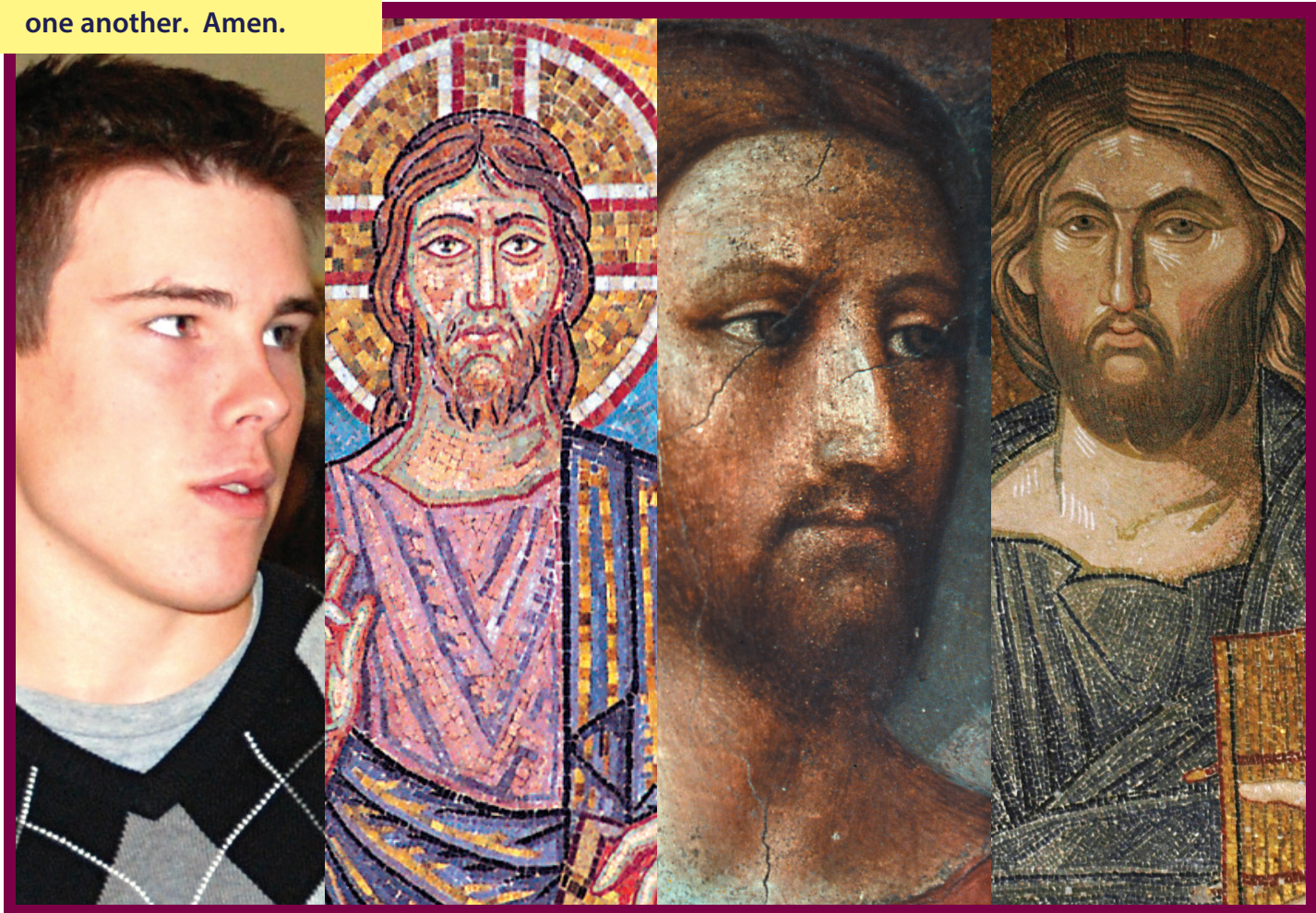




# SPiRIT

**PRAY** Loving God, you call each of us by name to belong to you, Father, Son, and Spirit, who live as a community of three in one love. Help us live out our baptismal call in love and service to one another. Amen.



## Who is Jesus and what's he up to?

### SUNDAY GOSPEL

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Jesus is God's Chosen One.

**NARRATOR:** John the Baptist was preaching to people near the Jordan River when he caught sight of Jesus coming toward him.

