ever.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 93) The apostles roused themselves, yawning, stretching, and looking sheepishly at the Lord. Jesus held each one's gaze in turn, and the look on his face explained it all to me. He didn't need them to be awake and present for his sake only; it was also for their sake. How often in the past three years had he warned them to watch because they didn't know the hour or the day? And now this was the hour. His hour. And they'd been sleeping. They'd thrown the chance away.

Why do you think Jesus wanted the apostles to remain awake? Why do you think it was so difficult for them? If you had been in this situation, what do you think you would have done?

GOING DEEPER

Seraphina sees many emotions pass over Judas' face: sorrow, fear, doubt, resignation. Explain why he may be feeling each of these things. Seraphina has to overcome her fear in order to follow Jesus to Gethsemane. When have you encountered fear of doing something?

INSIGHTS

Certain Biblical translations of John 18:3 describe those who came to arrest Jesus as a Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees. A cohort would normally be a force of up to 600 men. Even if the entire cohort did not go out to arrest Jesus (just like when we say the “fire department” responded to an emergency, we don’t mean every man and woman in the fire department), there were, nonetheless, many Roman soldiers who would have been sent by Pilate. With so many people in Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover, Pilate certainly would have wanted to do anything possible to prevent an uprising. These soldiers would have accompanied the temple police who were ordered by the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest Jesus. The group would have been quite large, and as Seraphina notes, would have appeared to be “a whole army for one man.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Use one of the previous prayers in the book or create one of your own.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 101) We didn't talk until we reached the bottom of the hill and started to cross the valley. "Back there in the garden . . . how did you know what would happen?" Mark asked.

I stopped walking, and he turned to face me. His hair had dried into wild curls, and a smudge of dirt streaked across one cheek. His eyes searched my face in anticipation.

"You know how I knew," I said.

His eyes were dark orbs under his brow. He swallowed hard, his Adam's apple working the saliva down his throat. Yes, he knew.

"So what do we do now?" he asked.

At the end of this chapter, Mark seems to believe in Seraphina's ability to know the future. What convinces him? Do you think he should have believed her earlier? What would it have taken for you to believe her?

GOING DEEPER

Seraphina's actions could have gotten her killed. Martyrs have died for their faith. Do you think you could give a good witness for your faith, even if it meant danger or death? What might prevent you?

INSIGHTS

The following Scripture passage has always intrigued me:

Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him. But someone pulled out a sword and slashed off an ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus asked them, "Am I some dangerous criminal, that you come armed with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn't you arrest me in the Temple? I was there teaching every day. But these things are happening to fulfill what the Scriptures say about me." Meanwhile, all his disciples deserted him and ran away. There was a young man following along behind, clothed only in a linen nightshirt. When the mob tried to grab him, they tore off his clothes, but he escaped and ran away naked. Mark 14:46-52

Who was this young man who ran away naked? And why was he so scantily clothed? "One traditional suggestion is that the man is Mark himself in whose house Jesus may have celebrated the Last Supper."*

In this book, I wanted to create a scenario that would provide a reasonable (although fictional) reason as to why a young man would be scantily clothed and why he might run away naked from the scene of Jesus' arrest.

*From the book **The Gospel of Mark** by Dr. Mary Healy.

CLOSING PRAYER

Use one of the previous prayers in the book or create one of your own.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 107) Peter whirled away, sobs racking his whole body. Large hands, weathered by years on the sea, cradled his head as he wept.

There was nothing we could do or say that would comfort him. He cried as if a knife had been shoved into his chest. And he was the one who had done the stabbing.

After his denial of Jesus, Peter felt “as if a knife had been shoved into his chest. And he was the one who had done the stabbing.” Why would his reaction have been described in this manner? When has something you have said or done not only hurt another, but also hurt you?

GOING DEEPER

Seraphina wasn't successful in getting Peter to help Jesus. If you could trade places with her, what types of things might you have said or done to change Peter's mind?

