



Cathy Gilmore: A Life Empowered by Virtue

As part of my introduction at events, I often describe myself as a **Bionic Catholic**: a “revert” to the Catholic faith for whom God’s grace has turned my brokenness into strengths. However, I was *not* restored to my original “*factory settings*.” God’s grace is making my flaws into something more, something stronger...with, and for and, through Him. I’m no superhero. I’m just a sidekick, trying to help others gain spiritual strength for the heroism God desires of each

of us.

I was raised as a K-12 Catholic, but I experienced hidden trauma as a child. My habits as a youth, and even into adulthood were paralyzed by a fear of nearly everything, nearly all the time. A series of changes were triggered when my marriage was pushed to a breaking point. I separated from my husband for a time and left the Church for five years. As God restored my marriage, He took me on a journey that freed me of fear, renewed my faith, and gave me a zeal to know the power of virtue in my life, and cultivate it in the lives of others. My author-educator heart was being prepared.

This path led me to the discovery of the Montessori-based faith formation program for preschool children known as Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. The CGS training was a balm of hope for my soul. My tiny young students were the best of teachers. I discovered that the core of true faith is humility. God loves what is little. Cultivating and appreciating our own “littleness” before God taught me humility in a wonderfully gentle way. “Jesus, I trust in You,” became an important internal touchstone for me as I learned, and led, CGS programs.

During this phase I overcame the fear that had paralyzed me for 25 years. When I graduated College, I longed to be a children’s author, but I was afraid of the process and had convinced myself that I could never be published. Providence, and a partnership with my wonderful sister, enabled my dream to be realized by co-authoring a picture book together. It is titled: *Easter Bunny’s Amazing Day*. It’s the story of a frightened little bunny who experiences the love of Jesus at the Resurrection and whose life is changed forever. I’m not the only one who identifies with that little bunny. Both adults and children were touched deeply by the story. I had found my author’s voice. I could create little animal characters who tell stories of holiness and virtue that not only infuse faith in the imaginations of children, but also deeply affirm the faith of grownups reading with them.

In the following year I released the book, *Little lamb Finds Christmas* on my own. The Christmas book won the USA Best Books award - Religious Category. Desiring continued growth in my work as a writer, I went to a national **Catholic Writers Guild** Conference. I wasn’t the only one working to create quality literature with a Catholic world-view. But most Catholic readers had no idea these authors or their titles even existed. I came home with a new nudge from God. I was inspired to use my creativity, not just to create and promote my own content. I was to do so in a way that helped people find and enjoy quality Catholic media, fiction and entertainment alongside great quality secular storytelling that was full of virtue. Virtue was the key. I was silly enough to trust that God would see this inspiration through.

A friend in my parish invited me to do a Marian Consecration guided through the book: *33 Days to Morning Glory*. On October 13, 2013 we completed the consecration, along with the Pope as he consecrated the world to Mary. I had a feeling I needed to buckle up. Something was about to change. My life was now devoted wholly to Jesus through Mary. Not like a religious hermit. But as a regular every-day person. My instincts were right.

Around that time, our youngest son was getting into the middle school years and struggling with impulsive emotions and reactivity. I brainstormed with a friend. "Could families really affirm faith and cultivate virtue in their kids through the reading and media they consumed?" My son spent what we called a *virtue immersion summer* testing out my hypothesis - reading and watching nothing but virtue-rich content. His faith and virtue *exponentially* improved. He had all the qualities we hope to instill in our kids. Going forward I watched his habits ebb and flow...the more virtue-rich content he was exposed to, the better his behavior. If less, then it diminished. Others I knew had similar experiences.

This led me to establish a non-profit organization known as The Virtue Literacy Project. Our goal: to provide a revolutionary new rating system for media and entertainment based on virtues. It would be used within an online search platform recommending virtue-rated books, movies, YouTube videos, TV series, music, and more. But to create such a system required hundreds of thousands of dollars that I did not have. As I faced roadblocks in securing the technology resources and the funding to make it happen... I had to pivot. Through a series of obvious stop signs, God had me push "pause" on the virtue rating system and the virtue-based search engine for a time. You know...God draws straight with crooked lines.

