promises broken, promises kept

by bill walsh

the lourdes word published in october 2017 posted the theme for the january 2018 issue as “promises kept, promises broken.” since october of 2017, i’ve struggled with what my article would contain. i had promised to write an article, but i watched as the sands fell through the hour glass of time and have not put pencil to paper, or for those younger folks, digits to keyboard.

on sunday, december 31, i had lunch with the editor and publisher of the lourdes word, mark hudson and martha ardis, respectively. during our conversation, i told them how much i had been struggling with the subject and blamed “writer’s block.” again, no pencil to paper. both mark and martha told me i was making it much more difficult than it needed to be. martha said, “take some time today and pray to the holy spirit for help and guidance, and you will be amazed at the results.”

so, that sunday (just a few days before the article due date), i sat down in my favorite chair, turned on the television for background noise and asked the holy spirit for help and guidance that i would need to get started on my article. of course, when i was finished with my prayer, i looked up and there on the tv was the final round of some pga golf tournament, a round i knew i had seen when it was live so many months ago. sunday and monday evaporated. tuesday and wednesday, i was sick with some viral infection which kept me in bed without food or water. here it is thursday, and the article was due january 3, to meet a january mailing date.

i have to tell mark and martha no. but, how can i say no, since i’ve had an article in every issue of the lourdes word since its inception in 2010. well, it will have to be in an email. email is so impersonal. the “no, i don’t have an article and won’t have an article” will sound cold, but broken promises are cold anyway and so leave it at that. breaking a promise face-to-face or word-for-word over the phone is far more difficult than i can face.

growing up i was taught many things on the way to living a good christian life. the golden rule, take care of others less fortunate, go the extra mile and to be the best the best person i could be, were only a few. the folks always had their sayings which covered almost everything, or least i thought so when i was a child. like “good, better, best, don’t rest until the good is better and the better is best;” as you can tell, this statement covered many, many topics. the folks also drilled into my little brain: the words you spoke were yours alone. do what you say you are going to do and when you can’t, say no. a spoken promise(s) which becomes a broken promise(s), is like the boy who cried wolf many times, when there was no wolf. when the wolf did show up, his cries for help went unanswered. his word was no longer believed. (continued pg. 2)
17 Rabbits

This morning, as I rode my bike on the Pennsy Trail at dawn, I began counting rabbits. I count rabbits every morning ride. They hop out of the bushes and meadow along the trail to graze on the grass at trail’s edge. It only recently occurred to me that I am reliving my childhood.

When I was a younger boy than I am today, we lived several miles south of Cumberland. Every weekday morning, my mother drove my father and me and my three brothers up to Cumberland for my father to catch his ride to work downtown. We left the house at 6AM and drove the winding country road up to Cumberland – bed to car in our pajamas. We called it “bunny trail” because all four boys counted the many rabbits as we went. As bleary eyed as we all were climbing into the car, it was a wide-eyed competition to spot rabbits at every turn of our country road.

It is a 50-year span between the bunny census of my youth and that of my… (I’m searching for the right word…). In my youth, there was an innocent joy to counting. Besides the sibling competitiveness, it was a tally of God’s great abundance that spoke to my boyhood imagination – a pre-fall Edenic world. There was good, there was evil. My family and I were the good. From a young boy’s perspective, our life was idyllic and untouched by evil. I don’t know at what age I grew into the world; sin is silent, subtle, incremental, insidious. We compromise a little here, a little there. Suddenly we are adults, and we are aware of our nakedness; we are offered the apple over and over again. And yet, we continue to believe in our own self-righteousness and the blindness from the log in our eye.

When I reflect on those 50 years and the raw failings of my acts of living, it is clear that my fall from the Eden of my cloistered youth was more than one bite. My sins are countless. And yet, God promises a single act of redemption. God has not been counting my sins. God counts only one act: the shed blood of His Son that I should not have my failings numbered but that the saving grace of Jesus Christ would reconcile me to Him.

2 Corinthians 5:19
“… God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation….”

Though I have failed to keep the futile promise of the Eden of my youth, God has fulfilled His prophecies and kept His promises. There is joy in the promise of redemption. While my Savior does not count my sins, 50 years later, I still joyfully count His rabbits. Today, I count 17 rabbits on my journey – each one a reminder of His promise to reconcile my sins through His Son.

Promises Broken, Promises Kept
(continued from front page)

My father said, “you were only given so many chances for your word to be believed.”

How is my “broken promise” of not submitting an article going to disappoint those who are counting on me? Hopefully, my “No” won’t damage my personal relationship with Mark and Martha. But, a “broken promise is a broken promise.” I don’t feel good about what I am going to do.