INSIGHTS

Three separate times, Peter is questioned by one of the bystanders in the courtyard of Caiaphas. Seraphina inadvertently becomes one of those questioners when she tries to persuade Peter to come to the aid Jesus. Not only does she not succeed in getting what she wants, she becomes a catalyst for the action she *doesn't* want to happen. A similar situation occurs when she tries to stop Barabbas from committing a crime. I wanted to intimately insert Seraphina into these situations and to have the outcome she encounters be the exact opposite of what she was trying to achieve. Not only is it a plot device for the progression of the book, but I wanted readers to feel aligned with Seraphina and to consider how they handle situations that don't turn out as expected.

CLOSING PRAYER

In contemplating Peter's denial of the Lord, we may be inclined to turn our attention to our own failings. Perhaps as a closing prayer, a recitation of the Act of Contrition would be in order.

Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You. And I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell, but most of all, because they offend You, O my God, Who are all good, and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace, to do penance and to amend my life. Amen.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 114) *“Did you see him?” a woman asked her companion. “He’s nearly dead already.”*

I reached out to her before the crowd swept her away from me. “Are you speaking of Yeshua?”

She dipped her head in affirmation, her eyes filling with tears. “They scourged him and sentenced him to death. He has already taken up the cross. I saw him, on the way—he fell right here in front of me.”

She stepped back and motioned to the ground. A smear of blood stained the stones at her feet. I fell to my knees and touched the stickiness with my fingers. I pressed them to my lips. Mark and I looked at each other, a single thought bouncing between us: we were too late. The hourglass had been flipped over, and the sands of time were quickly running out.

The last sentence of this chapter, *The hourglass had been flipped over, and the sands of time were quickly running out*, tells the reader much about how Seraphina viewed the situation. What do you think is meant by that final statement?

GOING DEEPER

If you had been locked in the cell with Jesus overnight, what might you have discussed with him?

INSIGHTS

St. Jerome, an early Church Father and Doctor of the Catholic Church, who died in 420 A.D., translated the Bible into Latin. “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ,” he said. This point is clearly illustrated in this chapter.

When Jesus is being questioned by Caiaphas, he says, “But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mt 26:64).

Jesus’ words are a clear reference to the prophet Daniel: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Dn 7:13-14).

“Son of man” is a Messianic term. Caiaphas knew this. Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah. That’s why Caiaphas becomes so enraged that he tears his garment—in his eyes, Jesus has committed blasphemy.

If we read Scripture, if we understand the Old Testament, we come to know Christ, for as St. Augustine, a contemporary to St. Jerome, said, “The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old is unveiled in the New.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Use one of the previous prayers in the book or create one of your own.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 118) I was suddenly hit with a clear revelation, and I felt utter shame at what I had been doing the last couple of days. I had been tempting Jesus to run away. I was no better than the Devil taking the Lord to the highest of heights and promising all sorts of things if Jesus would just do his will. I was as bad as Peter who argued with Jesus when Jesus told him that he was going to suffer and die. “Get behind me, Satan!” he had said to Peter. He could just as easily have said the same thing to me.

Seraphina feels enormous guilt at her actions. Do you believe she is correct to feel that way? Why or why not?

GOING DEEPER

Ronni discovers that if we follow the Lord, we may not arrive at the place *we* intended to go, but we always end up at the place *He* wants us to be. Can you think of an instance in your life where this was the case?

INSIGHTS

As is the case with many of the characters in the book, Simon of Cyrene makes an appearance earlier, in Ronni’s modern-day life. He is the man who helps Mark with his car, and his two boys, Alex and R.J. are the kids Ronni babysits. They are mentioned in the Gospel of Mark: *And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyre'ne, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross* (Mk 15:21). Because they are named in this Gospel, it is assumed that they may have been well-known to the audience of Roman Christians for whom it is believed Mark was writing. In fact, in St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, he asks his readers in Rome to “Greet Rufus, eminent in the Lord . . .” Might this be the same Rufus, the brother of Alexander, the son of Simon of Cyrene?