**JOHN:** Look there! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! It is he of whom I said, "After me is to come a man who ranks ahead of me, because he was before me." I confess I did not recognize him, though the very reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.

**NARRATOR:** John also gave this testimony.

**JOHN:** I saw the Spirit descend like a dove from the sky, and come to rest on him. But, as I say, I did not recognize him. The one who sent me to baptize with water told me, "When you see the Spirit descend and rest on someone, it is he who is to baptize with the Holy Spirit." Now I have seen for myself and have testified, "This is God's chosen One."

John 1.29-34



# A Dakota LEGEND

The Creator gathered all of creation and said, "I want to hide something from the humans until they are ready for it. It is the realization that they create their own reality."



The eagle said, "Give it to me, I will take it to the moon."

The Creator said, "No. One day they will go there and find it."

The salmon said, "I will hide it on the bottom of the ocean."

The Creator replied, "No. They will go there, too."



The buffalo said, "I will bury it on the great plains."

The Creator said, "They will cut into the skin of the earth and find it even there."

Then Grandmother Mole, who lives in the breast of Mother Earth and who has no physical eyes but sees with spiritual eyes, said, "Put it inside of them."



And the Creator said, "It is done."

istockphoto

# Wind FROM AN eagle's WINGS



Kristan Staub



by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

**A**t 15, Kristan Staub, along with three generations of his family, took part in the Ontario Native Kateri Conference. This conference gathered Canadian Cree, Ojibwe, and Mohawk Catholics to speak their dreams and visions of a Church that integrates Native spiritual traditions in its rites and prayers.

The conference takes its name from Kateri Tekakwitha, a young Mohawk woman who is the first person born in North America whom the Catholic Church has officially proclaimed canonized and recognized for her holy life. She is Native and Catholic, a patroness for the future.

Native elders grew up in a church that was Roman Catholic, not Native Catholic. However, the Second Vatican Council urged bishops and priests to appreciate and foster the spiritual symbols and gifts of all races and peoples and use them in worship.

One of the Native spiritual traditions, both a place and a spiritual process of discernment and healing, is the sweat lodge. A sweat lodge

is like a prayer meeting in a sauna. Traditionally it is made by ritually building a low lodge framework, covering it with blankets and tarps, and placing rocks around the bottom to enclose the space tightly.

A lodge keeper builds a fire outside and heats rocks. To create the sweat, the lodge keeper brings the hot rocks inside and pours water over them. In Native tradition the sweat is prayer as well as cleansing heat. The lodge is like the womb of Mother Earth. The experience is a spiritual rebirth like baptism.

At this conference Kristan Staub experienced his first sweat lodge. He tells about the experience.

*Each person who runs a sweat lodge has different ways. Last night they brought in seven stones for the seven directions (north, east, south, west, up, down, in) and we blessed the stones and welcomed them, saying, "Hello Grandfather, welcome Grandfather." They put water on the stones and prayed. They brought in two more stones and prayed again.*

*We had a break, drank some water, and*

just rested for a while. The drum was constantly beating, like a heartbeat; I felt it inside. It was dark. The only light we had was a glow from the rocks.

We entered for a second sweat, prayed again, and they brought in four more stones. There are 23 rocks that are essential to the sweat. A man who had been in many sweats told me that if an animal comes in, a bear or an eagle or something, not to be scared of it. "You won't see it come in and you won't see it leave, but it will be there," he said. "Just don't be frightened or panic."

After the break from the second session, we went into a third. The water on the rocks created a great steam. I put my towel over my face so that I could breathe, and I heard what seemed like a flapping noise. An eagle was above us, flying around. I could see how big he was, yet he fit in the lodge. And every time he flew by, I could feel the wind from its wings. I felt goosebumps go across my body, but they were from the inside, not the outside. The drum was beating all the time. I could feel it in my body.

After we came outside, I could still feel the pulsing. I felt greatly relieved like my prayers had been answered. I just lay down outside. I could feel beating in the ground. It just kept beating. I was thanking Grandfather...thanking the Great Spirit. It was a great experience.

## QUESTIONS

- 1 What was great about Kristan's initiation into the sweat lodge?
- 2 What has your experience of intense, physical exertion been?
- 3 In what other activities have you experienced what Erica describes?
- 4 What does the gospel imagery tell you about Jesus' identity and mission? What is Jesus up to in his ministry?



by Erica Dombro

**W**hen I run, I pray. In the process of exerting myself, I put myself out there for God to take hold of. God loves life and when I use my body or my talents to their full potential, I can feel that God loves me. Each minute of a race is the product of a massive buildup. In a race, I put everything on the line and use it all.

