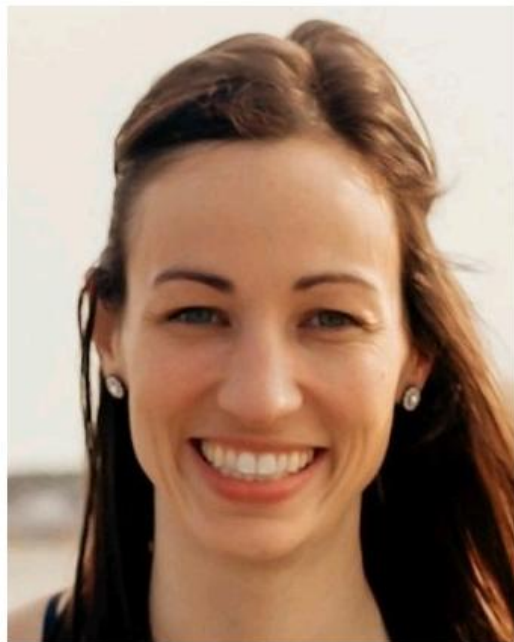


COLLEEN GRACE WISHALL

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**The following reflections were written by
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Reflection 1

Colleen Wishall is a wife and mother of four young children. She has no degrees in theology, philosophy or Biblical studies (though she wished she did!), but has been blessed over the years to see God use her little yeses to share His Love.

2025 was not the best year of my life. It began with a January 1st ambulance trip to the ER for what I thought was an acute attack of heartburn and feared might be a bleeding ulcer. Instead, I received the shock of my life-pancreatic cancer, metastatic to my liver. I will write more about that tumultuous year but for today would like to focus on a God who can make all things new and is proceeding to do so in this year of our Lord, 2026. As I pondered the ending of 2025 and what 2026 might bring, I had the thought, "If 2025 was the worst year of my life, why can't 2026 be the best? What if I woke up each day asking the Lord to surprise me-to surprise me with His goodness and with His presence? What if I actually followed the Scripture and asked Him for good things?" I was so filled with joy by this thought that I knew it was Holy Spirit inspired and I needed to follow it through. Next week I will share His first big surprise of the year and in the meantime, I invite you to ask God to surprise you. Ask Him to make His presence known and to give you the eyes, the ears, and the open heart to notice!

Matthew 7:9-11

Reflection 2

Over Christmas break I was visiting with a dear friend who has always inspired me by her commitment to making an annual retreat. As we chatted about her plans, I realized that God was calling ME to go on retreat. I considered the idea, but the thought of spending a weekend away from my children felt unfair and I worried that I would spend a whole weekend crying and angry at God (due to my cancer diagnosis). I set aside the idea knowing that God would make it happen if He wanted to. On the morning of January 9th, a priest friend called asking if he could visit the next day as he would be in Stamford hearing confessions for a Sisters of Life retreat. I casually mentioned to him that I had been hoping to go on retreat and I found myself, a few hours later, fully registered to go on retreat that night. My first big 2026 surprise! God had it perfectly planned-we had an empty weekend and I had no time to prepare or stress or worry (as mother's often do when they leave their family for a weekend). God was making it clear, "Yes Colleen, I will surprise you this year. Yes Colleen, I do want you to spend time in quiet with Me. Yes Colleen, you can trust Me." I encourage all of you to consider a way to make a spiritual retreat this year-whether for a weekend or a half day somewhere alone with the Lord. What can you do to make space for God? What can you let go of to make time with Him a priority?

