

+This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

Nicole Johnson “was walking [her five year old] son Jake to school. [She] was holding his hand and [they] were about to cross the street when the crossing guard said to him, ‘Who is that with you, young fella?’

“Nobody,” he shrugged.

Nobody? The crossing guard and [Nicole] laughed...[As they] crossed the street [she] thought, ‘Oh my goodness, I’m *nobody*?’ As Nobody, [she] would walk into a room and no one would notice. [She] would say something to [her] family, like ‘Turn the TV down, please.’ And nothing would happen. No one would get up or even make a move for the remote...Nothing.

That’s when [Nicole] started putting all the pieces together.” She writes, “I don’t think anyone can see me. I’m ***invisible***. [pause] It all began to make sense! The blank stares, the lack of response...no one can see if I’m on the phone, or cooking, or sweeping the floor, or even standing on my head in the corner. No one can see me, because I’m the Invisible Mom. Some days I am only a pair of hands, nothing more. Can you fix this? Can you tie this? Can you open this?”

Her kids sounds like the disciples in today’s Gospel reading: “James and John...came forward to Jesus and said to him, ‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you...Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.’ They treated Jesus just like that son treated his mother, taken for granted, pining away for their own edification like needy children.

I think quite of few of us can sense what this invisibility feels like, as if you are nothing but a dispenser, doling out help, or cash or kindness. It’s frustrating to feel like a vending machine or an ATM. I am sorry to admit, that even as a priest, there are times when I see the amount of money I see leave our bank account in taxes & tithe and I wonder what else I could do with that money. More than once I’ve asked my husband, “Can we *not* tithe 10% to the church on top of the 24.9% we give to Uncle Sam?” As a good and faithful steward raised in the church and well-practiced in the benefits of generosity, he always responds flatly, “No. That money belongs to God, not us. That’s part of how we become spiritually healthy.”

But still, the *invisibility* of tithing makes it tempting. I struggle with generosity. Nobody but our Finance person, Donna Garrison, would know if I didn’t tithe, right?

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Going back to Nicole’s story might help. Nicole, the Invisible Mother writes, “One night, some girlfriends and I were having dinner, celebrating the return of a friend from England. She had just gotten back from a fabulous trip, and was

telling wonderful stories. I sat there, looking around at the others...I was feeling pretty pathetic when my friend turned to me with a beautifully wrapped package and said, 'I brought you this.' It was a book on the great cathedrals of Europe. I wasn't exactly sure why she'd given it to me until I read her inscription: 'With admiration for the greatness of what you are building *when no one sees*.' [Emphasis mine]."

In the days ahead Nicole "devoured the book. And [she] discovered what would become...four life-changing truths:

1. No one can say who [exactly] built the great cathedrals—we have no record of their names.
2. These builders gave their whole lives for a work they would never see finished.
3. They made great sacrifices and expected no credit.
4. ...their building was fueled by their faith that the eyes of God saw everything.

"In the book, there was the legend of a rich man who came to visit the cathedral while it was being built. He saw a worker carving a tiny bird on the inside of a beam. He was puzzled and asked the man, 'Why are you spending so much time carving that bird into a beam that will be covered by the roof? No one will ever see it.' And the worker replied, '**Because God sees.**'"

"After reading that, [Nicole] closed the book, feeling the missing piece fall into place. It was almost as if [she] heard God whispering to [her], 'I see you. I see the sacrifices you make every day, even when no one around you does. No act of kindness you've done, no sequin you've sewn on, no cupcake you've baked, no last minute errand is too small for Me to notice and smile over. You are building a great cathedral, but you can't see right now what it will become. **But I see.**'"

Nicole writes, "When I choose to view myself as a great builder—instead of Invisible Mom—I keep the right perspective."

Jesus knew this intimately. He did invisible tasks, taking the hidden path of humility, patience and love. No one can say how he spent the first 30 years of his life in Nazareth, just as we have little record of those who worked decades to build the bishop's seat and flying buttresses of Chartres Cathedral. Like the anonymous builders of the great cathedrals, the invisible mother, Jesus, sacrificed his life for his children. The cathedral builders and Jesus made great sacrifices and expected no credit. Jesus says in today's Gospel, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Jesus was unafraid and unphased by his own invisibility and generosity, because he knew he was known and loved by God. And that was enough because God love is deep, mysterious and fulfilling in a way that surpasses a full bank account.

Jesus deeply knew God's love, that God sees every lick of good done on earth. God knows the hairs on our heads and the grains of sand in the sea. Before the foundations of the world, he knew us (Ps 139). **We are not invisible to God.** God sees and loves us even when no one else does. God is our Great Builder, helping us to be great builders in our own little way.

With this in mind, we can have courage to do wonderful, difficult tasks a little bit at a time. **Whether we are baking cupcakes, fixing air conditioners, changing diapers, polishing silver, tutoring children, fixing the printer, or writing our tithe checks, "we are building great cathedrals..."**we may feel invisible some days. But one day, it is very possible that the world will marvel, not only at what we have built, but at the beauty that has been added to the world by the sacrifices of invisible mothers", fathers, and regular disciples of Jesus.

Even though seeing that 10% leave my bank account is sometimes difficult, I have to remember the rest of the 90% is a gift I get to enjoy, that I get to relish, in freedom and peace because of God's grace. Maybe *because* I give away money, I realize how much of a gift life really is, I don't take it for granted as much. And that 10% is building something wonderful for God, here. It took 100 years and an entire region to finish some of the cathedrals, just like it takes a village, here, to do all the wonderful things St. Peter's does. It requires not just all of our tithes, but all of our incredible tiny tasks and prayers.

Our whole life is a practice in these small acts of faithful stewardship, of building something wonderful for God's glory even if we don't see the immediate results. The founders of St. Peter's mostly got to see the tangible outgrowth of their work. But most of the time we don't see the big accomplishments completed. Most of the time we only see the endless small tasks that go into big accomplishments. And those little tasks are holy, good, they are a gift to us and to God, and *they matter*. **We are building great cathedrals, temple of God's Spirit in our midst, in the little things.**