Veronica. Seraphina is no more. Ronni has received the name that she bears in the 21st-century. The story of Veronica was a driving force behind the writing of **Awakening**. She's not mentioned in the Bible; we know of her only through tradition, and we know very little. She is a woman whose name is changed, whose life is changed by her encounter with Christ. In the Bible, a change of name is associated with a redefining of, or a change in that person's mission. Think of Abram (Abraham), Sarai (Sarah), Jacob (Israel), Simon (Peter), and Saul (Paul), among others.

Another impetus for the writing of this book arose from asking the question “Why must Jesus die in order to save Israel?” Author and biblical scholar Tim Gray addresses that question: “The biblical answer is ‘the covenant.’ Israel and Yahweh had made a solemn covenant, and covenants—such as marriage—are permanent. Therefore, the oaths that Israel swore as part of the covenant, which included the curses, could not be taken back. God and Israel swore that breaking the covenant would end in death. According to the curses, Israel had to be exiled and destroyed for her unfaithfulness—unless one of the parties were to die. Israel's death would hardly solve the problem, and God couldn't die—or could He?”*

*From the book **Mission of the Messiah** by Dr. Tim Gray.

CLOSING PRAYER

Use one of the previous prayers in the book or create one of your own.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 123) For the first time, I understood why this height was called Golgotha, “the place of the skull.” No vegetation grew on the hilltop. It was a gently rounded mass of smooth, bone-hard rock, the color of chalk, the shape of a skull, a physical symbol of death.

(p. 126) Hours later as the sun beat upon us from directly overhead, the cosmos shifted. The full moon inched its way in front of the sun, sweeping its shadow across the earth. Silence enfolded the hillside as the sun ducked behind the moon, ashamed to show its face on the tragic happenings below.

(p. 128) Silence blanketed the earth, but for only a moment, and then the wind kicked up with the whistling fury of a tornado.

An enormous gust gathered the dust and dirt at the foot of the cross and swirled them into a spiral that curled upward around Jesus. Like a cloud of incense, it engulfed his body and rose, carrying the essence of his sacrifice toward heaven.

A bomb-blast of thunder exploded as a bolt of lightning cut through the dark skies, striking so near me that electricity sizzled in my ears, and every hair on my body stood straight out. Men shouted and women screamed. The ground shook and knocked people flat on their faces.

The author weaves aspects of nature into the description of the crucifixion scene. Why do you think she does this? What strikes you most about the passages above in connection with the suffering and death of Jesus?

GOING DEEPER

As previously discussed, it would be expected that the people of Jesus' day would have the psalms memorized, and the first line of a psalm did, indeed, serve as the work's title. *Todah* psalms begin with an expression of grief or trouble and call upon God's help by making a petition. Then they turn into a psalm praising God and giving thanks. Psalm 22 is a *todah* psalm written by King David. Read this psalm. What line(s) would you say are the turning point?

INSIGHTS

When Centurion Longinus thrusts the lance into Jesus' side, Ronni hears the Blessed Mother shriek. This brief action refers back to the Presentation of Our Lord, recorded in Lk 2:34-35, in which Mary's pain is foretold:

Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

While the Gospels do not name the soldier who thrust his lance into the crucified Jesus' side, tradition identifies him as Cassius Longinus, a soldier whose failing eyesight was cured by the blood of Christ pouring forth from the wound. This event caused his immediate conversion.

CLOSING PRAYER

Use one of the previous prayers in the book or create one of your own.



CHAPTER NINETEEN

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p. 138) The fog of confusion that had surrounded me since I woke up in Jerusalem began to thin. Of course. How could I have been so stupid? I was never supposed to stop the crucifixion. I had realized that earlier today. But I was charged with a very important duty.

Ronni has finally come to a point of understanding. If her mission was not to stop the crucifixion, what exactly *was* it? What brings her to this realization?

GOING DEEPER

The parable of the Good Samaritan takes on new meaning for Ronni when she realizes that the good her father and brother did seemed to have been paid forward. When have you encountered an instance of “paying it forward”?