Wait a minute…wait a gall darn minute! Do I sense the work of the Holy Spirit? Yes, the Holy Spirit does move in mysterious and spiritual ways. I started out composing an email to say No to both Mark and Martha to completing my article covering “Promises Kept, Promises Broken.” Except in my case, it’s “Promises Broken, Promises Kept.”

by Bruce Oertel
January (through December)  
by Linda Abner

Now is the time, when the old year has passed,  
We make resolutions that rarely will last.

We promise to eat better, exercise more,  
To clean out our closets, spend less at the store.

We vow to be kinder, and more thankful too,  
We'll change our behaviors, be good through and through.

What makes us think we can change to first-rate  
Simply because of a change in the date?

The weight of my promises, many not kept  
Weighs on my soul; fills my heart with regret.

I said I'd be patient, more giving each day,  
But selfish desire got in the way.

I promised to pray and faithfully fast.  
Though earnestly made, my vow did not last.

Perhaps my mistake is thinking that I  
Can do all I say if only I try.

But history shows, and experience repeats:  
Innate imperfection will lead to defeat.

Perhaps vows would be better made slowly, well-laced  
With thoughtfulness; few, and not made in haste.

Then given to God, in Whose perfect sight  
Their well-meant intent may be brought to full light.

Who alone sees our weakness; Who alone has power  
To bless and perfect, and make promises flower.
Promises: giving someone our word or pledging our allegiance to something. Promises are a big part of our everyday, sometimes formally and other times without much thought – almost in response to the moment. At other times, promises can seem like they are broken when they may not be.

We see politicians, police officers and other emergency personnel take oaths to serve and protect. In this, there is the promise to look out for the good of others and to be a service to those in need. We see in marriages promises made between two people to always love the other and to remain faithful until the end of time. We see in Baptism and Confirmation the role of parents, godparents and sponsors making promises to help those who are taking a significant milestone in their faith life to assist in spiritual development. In all of these situations, promises are made in a public way—in some sort of formal ceremony or liturgy. Maybe you can relate to one of these situations or maybe you have been a part of or witnessed your own public promise. These promises are made with good intentions, and yet, sometimes those promises are kept, and other times they are broken. We have those in positions of authority abuse the power that they have and at times hurt those they have promised to protect. We have marriages that don’t work out and end in separation for a number of reasons. We have relationships between people change, and those who once journeyed with one another in faith may no longer do so. Promises are made; promises are broken.

Sometimes promises are made more privately. Promises can be made with the intention of telling someone you love and care about what moment. Promises like, “I promise I will always be here for you” or “I promise everything will be fine” are meant to calm a situation and support another person. A few weeks ago, I found myself in a situation causing some people I care about to feel scared, nervous and angry. I found myself making promises that everything would be fine, this would all be over soon, and we would get to the bottom of this. In the moment, these words, these reassurances, these promises were needed, but in reality, these are not things I can promise. Yes, of keeping going, and we will move past this too, but we have all been affected by the situation in that our words and actions are a little bit different now. This situation could take a while before it is over, and some of the answers that we seek we may never know, but my promises were not empty words; they are what was needed and what I wished I could give to those about whom I cared. Maybe you have been in a situation like mine where you have made promises out of good intentions knowing you may not be able to keep them. Maybe you, like me, have promises made and promises broken.

There are several covenants throughout the Old Testament. These covenants are promises made between God and a person or group of people. Often times, covenants were promises of faithfulness to God, and in return, God would provide for the needs of the person or group. The promise went both ways—I promise you and you promise me. With the coming of Jesus, the New Covenant was fulfilled; it is with Jesus’ death that sins are forgiven and humanity is redeemed. At the end of Matthew’s Gospel, we see another promise. Matthew writes, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

(continued pg 5)
Jesus gives His disciples a mission to spread the Good News and in return, a promise to always be with them. This promise has to be significant because it is how the Gospel of Matthew ends. This scene in Matthew 28:18-20 happens in the days following the Resurrection. As onlookers, we can imagine the grief the eleven were feeling for the events of Good Friday, the overwhelming joy of the resurrection, the fear for their own futures and the doubt and confusion for this encounter with Jesus. It is in the midst of all these emotions that Jesus makes a promise. This promise would not have been any different than the promise made by those in positions of power. He was the teacher, the leader of this group. This promise would have also been like those made for people about whom you care. The eleven gathered here were his friends. They had traveled together, eaten meals together and spent countless hours together. He knew them and what they needed to hear. He knew what their futures would hold. All but one of those gathered there would go on to become martyrs, dying horrific and painful deaths for the sake of their faith. It was in this moment knowing all that He knew that the Teacher promised, “I will be with you always.” Would it be a promise kept or a promise broken?