Reflection 3

I have had the great gift of going on many spiritual retreats over the years. While I often experience fear or anxiety leading up to the retreat, what I have realized is that God *always* has something good in store for me. On my first retreat as a young adult returning to her faith I experienced the love of Christ, through a priest in the confessional, that I will never forget. The confession was face to face, and while I can remember the priest who heard my confession, it was not his words or his eyes that I remember, it was the overwhelming feeling that it was Jesus looking at me with eyes full only of love and mercy. The retreat I went on six months later led me to meet my husband! How is that for a surprise?! I also remember the retreat years later as a mother of two little ones, when I went begging the Lord for an answer for how He could possibly be enough for me? The answer, “Don’t put limits on Me.” This past month, while on retreat, the Lord gently reminded me that He is a good and loving God, one that I can approach without fear. After a year of living with cancer, I had come to fear the God who had allowed this suffering into my life. While it wasn’t the physical healing I longed for, it was a restoration of our relationship, reinvigorating my desire to spend time with Him in prayer, to listen to Him without fear. These moments of grace and answered prayers occurred because I gave the Lord time away with Him to truly listen. How might the Lord be calling you to renew your relationship with Him? Perhaps it’s time to schedule that retreat, make it to Tuesday night adoration or return to confession. Whatever He wants, be obedient and the graces will follow!

Reflection 4

I asked God for surprises this year and He is answering that request! For the first time since I was diagnosed with cancer, I received positive news from a scan-the tumor and liver lesions had both shrunk! Praise the Lord! If you want to hear more, you can google “Colleen Wishall Caring Bridge” to read my health updates. But what was more exciting this week was the way I heard God’s voice. Cancer has sparked in me another journey of spiritual growth. Wrestling with the problem of suffering and the great pains of this world, forces you to think harder about what you really believe about God. For awhile, I was afraid of Him, afraid to hear from a God that allowed a young, healthy mother of four to receive a pancreatic cancer diagnosis. But after He gently reminded me of His goodness, I have been opening myself up to hear His voice. Talking to some others who are going through this same process of seeking the Lord’s voice, led me to ask God this specific question during my middle of the night wakeups: “What is my identity?” The first night I got the sense that my identity was not in what I do or accomplish-this is a message He has been trying to impress upon me for years, which I finally accepted loud and clear when I returned from the hospital in October, entirely dependent on others for my basic needs but one that I was slowly letting slip through my fingers as my strength improved. The Lord confirmed this message as I was confined to the couch much of that day due to a sinus headache-it was like He was telling me-lie down, rest in Me, you don’t need to tackle the to-do list, today you need to rest in Me. Next week, I will share what He spoke to me the next night. In the meantime, consider how God is speaking to you. Are you asking Him to speak? Are you listening?

Reflection 5

Last week I began asking the Lord to reveal my identity to me. I know in my head (and sometimes my heart) that I am His beloved daughter, but I was asking for something more specific. After the first night of asking, I was led to Isaiah 30:15 “By waiting and by calm you shall be saved, in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.” I then spent the week sick on the couch, physically forced to allow God to be my strength. This gave me more time to spend in the Word. If you continue reading Isaiah, the prophet speaks of God no longer hiding himself, of the disciple hearing God’s voice clearly and then walking in it. This was something I was desiring-to hear God’s voice and to become more confident in Him, to walk in trust and obedience without fear. The next night I asked the Lord again about my identity and I heard Him say “You are a new creation.” Hearing God speak is not an everyday occurrence for me (likely not because He isn’t speaking but because I so rarely listen!). I knew this was a word from God and when I looked up its meaning I learned that a new creation in Christ refers to a spiritual rebirth where the old sin-bound nature is replaced by a new life guided by the Holy Spirit. What a gift! God was confirming my identity as the very same thing I was desiring, the very same thing He had revealed to me in Scripture the day before. I invite you to ask the Lord what your identity is. What might it mean to hear Him speak to you individually? What would it take fasting from in order to give yourself the time to listen?

Reflection 6

For years, I gathered regularly with a group of friends to discuss a spiritual read. When I became sick last year, I had to give up these gatherings as sleep became the higher priority. But as Lent approached, I thought, “Oh perhaps I can join again...my energy is increasing...I *miss* my friends... Of course, God wants me to add this good thing back into my life!” Without asking God His thoughts, I ordered the book and sent a quick RSVP. I was back in! It wasn’t long after that my energy began decreasing again—a combination of too much activity, multiple viruses, and the unknown workings of my body. I began to wonder if attending would be in my best interest. Then, Ash Wednesday arrived and along with it the flu. And the book? Well, it never arrived—it was officially “lost in transit”.

