



Christian Service Senior WRITTEN

Reflection

*This assignment is a **required** part of your community service at DeMatha. Failure to complete this portion of the community service requirement will result in your diploma and your transcripts being withheld.*

You must complete and turn in the paper by **March 20, 2024** for the requirement to be satisfied. If the paper is not complete by the aforementioned date, you are subject to penalty.

Written Reflection

Read each of the handouts that are in the packet. The readings include:

- *Catholic Social Teaching Scripture Guide*
- *Excerpt from Tattoos on the Heart, by Greg Boyle, S.J.*

Write a **3½ to 4 – page** paper, typed, double-spaced, **with one-inch margins** and in **12-point Times New Roman font** being sure to follow the directions carefully. Your paper topic is comprised of three different components. You must complete each section following the appropriate directions (including the length of each section) for your paper to be deemed acceptable. **The paper will not be read if it is shorter than 3½ pages and does not follow the format.**

I. Introduction (½ page)

Your introductory paragraph must identify **where, when and whom you served** during your Junior/Senior service project. Be specific and include which vulnerable population you served.

II. Personal Analysis (1 ½ pages and you must respond to both A and B)

In the body of your paper you need to:

- (A) Choose one of the seven basic themes of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) that your service embodied and use it to answer the following:
- a. Explain how your service embodied this CST theme
 - b. Use at least one Scripture reference given for your chosen theme to further explain your point
- (B) Discuss the effect this service had on you, the people with whom you worked, and the larger community

III. Traditional Analysis (1 ½ pages)

Using the excerpt from *Tattoos on the Heart*, please answer the following questions within your paragraph:

1. Boyle reveals that the end-goal of service or connection is to create kinship. What does he mean by this?
2. Were you able to find kinship in your service? Explain why or why not.
3. Read the story of Chico carefully. What did you think of how Boyle mourned his death?
4. Part of finding kinship with others is realizing that you can learn from them and that they have something to offer you. What did you learn from those you encountered while serving?

Any paper which is of poor quality and deemed unacceptable due to lack of effort, insight or reflection will not be accepted.

All papers are to be submitted to the Campus Ministry Office. If a paper is deemed acceptable, it will be kept. If a paper is deemed unacceptable, it will be returned to you for a rewrite. Until the paper is acceptable it will not fulfill the requirement.

Catholic Social Teaching

Scripture Guide



LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

All people are created in the image of God and thus, all human life, from conception to natural death, is sacred. Through the mystery of Christ, we become children of the Father and temples of the Holy Spirit. God's love for all is the foundation of human dignity. The basic dignity that each person possesses comes from God; therefore all forms of discrimination are always wrong. People take precedence over things and structures. Systems are meant to serve people. And people are meant to serve and care for one another. Scripture tells us repeatedly of God's love for us. We are called to see every person through the eyes of God and to love them because God loved them (and us) first.

Genesis 1:26-31 God created man and woman in his image.

Deuteronomy 10:17-19 God loves the orphan, the widow, and the stranger. You should too.

Proverbs 22:2 The Lord is the maker of both rich and poor.

Luke 10:25-37 The good Samaritan recognized the dignity in the other and cared for his life.

John 4:1-42 Jesus broke with societal and religious customs to honor the dignity of the Samaritan woman.

Romans 12: 9-18 Love one another, contribute to the needs of others, live peaceably with all.

1 Corinthians 3:16 You are holy, for you are God's temple and God dwells in you.

Galatians 3:27-28 All Christians are one in Christ Jesus.

James 2:1-8 Honor the poor.

1 John 3: 1-2 See what love the Father has for us, that we should be called Children of God.

1 John 4:7-12 Let us love one another because love is from God.



Catholic Social Teaching

Scripture Guide



CALL TO FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND PARTICIPATION

Our faith is rooted in the mystery of the Trinity: the divine relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's own essence is a communion of persons. Created in God's image, we too are social creatures. We are called to live this Trinitarian reality of self-giving love. It is in the community that we are shaped and formed. It is through the community that the dignity of every individual is realized. And it is out of the community that we are sent to love and serve the world. We find in Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, "The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practice this charity...This is the institutional path - we might also call it the political path - of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbour directly."¹

Genesis 4:8-15 I am my brother's and sister's keeper.