With the pandemic, my creativity found a different outlet - in the creation of my Tiny Virtue Heroes. This series of characters and storybooks had always been in my plans. I just didn't know when would be the right time for them to emerge. When everything was locked down, my imaginary menagerie of tiny insect and animal "sidekicks" were born. My team of over 30 characters lead children to admire the heroic virtue of biblical and missionary real-life heroes of holiness. The storybook series is gradually being released. They inspire a desire for virtue in young readers. This is, I believe, how we energize children, families, and schools with the transforming power of virtue - through Jesus' preferred teaching method: stories. For too long we have focused too singularly on *teaching* virtue through the *intellect*. Virtue is a lifestyle that must be lived beyond what we learn. Each book is a mini-curriculum in how to **think and pray, do and say** - virtue - flowing from a story that engages a child's imagination. At the end of each story the character personally invites the reader to become a virtue hero him or herself.

Moshe the mouse tells the story of the Annunciation, highlighting the heroic virtue (HUMILITY) of **Blessed Virgin Mary** in **A Mouse and a Miracle**. This was the first book published in the series, to honor Mary and her virtue of Humility...because that's where all virtue begins.

Amel the camel who tells the story of the Nativity through the journey of the three wise men. He highlights the heroic virtue (WISDOM) of **King Balthazar** in **Wisdom Finds a Way**. We published this story in 2020 when all the riots were happening in hopes of fostering respect and peace among races and to honor the king "of color". The reality is that the Catholic Church is very diverse...Catholic children's books, sadly, not so much. It is my continuing hope that this story will be a blessing in a myriad of ways.

Eli the caterpillar tells the story of the Finding in the Temple, highlighting the heroic virtue (KINDNESS) of **St. Joseph** in **Jesus Lost and Found**. It was launched in 2021 on Father's Day to honor the year of St. Joseph. This story helps children appreciate the quiet heroism of fatherhood. With so much children's literature that mocks and marginalizes fathers, I wanted this book to be an antidote. The child sees the example of a kind and courageous father, and the father feels affirmed as he reads it to his son or daughter.

During my reversion process, I was captivated reading the writings of the mystic saints. Mary of Agreda, Anne Catherine Emmerich, and more, enabled me to vividly picture the lives of the Holy Family and the early Church in ways I had never done before. Anyone familiar with those saints will see the brush strokes of their words in the stories I create for children. The simple depth of the imagery in these stories is perhaps why they are not only valuable in catechizing children, but also in awakening the faith of lukewarm young adult parents who read the stories too.

Another somewhat hidden feature of the series is that the first 20 stories align with the mysteries of the Rosary. The three stories that are currently available help children imagine the Annunciation, the Nativity,

and the Finding in the Temple. The next story to be released will be ***Buzzin' About Cousins***, featuring Devoree the honeybee, that begins with the story of the Visitation. It highlights the heroic virtue (INSPIRATION) of Elizabeth with both young Mary, who visits her elderly cousin, and with little John as a toddler living in the wilderness with her later on. It will be followed by ***Many Thanks for the Moo-siah***, featuring Zeva the red calf, telling the story of the Presentation highlighting the heroic virtue (GRATITUDE) of elderly Simeon when Mary and Joseph present baby Jesus, the long awaited Messiah, at the Temple.

I'm deeply committed to the belief that our imagination is a sacred space - where we "see" the unseen and can perhaps uniquely encounter God. With that in mind, I work step-by-step to give parents, grandparents, and teachers the resources and techniques to harness the power of pretending to strengthen children with habits of virtue. That's why I created the Virtue Heroes product store on Zazzle.com. This is where you can purchase the TVH pillowcases and more. What's the big deal about a pillowcase? These pillow cases have the 35 Virtue Heroes pictured with the words "I AM a Virtue Hero!" on the front so that a child can say this affirmation each night before they go off to sleep. On the back is the Virtue Heroes logo: a "V" with a flame inside. It signifies our superpower strength coming from the fire of the Holy Spirit. This logo is positioned for a child to wear the pillowcase clipped to their shoulders as a superhero cape during the day...as a Virtue Hero who does great acts of goodness to make the world a better place!

Through my stories and other resources, I will continue to zealously work to strengthen children and families with the super-strength of virtue. Why? Perhaps because I'm not afraid anymore. Jesus told us we need to have the faith of a child to enter Heaven. I'm his little girl, a virtue hero in training, and together we can all say... *Jesus, I trust in you.*

Visit **VirtueHeroes.com** to discover more about the stories, the resources, and the characters who empower CHARACTER in kids.