My desire for normalcy, my desire to *do*, to read and discuss, to be out with friends had all trumped my desire to do God’s will. While none of these desires were bad, none of them was the highest good God was calling me to. His highest good for me this Lent? Accept the crosses I’ve already been given. If this feels too simple, too basic, might I even say lazy, I understand. But now over a week into Lent with two sick children still at home, I have lying next to me, not an unread book and growing list of unaccomplished Lenten goals, but a sweet (and spicy) sick child resting against me and list of “yeses” that I’ve given our Lord. This Lent, give your Yes to whatever the Lord is asking of you, whether that is extra prayer and penance or a simple Yes to the daily crosses inherent to your state of life.

Reflection 7

In December, my sister, Erin, and her family relocated to Stamford to be of service to our family. It has been the most wonderful gift to see them daily and to share the joys and struggles of parenting young children with my sister and brother-in-law. One morning, Erin was sharing with me that she was trying to teach her six-year-old the *why* of fasting. She explained to him that we fast to show Jesus that we love Him more than the thing we are giving up. While this explanation was for her son, it has been constantly on my mind this Lent.

I have always struggled with fasting. While my husband can go an entire day without eating, I find myself hungry and grumpy if I'm a whole 30 minutes past a regular meal time. And while my health does not allow for vigorous fasting from food, giving up sweets, social media, time on my phone, etc. are fruitful and accessible forms of fasting in my current state. Lately, when I have found myself tempted to engage in those comforts and distractions, I hear the Lord say to me, "Colleen, do you love me more than social media? Do you love me more than a bite of chocolate?" When I hear that gentle voice, I no longer have to white knuckle my fast, instead I can offer it as a gift of love. Of course, Jesus, I do love you more than those! So let the Lord speak these words to you, as he did to Saint Peter after his resurrection, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" John 21:15 Let your fast be a gift of love, an expression that you love Him more than anything this world can offer.

Reflection 8

Fourteen years ago, I had the great privilege of going on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. While there, we were required to receive the Eucharist on the tongue. This was a new posture for me and felt awkward. When I returned to the States, I felt the Lord inviting me to continue to receive Him in this manner. I resisted for a time, but eventually obeyed him and it came, for me, to be a more reverent way to receive. Many years later, my eldest daughter received her First Communion and did so on the tongue and kneeling down. Soon after, we followed her lead and began as a family to do the same. Since then, no matter where we go to Mass, my daughter drops to her knees and receives our Lord with profound reverence. I wish I could say I always did the same! I, rather than immediately responding in obedience to what our Lord has asked of me, wonder, "Should I kneel or stand? Is the Eucharistic minister prepared for me to kneel? Will they judge me if I do?" Why do I still feel awkward about this?!"

I recently heard an interview with Jonathan Roumie, the actor who portrays Jesus on *The Chosen*, in which he described a similar experience of God calling him to receive in this kneeling posture. He too felt hesitant to do so and had his own awkward story to share, but he has persisted in obedience. I wonder if many of you feel the same? Perhaps you grew up as I did, in a parish where this was extremely rare. Perhaps you feel much more comfortable with someone placing our Lord in your hands rather than in your mouth. We are so fortunate here at Holy Spirit to have the kneelers available to make reception on the knees and tongue much easier. I invite you to ask our Lord how He wants you to receive and to respond in obedience. My wise daughter offers this advice, "Close your eyes and stick out your tongue." And she is right-the closing eyes part truly helps!

Reflection 9 (Easter Sunday)

He is risen! Alleluia! How was your Lent? Did you come running into Holy Week, afire for the Lord? Perhaps you came in stumbling, your original plans for Lent a distant memory? One amazing thing about our God is that, however we come to Him, He welcomes us gladly. We come with our mess and He awaits us with forgiveness. We come with our failures and He awaits us with mercy. We come with control and pride and fear and He awaits us with love. Yesterday, today, and forever, He is the same. He is waiting with open arms. He is longing for our love and longing to know us-the good AND the bad. He saw all the sins of the world and still He died to save us.

