
The United States is rapidly becoming a religiously indifferent country. Nearly a third of Americans under the age of 30 don’t belong to any faith. Roughly 70 percent of the so-called Millennial generation identify as “spiritual but not religious.” And over the past five years, the number of religiously unaffiliated Americans has grown from roughly 15 percent of the adult population to just under 20 percent.

The causes of this great apostasy are well-known, and need not be discussed here. What these alarming statistics should do is prompt us to engage those who are disaffected with organized religion. One way Catholics can accomplish this is by providing them with a copy of *My Sisters the Saints: A Spiritual Memoir*—a fantastic and refreshing book written by columnist and soon-to-be EWTN host Colleen Carroll Campbell.

At times, *My Sisters the Saints*, which has already received an award from the Association of Catholic Publishers, feels like an apologetics book. In reality, it’s a book about relationships. Specifically, it’s about Campbell’s relationship with six women saints who helped her get through the most difficult times of her life over the past fifteen years—Teresa of Avila, Thérèse of Lisieux, Faustina of Poland, Edith Stein of Germany, Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Mary of Nazareth.

Campbell begins *My Sisters the Saints* by recounting her undergraduate years at Marquette University in Milwaukee. Fed up with her ideologically-driven professors and the emptiness she would experience after nights of revelry, Campbell began asking herself the questions too many young adults fail to consider: “Is this all there is?” Why has “maximizing my sexual allure, racking up professional accomplishments, and indulging my appetites while avoiding commitment . . . left me dissatisfied?” Why “am I so miserable?”

Eventually, Campbell, with the help of her parents, especially her father, whose relationship with Campbell is featured prominently throughout the book, found her way back to God.

Like many young people, Campbell’s relationship with her father experienced a drastic change while she was away at college. But unlike most young people, their relationship was altered not because of rebellious behavior or disrespect. It changed when she received a phone call during her senior year on a “bleak January night.” It was her mother calling. Her father had just been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. Confused, fearful, and blindsided, Campbell writes that she didn’t really know “what the coming
years would bring.” What she did know is that she “began to worry about” the “anguish” her family would have to go through as her dad slowly slipped away from them.

Even though Campbell tells us she was reluctant to accept the fact that she would have to take a more active role in caring for her aging father, the “heroic way he faced his greatest trial,” Campbell told me in an interview, “enriched me beyond measure.” The “way I looked at my Dad” changed “the way I looked at millions of others like him.” Eventually, his suffering resulted in Campbell’s conversion from being “vaguely pro-choice to passionately pro-life.” Moreover, his suffering compelled her to become a voice for those at the margins of society: the unborn, the homeless and, among others, the mentally challenged.

The lion’s share of the remainder of My Sisters the Saints, though not any less germane to the book’s message than her relationship with her father, focuses on Campbell’s devotion to the aforementioned women saints and how they helped her get through the ups and downs of her writing career, her struggles with finding a spouse and her subsequent bouts with infertility. Campbell, who is rather explicit about the challenges she faced, especially the challenges she came up against during her pregnancy, says she did “not aim to make [anything] look easier or harder.” She just wanted “to be real. I wanted to tell my story as honestly and transparently as I could.” She figured that “readers would find the most grace” in “the truth [and] in life as it really happened, apart from my expectations or pretensions to perfection and control.”

Catholics of all kinds will thoroughly enjoy My Sisters the Saints. Those who have a strong connection to the saints will be moved by the way Campbell gleans insight from the likes of Mother Teresa and Saint Edith Stein. Those interested in politics will enjoy Campbell’s recollection of her time as an up-and-coming writer and her time spent as a speechwriter in the Bush White House. Young adults living on college campuses hostile to Catholic teaching will appreciate what Campbell has to say about her time at Marquette. And those who know someone affected by Alzheimer’s will be able to relate to Campbell’s intimate retelling of her relationship with her father. In sum, Catholics will greatly benefit from Campbell’s emotionally gripping story, as it reminds us of two unchangeable truths: the power of prayer and the need to trust in God.

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