

Chicken of the Sea

Theodora Ranelli

Sometimes I feel like the Jessica Simpson of Catholicism. Here's Jessica Simpson on *Newlyweds* in 2003:

Simpson: Is this chicken what I have, or is this fish? I know it's tuna, but it says Chicken ... by the sea. Is that stupid?

Simpson: *What?* Don't make fun of me right now. I'm not in the mood.

Lachey: You act like you've never had tuna before.

Simpson: I've had tuna fish, like, sandwiches and stuff, like this.

Lachey: Baby, you and I have eaten tuna like this before.

Simpson: Why is it called "Chicken by the Sea" or "in the Sea"?

Lachey: "Chicken *of* the Sea" is the brand.

Simpson: Oh.

Lachey: You know, 'cause a lot of people eat tuna, it's like a lot of people eat chicken? So it's like the chicken of the sea.

Simpson: Oh. I understand now. I read it wrong.

When people who aren't Catholic ask me questions like What is the Trinity, or What is the Rosary, or What do Catholics do on Sundays, or What is the Eucharist? Or how can Jesus be God? And what's with the Holy Spirit? – I can sympathize a bit, because I really don't know how to explain those things. I'm not sure I understand those things. Even though I'm not sure how much I believe in the Trinity, I tend to pull it over me like a big, comfy

blanket and revel in the mystery. I feel comfortable in my discrepancies regarding the Eucharist – see, it's God in the Eucharist, and it's Jesus' actual body and blood, but Jesus is not God in my mind, so whaaat – it's God through Jesus, see?

A spiritual advisor (who is a Muslim convert, by the way) was telling me that I should greet God as soon as I open my eyes. And I said, I don't do that, but I thank God in other ways when I get out of bed. And she said, you know, it's o.k. to be honest about your spiritual practice, because the struggles you face on your journey are things that tons of other people face, too. So it's part of affirming that we're not perfect people, a lot of us are stumbling toward some sort of better communion with God. O.k., in all honesty, then – the mornings are reserved for me waking up and going coffeecoffeecoffee. And she says, but you can attempt now. And it's a long process, it's o.k., you know, if you don't figure it out right away. Prayer is personal and complicated.

I cannot understand God. I can understand God in the way God pulls at my jugular vein, or that everywhere I turn there is the face of God, or that God undresses my beautiful body with [God's] eyes – but everything I know about God is a drop in the ocean. And boy, everything I know about Catholicism is a nail on my finger compared to the rest of the hand. And no matter how many degrees in Theology we have, no matter how much church experience, no matter how many books we all have read – we are all stumbling on our way to understanding. After all, interpreting the Quran has many layers to it – each verse, I've heard, can be read on 28 levels (I've also heard some seven levels, of which each has seven levels) – this is according to another Sufi friend. I've also heard that each letter contains over a thousand meanings.

I'm not ashamed to say that I've mistaken Chicken of the Sea for actual Chicken! You've all done it and we will all do it again. It is those little tremors that I love, those – where I see some sort of glimmer through the confusion. But then again, isn't that a blessed state to be in? A state of bewilderment, where you are open and wild? Here's to being utterly bewildered and continuing on our journeys!

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