INSIGHTS

John Jackson, one of the scientists who has studied the Shroud of Turin, has long maintained that the burial cloth of Jesus was probably a tablecloth, and possibly the tablecloth from the Last Supper—a detail incorporated in this book. Since the crucifixion occurred during Passover and the shops would have been closed, preventing the purchase of a burial cloth, Joseph of Arimathea would have used what was at hand. The ornate weave of the tablecloth Joseph presents in this story

for use at the Last Supper would be in keeping with the description the Gospels give of the burial cloth of Jesus, which is that of being “linen,” a finely-woven cloth of the time.

The curtain in the Temple is a continuation of what the Lord required of the Israelites in the wilderness during the Exodus. (See Ex 26:31-35.) The purpose of the curtain was to separate man from the Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place which contained the Ark of the Covenant. It was here that God came down in the form of a cloud to meet with his people. But only one man could enter this area, and only on one day a year, the Day of Atonement. When the Temple was built in Jerusalem, the curtain was in place there as well, separating God from man. It is a telling sign that the curtain rips apart just as Jesus dies.

Mark and Ronni note that the earthquake has split the earth down into the quarry where it comes to a stop in the area of stone not used by the masons. This is a reference to Psalm 118, and several verses in particular are worth noting: *I thank thee that thou hast answered me and hast become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it* (Ps 118:21-24).

This scene is also drawn from Daniel 2:34, which refers to a stone which has not been cut by human hand—a stone which can topple powerful rulers and kingdoms.

Finally, the New Testament individual known as “John Mark” was a missionary companion of St. Paul and very well may have worked as an interpreter and translator for St. Peter, perhaps even writing down St. Peter’s memories in what became the Gospel of Mark. Furthermore, the home of the mother of John Mark may have been the setting of the Last Supper as well as the setting where the disciples were gathered in prayer at the time of Pentecost.

CLOSING PRAYER

Use one of the previous prayers in the book or create one of your own.



CHAPTER TWENTY

EXCERPT FOR DISCUSSION

(p.147) I spotted a folded-up square of white fabric wedged between the nightstand and my mattress. It was the tea towel that had become a veil that had wiped the face of the Lord. How much of that was true? How much had really happened? All of it? None of it?

I stared at it for several minutes, debating what to do. Finally, I crawled over to the bed, stood up, and straightened out my dress. With quivering hands, I fumbled with the material, trying and failing to unfold it. I sucked in a deep breath, labored to calm myself, and slowly opened it. The cloth was blank. I flipped it over. Nothing.

The veil doesn't bear the image of Christ on it. Why do you think the author chose this ending? What other endings could you imagine? The fact that the cloth has no image on it doesn't affect Ronni's faith. In what ways have you "not seen and yet believed"?

GOING DEEPER

Ronni's mom tells her that Tabby's family never made it to the cabin because of an avalanche. In keeping with her belief that "We know that in everything, God works for good," she says that the avalanche was "good." What does she mean by that?

INSIGHTS

Although Ronni doesn't see Christ's image on the cloth, it was important for me to show the constant action of the Lord in her life—and in the lives of each one of us. That's why I have written into the story the healing of her eczema. It's something that she doesn't realize for quite some time after she awakens. Is that the way it is for us in our everyday lives? Do we encounter a miracle, a blessing, a joy—and do we neglect to realize the source of that occurrence? And how often do we forget to say "thank you?" Gratitude. It's my hope that each of us, every day, can see the

workings of God in our lives, and can remember to offer a prayer of thanksgiving at each of our awakenings.

CLOSING PRAYER

This early Christian prayer for Easter Sunday is attributed to St. Hippolytus who lived from AD 190-236.

Christ is Risen: The world below lies desolate
Christ is Risen: The spirits of evil are fallen
Christ is Risen: The angels of God are rejoicing
Christ is Risen: The tombs of the dead are empty
Christ is Risen indeed from the dead,
the first of the sleepers,
Glory and power are his forever and ever!

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