



The Book Reviewer

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Our One Great Fidelity by Ronald Rolheiser (Sacraments)

This small gem of a book should be read by everyone: everyone who receives communion once a week, or daily, or not at all because of fear or doubt. Fr. Rolheiser explains through personal experiences and through stories gathered from other people and from other religions, the history of and the many meanings of *eucharist*. The literal meaning of the word is thanksgiving; and therefore our one attitude toward life and our relationship with God must be one of gratitude. Beyond thanksgiving, eucharist is a

communion; a communion with God, with others, and with the world—with all of creation.

Eucharist represents the climax and the whole of the teaching of Jesus. It is a climax because it was instituted at the Last Supper, which was begun with Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, which very graphically tells us to love one another, and to forgive one another as the Father loves and forgives us. Fr. Rolheiser glowingly makes a case for social justice, and our duty

to share as a part of our participation in the Eucharistic banquet. We are all, with Christ, called to be priests and prophets.

The last chapter consists of three wonderful homilies of Saint Augustine, speaking on Easter morning to newly baptized converts about the importance and the meaning of eucharist.

Eucharist is God's free gift to us, like life itself; and our one great duty is to receive it joyfully, and to share it.

Reviewed by Clare Dinno

A Jesuit Off-Broadway by James Martin, S.J. (Spirituality)

Father Martin, an author and Jesuit priest, wrote an account of his experiences as theological adviser to an off-Broadway play, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*. Playwright Stephen Adly Guirgis recruited Father Martin in October 2004 to provide some background information about Jesus and life in first-century Palestine. The book also examined the fate of one of the most reviled men in history.

The six months with the

LAByrnth Theater Company provided Father Martin with the opportunity to share information about faith with a largely secular group of people. *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* ended a sold-out run at the Public Theater in New York City in April 2005.

Many of us have questions about the Bible. Can we believe the Bible? What was Jesus' mission? What is sin? Does hell exist? Is anyone beyond God's forgiveness?

Father James Martin, S.J. answered these questions plus other difficult questions about the Bible and life. The theater cast along with Martin discovered that the sacred and the secular aren't always that far apart.

Father Martin accomplished many things with his book and even interested some of the cast into thinking about God; in fact, several came back to the church.

Reviewed by Pat Dalcher



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Joan of Arc by Mark Twain (Fiction)

One wouldn't expect such an admirably compassionate re-telling of the story of Joan of Arc from Mark Twain, who was conflicted in his feelings toward Catholicism. After studying historical documents for twelve years, including those surrounding Joan's trial for heresy, Twain labored for two years crafting this beautifully rich fictional account. Built on the real events of her life, and written from the point of view of Joan's lifelong friend and campaign page, this "memoir" of her life begins with her childhood and ends in her trial and execution, with most of the book devoted to the events that occurred as she led the French army in victorious battles against the English which resulted in the crowning of

Charles VII as king of France at Reims.

George Bernard Shaw (who wrote a play about Joan of Arc) once complained that Twain had an infatuation with Joan, and thus romanticized her life. That may explain this engaging, fleshed-out portrait of an extraordinary young woman who overcame the doubts and disdain of battle-hardened soldiers who eventually ceded authority to her. Joan's calm insistence that God had called her to this mission, her superior intellect, her ability to accurately assess people and situations, and repeated success upon executing her military strategies led those under her command to respect and love the Maid of Orleans. Joan *was* France for those who followed her

into battle, and for those living in the towns along the way to Reims who cheered her on.

The characters that the author places around Joan are so well developed that you can picture them and almost hear their voices. Twain's humor shows up most often in the egotistical exchanges between soldiers as they vie for each other's, and even more, Joan's attention and respect. Twain (as *Sieur Louis de Conte*) employs an archaic writing style which takes some getting used to, but before long the reader is immersed in the world of this girl "with the greatest heart and the simplest that ever beat" who inspired awe as she steadfastly obeyed God's instructions, even unto martyrdom.

Reviewed by Susan Triplett

The Very Rich Hours of Jacques Maritain by Ralph McInerney

This is a richly told biography of Jacques and Raissa Maritain, and because of the very spiritual depth of their life together, and of their writings, it is largely a spiritual journey.

They met as students at the Sorbonne; Raissa was Jewish, and Jacques came from a background of anti-clericalism and socialism. The atmosphere of the University in France at the turn of the 19th century was completely devoted to positivism, which made science and recent progress in physics, biology and psychology the center of all

academic and social thought. Jacques and Raissa became emotionally disturbed by the bleakness and the meaninglessness of this world-view. A course with Henri Bergson, who taught his theory of creative evolution, began to lift their gloom, and together they began to explore spiritual ideas, which gradually led to conversion to the Catholic Church. Both of their families were outraged by this defection, but later Raissa's mother and sister also became Catholics.

Jacques became fascinated by the theology of St. Thomas

Aquinas, and he spent the rest of his life lecturing, writing, and making Thomistic thought known and relevant to modern academia in Europe and in the United States. They spent WWII in the U.S., Jacques having been appointed to teach at Princeton University, and after the war he was appointed French ambassador to the Vatican for three years. Then they returned to the U.S. and he taught not only at Princeton, but at Notre Dame, Fordham and other universities. His most creative work was in America, but both he and Raissa died and were buried in France.

Reviewed by Clare Dinno