He is *also* longing to teach us. He wants us to know Him and He wants us to know ourselves. I invite you over the next week to spend quiet time with the Lord reflecting on your experience this Lent. Ask Him about your failures and your triumphs-ask Him, "What do You want me to know about this?" Ask Him, "Is there something I believe about myself or You that isn't true?" And then, let Him speak. Let the risen Lord who has conquered sin and death speak truth into your heart, mind, and soul.

Happy Easter my dear friends in Christ! Let us rejoice in His love!

Reflection 10

I was struggling to come up with an idea for this week's column, when I mistakenly asked my two young boys what I should write. As you can imagine, a slew of ideas that sounded mostly like potty words came spewing out of their mouths along with some big smiles and twinkling eyes. In a moment of leisure and peace, I laughed heartily along with them.

I have laughed more the last few weeks than I have in years and it makes me wonder, when did I lose the ability to see the joy and humor in this life. Was it when I found out I had cancer? Or was it much earlier? Perhaps in the throws of newborn exhaustion? Or in the hard years as a young mother, feeling isolated at home with many young ones and a husband who worked late in the city? And why had I become so serious, so concerned about my to-do list, so disturbed by messes that I failed to appreciate the joy before me?

I don't have all the answers to those questions, but almost dying and now being gifted with more time on this earth, my eyes have been opened. There is an evil one who wants all of that distraction, all of that pettiness to get in the way of the bountiful life that is before me. I want to delight in the hilarity that is the sentences my son crafts for his spelling homework. I want to joke around and dance with my kids and not have them looking at me in shock, wondering who this happy woman is that stands before them. I want to notice every ridiculously cute thing my toddler is doing and saying. Perhaps you want this as well? This week, ask God, in his mercy, to help you to set aside the worries, the pressures, the lists and the messes so that you can delight in the joy before you.

Reflection 11

When I am going through a particularly hard suffering, any additional difficulty can feel like too much. I cry out to the Lord “Is this cancer diagnosis not enough?! How am I supposed to manage this other difficult relationship, and this child who needs help I don’t know how to provide, and oh now my mom has cancer too?! Lord it is too much!”

And it is. It is far more than I can handle on my own. Truthfully, I can’t handle any of those individual sufferings on my own. I let fear get the best of me. I try to control and manipulate. I spiral. But God doesn’t ask me to do it on my own. He says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest..for my yoke is easy and my burden light.” He says, “whoever comes to me will never hunger and whoever believes in me will never thirst.”

So again, I have to evaluate the state of my heart and my actions. Am I yoked to Him? Am I doing this alone or am I walking with Jesus? Am I coming to the internet to solve my child’s problem or am I coming to the source of wisdom Himself? Am I believing in His word-that I do not have to be afraid, that He is with me always?

I invite you this week to examine one area of suffering or difficulty that you are trying to endure or to fix on your own. Invite the Lord into it. Let Him guide you and give you the grace to carry the burden well.

Reflection 12

As a mother of young ones, my sickness has brought certain fears to the forefront. I wonder, how would my family manage if I was no longer there? Who would provide the motherly comfort, tenderness and advice if it weren't me? How could that be okay? If I let myself dive deep, I could find a worry about the most miniscule of things-like who would make sure the bathroom baseboards get cleaned and who would transition the winter clothes to summer especially during that in-between season where they need both?!

Now while these might not be your particular concerns, all of us, in our pride, actively fear what might happen if we are not in control, if we truly let God be the lead. We might worry, what if I took a job that brought in less income but afforded me more time with my family? What if I let go of this leadership role (that I'm really good at) that takes me away from a higher priority? What if I deny my child this device or activity and they become the odd kid out and resent me forever? The fears go on and on. But God does not want us to live in fear. I'm sure I'm not the first person to share with you that, in the Bible, God says some form of "Do not be afraid" or "Do not fear" three hundred and sixty-five times-one for each day of the year. How stubborn and prone to fear are we as humans, that we need this constant reminder! And yet, how many of our lives are ruled by fear?