Leviticus 25:23-43 What you own belongs to the Lord and is given for the good of all.

Jeremiah 7:5-7 If you act justly with one another, God will dwell in the land.

Micah 6:6-8 Act justly, love kindness, walk humbly with God.

John 15:12-17 This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you.

Acts 2:43-47; Life among the believers.

Romans 12:4-8 We are one body, individually members one of another.

Hebrews 10:24-25 Rouse one another to love and good works.

1 Peter 4:8-11 Serve one another with the gifts you have received.

1 John 3:16-18 We ought to lay down our lives for one another.

1 John 4:19-21 Those who love God must love their brothers and sisters.

¹Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*.



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RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

We are created in God's image. As such, every person has the right to life. They also have a right to those things which preserve their dignity, or quality of life: food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful employment. Corresponding to these rights are responsibilities. Because we are created in the image of the Triune God, we must respect the rights of others and care for others according to God's commandments and example.

Leviticus 19:9-10 A portion of the harvest is set aside for the poor and the stranger.

Ruth 2:2-23 Boaz cares for Ruth, a widow and a foreigner, giving her far more than the law requires.

Tobit 4:5-11 Give from what you have received and do not turn away from the poor.

Isaiah 1:16-17 Seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Jeremiah 22: 13-16 A legitimate government upholds the rights of the poor and vulnerable.

Jeremiah 29:4-7 Seek the welfare of the city, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Matthew 25: 31-46 Just as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me.

Luke 16:19-31 The rich man has a responsibility to care for Lazarus.

Acts 4:32-35 There was not a needy person among them.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 God's gifts are given to be shared.

James 2:14-18 Faith without works is dead.





OPTION FOR AND WITH THE POOR

The morality of society is judged by how well our most vulnerable members are faring. Just as a parent gives more care and resources to a sick child, in order that the child might become healthy, so we as Christians are called to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. Those with the greatest need require the greatest response. In a society marked by the deepening divide between rich and poor, the gospel calls us to radical and self-giving love—to meet the needs of the poor and vulnerable and to oppose the structures that perpetuate poverty and abuse the vulnerable.

Exodus 22:20-26 You shall not oppress the poor or vulnerable. God will hear their cry.

Job 34:20 The Lord hears the cry of the poor.

Proverbs 31:8-9 Speak out in defense of the poor.

Sirach 4:1-10 Don't delay giving to those in need.

Isaiah 25:4-5 God is a refuge for the poor.

Isaiah 58:5-7 True worship is to work for justice and care for the poor and oppressed.

Luke 4:16-21 Jesus proclaims his mission: to bring good news to the poor and oppressed.

Luke 6:20-23 Blessed are the poor, theirs is the kingdom of God.

1 John 3:17-18 How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's good and sees one in need and refuses to help?





DIGNITY OF WORK AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS

Work is about more than making a living; it is a form of participation in the creative work of God. People have a right to decent, meaningful work and fair wages. Workers have the right to organize and join unions, own private property, and to economic initiative. Work should promote the dignity of the worker. Our economy exists to serve people, not vice versa. Our faith calls us to demand justice for all workers and a just economy that serves the life and dignity of all. Likewise, our work contributes to the good life of our brothers and sisters.

Genesis 2:1-3 God rests on the seventh day.

Deuteronomy 5:13-15 The Sabbath is for everyone—all are allowed to rest from their work.

Deuteronomy 14:28-29 The Lord blesses our work so that we may share its fruits with others.

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 Do not withhold wages from your workers, for their livelihood depends on them.

Sirach 34:20-22 To deprive an employee of wages is to commit murder.

Isaiah 58:3-7 To observe religious practices, but oppress your workers is false worship.

Jeremiah 22:13 Woe to him who treats his workers unjustly.