In Fr. Rick’s Christmas Homily, he talked about what is in a name, with one of the names being Immanuel, meaning God is with us. Jesus’ birth was a fulfillment of the prophesy found in the book of Isaiah which is where the name of Immanuel is first found. I find it interesting that we celebrate the birth of Christ at one of the darkest times in the year, just days after the winter solstice. With this celebration of Christmas, the light of Christ comes into the world that is dark. This name of Immanuel is connected to the promise found at the end of Matthew’s Gospel in that it echoes the promise found in the beginning. The Gospel begins and ends with the same promise of God being with us. But are these promises kept?

This mission and promise made to the disciples extends beyond them to us. Does Jesus keep this promise to us? When we are dealing with grief that comes from losing someone or something in life, is Jesus there? When we or others we love are dealing with an illness, is Jesus there? When world events happen evoking terror and causing questions of safety and security to arise, is Jesus there? When events in our life cause stress to be high, hope to be all but gone and the darkness of despair to be creeping in around us, is Jesus there?

If we do not see an answer to our prayers and the situation does not seem to get any better, does that mean that the promise has been broken? Could that mean that we need a new perspective? The promise was made for His presence, so where is God’s presence in each day? Is it noticed when the sky becomes pink and purple as the sun comes up in the morning? Could this be how God is greeting us as we begin a new day? Do we notice Him in the quiet of the church and in the Sacraments? Do we sense His presence from an unexpected kind word or gesture, the perfect song that comes on the radio that is exactly what you need to hear or in the sunshine after many gray winter days that seems to bring a sense of hope with it? Maybe there is another way that you experience God in your life. His presence is there if we are open to it and look for it.

If you enjoy writing and would like to submit an article, poem, etc., please see the last page of this publication.
I Promise to Try to Rely on God’s Promise

by Michele Oertel

Right after Thanksgiving (well, perhaps even a little beforehand admittedly), I started watching Hallmark Christmas movies. Watching these with my husband has become a heart-warming tradition that gets us in the festive holiday spirit. We feel fortunate to be able to pay for the Hallmark Channel, so we might as well get our money’s worth! These movies serve as a brief escape from negative news that bombards us 24/7 and a light break from some of the box office type movies that tend to disturb my sensibilities. I realize that some people might make fun of the Hallmark movies – too sappy, too unrealistic, too predictable. Yes, especially that last point is true; the storylines are somewhat formulaic, though that offers yet another layer of fun while watching, being the first one to predict the ending.

While these wholesome movies give me warm and fuzzy feelings, what I don’t like is when one of the characters inevitably makes a promise to someone – especially a promise that is out of that person’s control. Those promises are usually broken. When a well-intentioned parent promises a young child that a sick loved one will live or that an absent parent will return home, I cringe. When a quaint town local promises a transient stranger who lost her memory that she will get better and return home, I find that I am hopeful, but cringing – again.

Generally, I trust that things will work out one way or another, though I have come to terms with the fact that we are human, we fail, we break promises. I suppose I would prefer a slight dialogue tweak – “I promise I will try…” Yet I believe that most of us have the best intentions when we make promises, presuming we will try, do our best, and succeed. What I believe more, though, is that God fulfills His promises.

Contrary to a Hallmark story, life is not always happy. However, it can be joyful when we are happy in the Lord and His promises. From one of my morning devotionals, some listed promises below served as solid reminders to rely on God’s promises:

- Fear not, I am with you. I will never leave nor forsake you. You are Mine for eternity.
- Seek to please only Me, and you’ll have nothing and no one to fear.
- You don’t have to worry about being inadequate ever again. I am your strength, wisdom, and courage.
- When others reject you, be sure of My unqualified love for you.
- Let go of your own control and humbly trust Me to guide you each step of the way.

These were derived from Psalm 85:8: “I will listen to what God the LORD says; He promises peace to His people, His faithful servants – but let them not turn to folly.” The promises of God found in scripture are powerful and are the sure way to get and keep the true Christmas spirit – all through the year.
His Promise

To my mind, a promise is a fluid concept. Not all promises hold equal weight. A promise to be faithful in marriage is not comparable to a promise made while dating. When I was in high school, I fell in “love” with a boy who gave me a “First Promise” ring. I found out that was an empty promise when he broke my heart. Our pastors have promised obedience to our Bishops. You can’t compare that promise to a promise to obey traffic laws when becoming a licensed driver.

We’ve all either made a promise to do something, if only… or have been promised something, if only… Like when we promised to never ask for another thing if only we could have this one thing. Most parents have heard this one… “I promise I will feed and walk it every day if you will let me have a dog!”

As a parent and grandparent, I try not to make promises because I know how circumstances change and I know that it isn’t always possible to live out the promise. The words, “I promise” are easily said, and the intent to fulfill the promise is there, but it just isn’t always possible. There is one promise, however, that I do trust because I have experienced its validity time and time again. The promise that I hold dear is that the Lord will never leave me, but that trust was a long time coming.