Months ago I confessed my fears for my family to the Lord and asked Him what he thought about it. In a most gentle voice I heard, "Colleen, I love them even more than you do." In 1 John 4:18 we hear that, "perfect love casts out fear". It is God alone who can cast out our fears. It is Him alone who can bring us to a place of trust and surrender. I invite you to do that this week-in a moment of quiet, bring a fear to Him and ask Him what He has to say about it and then take Him at his word.

Reflection 13

Spring is my favorite season. There is nothing more hopeful than to watch the earth, seemingly dead, come back to life. I have never been more in awe of it than I have this year. The first day I glimpsed a butterfly, I was a bundle of excitement waiting to tell my children when they returned from school. Their eyes lit up too-completely in awe that after months of cold and snow, butterflies had returned.

In our side yard, we have been excitedly watching a mother bluejay incubate her three eggs. My sons and nephews have been finding never before noticed salamanders, tadpoles, and insects. With their help, I am relearning to be curious and to delight at the wonder of the universe and the awesomeness that is the Creator.

Things around us can feel dark, dead, hopeless...and then springtime comes once again. Since my cancer diagnosis, I can interiorly get stuck in a seemingly endless winter.

Perhaps you are in one too. But God invites us to step out of our suffering and our darkness and into His light, into His hope. The universe speaks to us of new life, of rebirth, of promises fulfilled. I invite you this week, if you find yourself stuck in a place of darkness, to spend some time outside without distractions. Go barefoot, look for birds' nests, notice the intricacies of flower petals, the uniqueness of insects, the variety of creation to delight in. Then take some time to wonder about a Creator who made all of this for us. Oh how He loves us!

Reflection 14

Summer is officially here. School is out and the days are long and unstructured. As I do each year, I long for the “best summer ever.” I want the children to run barefoot outside and be drawn into wonder and awe at the intricacies of creation. I want them to get along, to compromise, and to emotionally regulate (sometimes setting my expectations greater for them than for me!). I want to have a regular morning prayer time where they pick up their own Bible and read beside me. I want to feel well and not miss out on being with my children due to pain.

While all these desires are good, they are not my reality. I feel decent until I don't. My children fight and complain. I lose my patience. I pick up the newspaper to read instead of my Bible. We are all a work in progress. I have a long way to go on my path to sanctity, but if I seek Him, I have no doubt that His help and His grace will supply my daily bread.

This summer, the Lord is inviting me to reconsider what “best summer ever” could mean. I think He wants me to accept the daily crosses with trust and surrender. He wants me to care far more for the hearts of my children, than the sandy, sticky mess they track onto my kitchen floor. He wants me to join my children in wonder and gratitude at the gift that is each day, each breath. I think He wants that for all of us.

Reflection 15

While cancer is not a cross I would willingly choose, I have experienced many graces since being diagnosed. One of the most profound is that I have begun to comprehend the Body of Christ in a way I never had before. In 1 Corinthians 12, St. Paul teaches that though the body has many parts, we are one in Christ and that each of us has a specific purpose for the good of the whole body (the Church).

Have you ever considered that God has chosen YOU to be here in this specific time, in this specific community, to love others in a way that only you can? It is easy to look at others' gifts and find we do not measure up, but St. Paul exhorts us that the whole body cannot function as it should unless all parts are present and active.

My family has been loved and carried through this difficult time because of the activation of the unique gifts of our local Body of Christ. For example: there are those who bring meals, those who provide rides for our children, those who come to pray and those who pray faithfully from afar, those who offer up their own suffering that I might be healed, those who hold hope when I cannot, those who bring the fun so I can forget cancer for a while, those who take children for playdates, those who help me shower and find clothes that fit, those who pick out and deliver books for me to read, those who run errands, those who help my parents and siblings (because my parents and siblings are helping me), those who travel long distances to help and visit, those who send gifts, those who bring the Sacraments, those who provide spiritual direction, those who give the best hugs, those who drive me to appointments, those who bring me to tears each time I see them because of the greatness of their love. And this list goes on and on.

We all have a mission of love-what an exciting opportunity that is! Take some time this week to consider how you can build up those around you with the gifts God has given you. Something that seems small to you, might be just what is needed.