Matthew 20:1-16 All workers should be paid a just and living wage.

Mark 2:27 The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath.

Luke 3:10-14 Practice integrity in your work.

Luke 12:13-21 One's worth is not determined by an abundance of possessions.

James 5:1-6 Those who become rich by abusing their workers have sinned against God.

Catholic Social Teaching

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SOLIDARITY

We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic and ideological differences. We are our brother's and sister's keeper. As Christians, we are as St. Paul reminds us, one body. Love of neighbor has global dimensions in our rapidly shrinking world. At the core of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Peace is more than a lack of conflict. Peace, or in Hebrew Shalom, means literally "right relationship." The gospel calls us to be peacemakers: that we live in right relationship with others, ourselves, and God. Pope Paul VI taught, "If you want peace, work for justice." Our love for our entire human family demands that we work for justice and for peace, that we promote God's shalom in our world.

Genesis 12:1-3 God blessed Israel so that all nations would be blessed through it.

Psalms 72 Living in right relationship with others brings peace.

Psalms 122 Peace be with you! For the sake of the Lord, I will seek your good.

Zechariah 8:16 These are the things you should do: Speak truth, judge well, make peace.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, they will be called children of God.

Matthew 5:21-24 Be reconciled to one another before coming to the altar.

Romans 13:8-10 Living rightly means to love one another.

1 Corinthians 12:12-26 If one member suffers, all suffer. If one member is honored, all rejoice.

Colossians 3:9-17 Above all, clothe yourself with love and let the peace of Christ reign in your hearts.



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CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth and set humans as his stewards to care for his creation. Care for God's creation was God's fruitful commandment to humanity and a fundamental requirement of our faith. Moreover, creation witnesses to God's existence. God reveals himself in creation and we see in nature the fingerprints of God. Creation is always an object of praise in Israel's prayer and the prayers of the early Christians. We are called to honor and protect our planet and its people—to live in relationship with all of God's creation. At the dawn of creation, God commanded us not only to be fruitful and multiply, but also to use for his good creation.

Genesis 1:1-31 God made the heavens and the earth and it was good.

Genesis 2:15 Humans are commanded to care for God's creation.

Leviticus 25:1-7 The land itself must be given a rest and not abused.

Deuteronomy 10:14 All of heaven and earth belong to the Lord.

Psalms 24:1-2 All the earth is the Lord's.

Daniel 3:56-82 Creation proclaims the glory of God.

Matthew 6:25-34 God loves and cares for all of creation.

Romans 1:20 Creation reveals the nature of God.

1 Corinthians 10:26 Creation and all created things are inherently good because they are of the Lord.



2010 SCIBA BOOK AWARD WINNER FOR NONFICTION

"Destined to become a classic of both urban reportage and contemporary spirituality." —*Los Angeles Times*

"Jaw-dropping. Boyle take[s] us through the human lifecycle of fall/grace/redemption/repeat again and again. Reading this book is a spiritually cleansing experience that won't leave you the same. *Tattoos on the Heart* welcomes all of us to join in the 'no matter whatness' of God's unconditional love." —*Sojourners*

For twenty years, Gregory Boyle has run Homeboy Industries, a gang-intervention program located in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles, the gang capital of the world. In *Tattoos on the Heart*, he distills his experience working in the ghetto into a breathtaking series of parables inspired by faith. Arranged by theme and filled with sparkling humor and glowing generosity, these essays offer a stirring look at how full our lives could be if we could find the joy in loving others and in being loved unconditionally. From giant, tattooed Cesar, shopping at JCPenney fresh out of prison, we learn how to feel worthy of God's love. From ten-year-old Lula we learn the importance of being known and acknowledged. From Pedro we understand the kind of patience necessary to rescue someone from the darkness. In each chapter we benefit from Boyle's gentle, hard-earned wisdom.

These essays about universal kinship and redemption are moving examples of the power of unconditional love and the importance of fighting despair. Gorgeous and uplifting, *Tattoos on the Heart* reminds us that no life is less valuable than another.