As a child and even as a young adult, every time there was a thunderstorm that terrified me, I can remember my mother telling me to trust the promise that God would be with me. I thought it was a ridiculous thing to say because… so what if God is with me if that tornado is going to get me? It’s still going to be the death of me! Every fear I had was, in my mind, trivialized by her saying that be-

cause… if the outcome was the same, then what difference did it make if God was with me?

Then I found out what she meant. A few years ago, I was caring for my mother-in-law in a nursing home, and I was faced with a rather distasteful task – emptying her bedpan. Now, I had been changing her diaper and bathing her for months. I was uncomfortable at the prospect in the beginning, but she was so matter-of-fact and ho-hum about it that she took all of the embarrassment out of it and it became a true labor of love. For some reason, though, the idea of getting up close and personal with her bedpan about did me in. I was walking towards her restroom like a woman being led to the gallows, asking myself how I was going to do this.

Some might think that something as distasteful as this predicament is a strange place to meet God, but that’s exactly what happened to me. As I was making my way to the bathroom, I suddenly felt the undeniable presence of God and His assurance that He would get me through it. It was a life-changing experience. I learned to trustingly place myself in His care with the knowledge that with Him all things are possible.

Shortly after that incident, my sister suggested that my husband and I join her and her husband at a New Year’s Eve retreat at Fatima Retreat House being led by Father Jim Farrell. It was the end of 1999, and we had been bombarded with messages of horrible things that were going to happen because of the millennium change. I was at least somewhat fearful that something might happen and just wished the whole thing was over. I told her that I would rather be at home in case something should happen. Then I remembered that no matter what happened, God had it handled, and what better place to feel His presence than at the chapel for Mass? It was a beautiful experience, and I am grateful that I could “let go and let God.”

And, what about all of those broken promises that inevitably come? They are much easier to get through knowing that the only promise that really matters is that God will always be with me.
Actress Shirley MacLaine once said, “It is useless to hold a person to anything said while they are in love, drunk, or running for public office.” What a sad commentary! Promises are made and broken many times during our lives. Some are often trivial, but others are extremely important, expressing our true feelings and desires. However, broken promises we make or others make don’t stop us from:

- Getting married (sometimes repeatedly)
- Hoping a loved one will change problematic behavior
- Electing politicians
- Making and believing more promises.

A few years ago, while I was cutting a customer’s grass, a storm was quickly approaching. In my infinite wisdom, I decided to use my bargaining power with God (not a good idea but one we humans often resort to when asking God for something). In this particular instance, God was promised that if the rain would be held off until the yard was cut that I would make a special donation to the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Evidently, God really desired that extra donation because the rain held off allowing me to finish mowing the lawn. My donation was sent a few months later.

On several occasions, I also made promises to the bank. It was agreed that if it advanced me the money for a new car, I promised to pay back the bank. I upheld my promise and paid the money back with interest. Funny thing, though, how I seemed not to forget that when banks loan someone money, they seem always to want it back.

Our Baptismal promise is the first promise made by the vast majority of Catholics. For those baptized early in life, these commitments were made in our name by our Godparents. Then later on, we ratify these promises. Each year, the Church provides this opportunity at Easter. We are asked if we reject Satan, all his works and his empty promises. Do we believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth? Do we believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father? Do we believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting? Periodically, a good examination of conscience will ask if I have been faithful to these Baptismal promises. What are my sins and when have I been attracted to false promises, etc.? Making promises is easy; following through with them can often be difficult. Maybe there is some truth in what Shirley MacLaine said.
by Woody Guthrie

I didn't promise you skies painted blue
Not all colored flowers all your days through
I didn't promise you, sun with no rain
Joys without sorrows, peace without pain.
All that I promise is strength for this day,
Rest for my worker, and light on your way.
I give you truth when you need it, my help from above,
Undying friendship, my unfailing love....

Parish Mission Statement ~ We, the faith community of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, strive to live, share and be Christ in all we do.

www.ollindy.org
Our quarterly publication of *The Lourdes Word* is an attempt for us, the followers of Christ, to publicly reflect on our faith journey. Each edition has a specific theme. Contained in this issue are reflections on “Promises Made~Promises Broken.”

We invite the parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes to submit writings which they feel will help address the theme of the next publication. All submissions will be reviewed by the publication committee. Please note that due to space requirements, editing may be necessary. Therefore, please limit your submission to 525 words or fewer. The theme for the next edition will be “Gratitude.” The edited copy will be returned to the author for review before final publication. Please feel free to submit writings through the parish secretary.

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