At the beginning. On the blocks, my muscles strain for the sharp crack of the gun. I chase the blurred forms of my competition, existing in my periphery. Eyes focus on the path. Pushing it all out on that final stretch. One foot in front of the other, dragging my legs through the air. Using what I was given to achieve that final destination. That line that signals the end.

Every race is a gift. Training for it. Running it. The result of it. After, there is complete and utter emptiness. Exhaustion. I quake in the void, concentrating on breathing. In and out. In, out. Hands on knees. Limbs leaden and sinking, but quickly filling with air to bounce. Vulnerable, reaching out to embrace those who supported me. High fives. Rain, running down my face. Chills. Something inside eases open and the nirvana comes. Adrenalin, pumping, shoving in my head. Quivering in the soar.

This extreme happiness and contentment can really only come from one place. In joy and relief, I soak up my surroundings and enjoy them. Even though I am working my flesh and blood, in that moment I realize that I am part of something bigger and more important than my life. It is odd how living does this. In these moments, I learn that I am loved and, in turn, learn to love. Using what I was given and being genuinely happy is just as true as saying an *Our Father*.

Bouncing. Smiles.

**The author won the state championship in the 400-meter dash her first year in high school.**





# Experiencing the mystery of God

**W**e humans have the capacity of mind and heart to get outside and beyond ourselves, even to experience transcendent God moments, natural highs. To transcend is to pass beyond a human limit, to rise above or across.

Often we feel locked inside our own skins and drama, feeling alone and isolated. We are made for connecting with others and with God. A new friend can make us forget ourselves and throw ourselves into getting to know him or her. This happens when people fall in love. We are social beings. Others call us beyond the confines of our egos.

The drug Ecstasy is named for producing feelings of euphoria and closeness—an unnatural high. Nature, friends, silence, celebrations, music can give us natural highs.



Ecstasy literally means to be carried away. The *ec* comes from the Greek syllable *ek*, which mean *out*. The second part of the word *ectasy* comes from the Greek word *stasis*, which means *the place where one stands*. Ecstasy happens when an experience carries us beyond our own place.

Mary Magdalene and the women who find Jesus' tomb empty three days after he is crucified and buried leave the tomb trembling and ecstatic—utterly amazed. The experience carries them out of themselves, beyond their wildest expectations (Mark 16.7-8).

**C**hristians believe God creates us out of love and calls us into communion in love with each other and with Father, Son, and Spirit. Our capacity to experience the mystery of God is like a seed of the eternal in us. All of us have God moments to treasure.

In our human evolution religions have developed rituals and practices that help people discover their capacities of mind and heart to go beyond themselves. How do we awaken to the holy in our midst and to our oneness with all that is? What practices appeal?

The order and beauty of the created world call us beyond ourselves to God.

Our friends call us beyond our limits and fears.

Our longings for a better, safer, more loving world testify to our openness to more and ultimately to sacred mystery.

In "Wind from an Eagle's Wings," Kristan Staub discovers the power of the Native American sweat lodge as a way to experience the Spirit present in his cultural community.

Runner Erica Dombro experiences going beyond herself in running alone and in putting herself and all her athletic ability on the line in a race. She soars and experiences giving herself.

**The desire for God is written in the human heart.**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church #27*

"Music goes beyond the reach of words," writes Karen Armstrong in her book *The Case for God*. Hearing a piece of music can stir within us the same feelings the musician and composer felt in creating the piece.

Putting all my ability on the line in a race or a game or a contest can carry me beyond myself. I become part of something bigger when winning for the team. Playing a game can pull us beyond the skills we practice into performing as a team in a ways none of us knew we could. Giving of ourselves totally reveals how much we care about teammates and common causes. We open ourselves to they mystery of God in those self-giving moments.

In Sunday's gospel John the Baptist testifies that Jesus is God's chosen one, the one he has prepared people for. A soaring bird symbolizes the Spirit of God that fills Jesus for the mission he is beginning. His words and actions are God moments to treasure and imitate.

## FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Record in a journal an experience of going beyond yourself whenever it happens. Tell a friend about a God moment in your experience.
- 2 Practice an action that challenges you to go beyond yourself.
- 3 Spend an hour alone frequently.
- 4 Find a service project that challenges you to be compassionate.