MAURY PHILLIPS



Gregory Boyle is a Jesuit priest and the founder and executive director of Homeboy Industries. He makes approximately two hundred speaking appearances per year and has received numerous humanitarian awards, among them the California Peace Prize. He lives in Los Angeles.

THE AUTHOR IS DONATING ALL HIS NET PROCEEDS FROM THIS BOOK TO HOMEBOY INDUSTRIES. VISIT THE AUTHOR AT HOMEBOY-INDUSTRIES.ORG.

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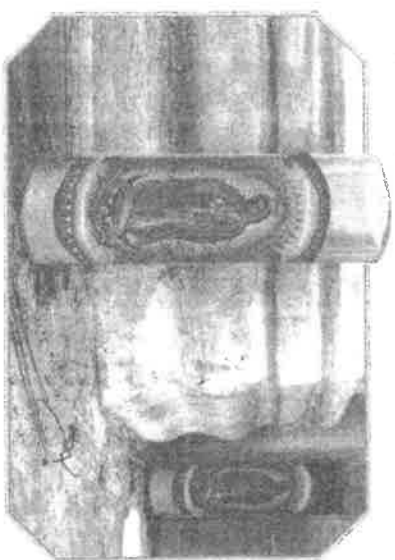
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T I M E S B E S T S E L L E R

"An astonishing book...about suffering and dignity, death and resurrection, one of my favorite books in years. It is lovely and tough and tender beyond my ability to describe and left me in tears of both sorrow and laughter." —Anne Lamott, author of *Grace (Eventually)*

Tattoos on the Heart

THE POWER OF
BOUNDLESS COMPASSION



Gregory Boyle
Founder of Homeboy Industries

Winner of the 2011 PEN America Award for Best Non-Fiction

"As I saw this kid," she tells me, "I just kept thinking of what my friends might say if they were here with me. They'd say, 'Pray that he dies.' But she just looked at this tiny kid, struggling to sidestep the fate of her sons, as the doctors work and scream, 'WE'RE LOSING HIM. WE'RE LOSING HIM.'"

"And I began to cry as I have never cried before and started to pray the hardest I've ever prayed. 'Please... don't... let him die. I don't want his mom to go through what I have.'"

And the kid lived. Sometimes, it only seems that the hurt wins.

Mary Oliver writes, "There are things you can't reach. But you can reach out to them, and all day long."

In the end, effective outcomes and a piling of success stories aren't the things for which we reach. Though, who am I kidding. I prefer them to abject failure and decades of death. But it's not about preference. It's about the disruption of categories that leads us to abandon the difficult, the disagreeable, and the least likely to go very far. On most days, if I'm true to myself, I just want to share my life with the poor, regardless of result. I want to lean into the challenge of intractable problems with as tender a heart as I can locate, knowing that there is some divine ingenuity here, "the slow work of God," that gets done if we're faithful. Maybe the world could use a dose of a wrong-size approach; otherwise the hurt wins. Maybe there are things you can't reach. But you can stretch your arm across a gully and forgive and heal. Equal souls. All day long.

Kinship

Mother Teresa diagnosed the world's ills in this way: we've just "forgotten that we belong to each other." Kinship is what happens to us when we refuse to let that happen. With kinship as the goal, other essential things fall into place; without it, no justice, no peace. I suspect that were kinship our goal, we would no longer be promoting justice—we would be celebrating it.

Kinship has a way of sneaking up on you even as you seek to create it. I celebrate Catholic services, on a rotating basis, in twenty-five detention institutions in Los Angeles County—juvenile halls, probation camps, jails, and state youth authority facilities. After Mass, in the gym or chapel or classroom, I hand out my card. The infomercial is always the same:

"Call me when you get out. I'll hook you up with a job—take off your tattoos—line ya up with a counselor. I won't know where you are, but with this card, you'll know where I am. Don't slow drag. Cuz if you do, you'll get popped again and end up right back here. So call me."

Tattoos on the Heart

I hand out thousands of cards a year.

So a homie named Louie, seventeen years old, appears in my office one day, bright, happy and smiling. Never in my life had I seen more hickies on a human being than on this guy. His entire neck is spotted with these *chupetonzos*. Even his cheeks are covered. I'm thinking Mr. Guinness of the world records might be interested in talking to Louie.

"So, here I am," he says, arms outstretched, "I just got out yesterday," and he points at me with glee, "and YOU... are the VERY FIRST person I came to see."

I look at this giddy gang member and say, "Louie... I have a feeling I was your second stop."

The two of us collapse in laughter and, suddenly, there's kinship so quickly. Not service provider and service recipient. No daylight to separate—just "us."

Exactly what God had in mind.

Often we strike the high moral distance that separates "us" from "them," and yet it is God's dream come true when we recognize that there exists no daylight between us. Serving others is good. It's a start. But it's just the halfway that leads to the Grand Ballroom.

Kinship—not serving the other, but being one with the other. Jesus was not "a man for others"; he was one with them. There is a world of difference in that.

* * *

I suppose I never felt this kinship more keenly in my own life than when I was first diagnosed with leukemia. At this writing, I am several years cancer free. Not long ago, a homie breathlessly

Kinship

He pauses and gets still.

"And she cried."

I get still myself.

Well, mija, whatdya spect? She just caught a glimpse of ya. She saw that you are somebody. She recognized you... as the shape of God's heart. Sometimes people cry when they see that."

Suddenly, kinship—two souls feeling their worth. Flight attendant, gang member, 34,000 feet—no daylight separating them. Exactly what God had in mind.

* * *

If you locate one job for one homie from one gang, be assured that eight other homies from that same barrio will call asking for a job. It was in late May 1996 that Chico called. I didn't know him, but I had just found a job for one of his *amanzadas*.

"Kick me down with a jale," he blurts out with what I think is a fair amount of nerve. This roughly translates as: "Do you think you'd be able to locate gainful employment for me?"

"Well," I tell him, "I don't even know you, dog. How 'bout we meet first?"

I schedule a time to go to his house, which is not far from my office, situated on a steep, hilly street behind Roosevelt High School. Chico is sixteen and from a neighborhood whose roots reach back to the forties and the Pachuco (Zoot Suit) era.

I meet Chico's mom, Rosa, a sweet, diminutive woman who clearly delights in her children and maintains, at the same time, an evident dread at the path her bald-headed, cholo son has chosen. Her appreciation at my arrival this day is palpable.

Tattoos on the Heart

Chico and I sit on the front porch. He is a lanky, funny-looking kid. As with most homies, his *pelón* haircut has pointed large arrows at his overly large ears, though his ears are more pronounced than most. His smile is ready and willing, always hanging out at the surface and quick to appear at the slightest urging. Chico is shy and jittery and yet will leap into areas of conversation that would take more time with other homies. We talk about his lady, his family, and his barrio's status with neighboring enemies. A most likable kid, made all the more winning by his nervy request for a job, *sigu* unsean.

"So, if I got you a job, *mijo*, is there some skill you've always wanted to learn or pick up?"

Chico is quick. He needs no time to consider my question.

"Oh yeah, computers. I really wanna learn and know computers."

I assure him that I will work on this, promising only that I'll do my best.

Some days later, I call Chico. My investigation led me to the Chrysalis Center, a nonprofit homeless resource center in downtown Los Angeles. I knew that they had recently received a bank of computers, so I made them an offer. I told them I knew this kid, Chico, who wanted to learn everything there was to know about computers. He's a gang member, but he wants to redirect his life. He goes to school in the morning, I explained, and could work at the Center from 1 to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. I tell them that I will pay his salary each week, and all they need to do is supervise him, teaching him everything they know about computers. We will call this a job.

They agree.

Kinship

"Now, *mijo*, you start at one o'clock," I tell Chico over the phone, laying down the ground rules.

"If you don't go to school that morning, please don't bother to go to work either. And I'll know if you ditch school. A job is a privilege. Going to school every day makes you worthy. You will have two bosses. One of them you'll meet on Monday, and the other you're talkin' to right now. So if I find out, and I will, that you're hanging, banging, or slanging, with all due respect and love—I will fire your ass. Got it, dog?"

"I understand, G," he says, "Oye, *gracias*. I promise I won't let you down."

When one o'clock on Monday arrives, I stare at the clock on my wall. I think *Chico is now walking into the Chrysalis Center*. When it's five o'clock, I think, *Chico is now leaving the Chrysalis Center*. I think maybe he'll call or stop by so I stay in the office for some time. No word from Chico. On Tuesday, I repeat the same conscious staring at the clock and await a word or a visit from Chico after hours. Tuesday turns into Wednesday, Wednesday into Thursday. Still nothing. I start to think that maybe he flaked out on me. Maybe my directions were bad and he never found the place, too ashamed to call me. Maybe his probation officer popped him for something and his embarrassment keeps him from contacting me.

I have imagined all the possible scenarios and ponder Chico's failure to communicate, when on Thursday at 3 p.m., a message emerges from the fax machine next to my desk. I can spot at the top of the paper, the tiny, typed Chrysalis Center masthead. The fax is a missive from our man Chico, written in large, clumsy script:

DEAR G:

I AM LEARNING HOW TO USE A FAX MACHINE.

I AM LEARNING A GANG A SHIT HERE.

LOVE,

CHICO

P.S.: I REALLY LOVE THIS JOB

THANKS FOR GETTING IT FOR ME.

About two months later, as I fumble with the keys to my office door at 7:30 a.m., I hear the insistent ringing of the phone inside. I catch it midring. It's Chico's mom, Rosa. She tells me that the night before, Chico was standing with some friends, not far from his front porch. A car slowly crept up. Maddogging glances were exchanged. Windows were rolled down, words were volleyed back and forth, and, finally, bullets began to fly from within the backseat of the car. One of the bullets lodged very high up on the back of Chico's neck, and he is now in the intensive care unit at General Hospital.

I leave immediately.

I walk into the unit and see Chico lying there, skinny and tattooed, naked but for a diaper. He is heavily tubed, with all the requisite IVs—nose, mouth, arms. He is staring, most notably, wide-eyed and unblinking, at the ceiling, riveted to the acoustical tiles. There is a doctor at the foot of his bed, scribbling notes onto a clipboard. I go to him first to assess Chico's condition.

"You know, Father," the doctor begins, "In all my years, I've never seen a paralysis this high."

The doctor points to the back of his own neck.

"It is so high on the stem, that we suspect there may well be brain damage, though we're not certain."

The doctor leaves, and I walk closer to Chico. His eyes don't even register that I'm approaching. They remain transfixed on the ceiling, unblinking, stretched, it would seem, beyond their capacity. I lean in.

"Chico."

No movement, no acknowledgment at all. I anoint him in the Church's *unción de los enfermos*. I rub a generous swath of oil on his forehead, hoping against hope that the balm will penetrate his frozen state, hoping it will lead us both to some divine compensation for this mad, mindless waste of life. No such penetration happens. I am left thinking only, *menos mal*—just as well, that he not know what's going on.

Truth be told, this was a hard kid to visit the next day. Excruciating, really. After the first visit, a rush of memory swept through me and placed in bold relief the hugeness of this loss. I can still see Chico in my mind's eye, waiting for me on his front porch on a Friday afternoon. Unlike other homies waiting for their paycheck, I never had to honk my horn or leave my car in search of Chico. He was always there, seated on his porch, and I was almost always late. He would catch sight of my red car coming up the narrow, steep hill, and he would leap from the porch and head for my car in a hurry. He'd run this goofy, gangly trot (decidedly uncool—gang members don't run, unless law enforcement is chasing them). He had an absence of care about such things. He just wanted to get to ya (and get to ya he did). He would hop in the passenger side of my car, and there was no extricating him. He was there to stay and sit and talk. Gone long ago was the rei-

Tattoos on the Heart

cent shyness. He would just launch into it. He was, as we say, *bien preparado*. He'd ask a grip a questions. In fact, he'd invariably ask me stuff about God (like I would know).

"Is God pissed off if I have sex with my lady? What do you think heaven is like? Do you think God listens to us?"

Clearly, far more valuable than the measly paycheck I'd hand him every Friday afternoon was the time I was privileged to spend with him, in that car, wondering together what might be on God's mind. To this day, my only regret is that I didn't spend more time.

I did go back the next day, of course, to the hospital. I walked in and found Chico, much the same as I had the day before. But I made the attempt anyway.

"Chico," I say, not far from his ear. His frozen eyes thaw in an instant and they dart to my own, and they lock onto me and they will not let go. I'm startled by this and speechless. Chico's eyes become intense puddles. Mine do as well.

"Do you know who this is, *mijito*?"

And to the extent that he can nod affirmatively, he does so. If such a thing is possible, he nods his eyes.

I search for something, anything, to say.

"Do you know, *mijo*, that we all love you very much?"

This last statement sets him off, and he cries a great deal. He's wailing, really. And his face says to me, in a most unmistakable way, "Please . . . get me out . . . of this body."

I anoint him as I had the day before, and I think, *the good news is, he's alive*. The bad news now is that he knows enough to wish that he weren't. Our eyes cling to each other's as I finally leave him, slowly backing out of the intensive care unit. His eyes want to leap out of their sockets. They long to be transplanted any-

Kinship

where else. I still see Chico's desperately haunted eyes after the door closes behind me.

One week later, Chico's heart stops, unable to sustain his ordeal any longer.

At the cemetery, as I bless the gold cross resting on his coffin and hand it to Rosa, a thought comes to me. I realize that I really must let this grief in. For too long, I had suspended my own profound sense of loss, dutifully placing it on my own emotional back burner. I needed to be there for Chico's family, his girlfriend, his homies. So I give myself permission now, to allow this pain into some cherished, readied place in my heart. Every homie's death recalls all the previous ones, and they all arrive at once, in a rush. I'm caught off guard, as well, by the sudden realization that Chico's burial is my eighth in the past three weeks.

I decide to walk away from the coffin and spot a lonely tree not too far from the crowd. I stand there by myself and welcome all the feelings of this great loss. I cry. Before too long, the mortician appears at my side. He is more acquaintance than friend.

Now he has broken the spell of my grief and unknowingly invaded the space I had carved out for myself. I am overwhelmingly annoyed that he has done so. Then, I'm annoyed that I'm annoyed. There is an obligation, clear and immediate, to break the silence, to welcome the mortician into my space, uninvited though he is. I remove my glasses and wipe away my tears. I point feebly at Chico's coffin and know that I need to find some words to fill our blank air.

"Now that," I whisper to the intruder, "was a terrific kid."

And the mortician, in a voice so loud and obnoxious that it turns the heads of all the gathered mourners, says, "HB WAS?"

Tattoos on the Heart

My heart sinks. I know exactly what he's thinking. *No cabe--* something isn't fitting here; there is some large disconnect for him, and he's incredulous. *How* could it be possible that a sixteen-year-old *cholo*, gunned down, not far from his home, be a terrific kid?

But who wouldn't be proud to claim Chico as their own?
His soul feeling its worth before its leaving.

The mortician's incredulity reminds me that kinship remains elusive. Its absence asserts that any effort to help someone like Chico just might be a waste of our collective time.

"But in this place of which you say it is a waste, there will be heard again the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness . . . the voices of those who sing."

And so the voices at the margins get heard and the circle of compassion widens. Souls feeling their worth, refusing to forget that we belong to each other. No bullet can pierce this. The vision still has its time, and, yes, it presses on to fulfillment. It will not disappoint. And yet, if it delays, we can surely wait for it.

Acknowledge me!

St. Paul challenges us to "dedicate ourselves and so I will.

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