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## Only in God is my Soul at Rest

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## Only in God is my Soul at Rest

### Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"My 11 year old son has Tourette's syndrome; an obsessive compulsive disorder; and a germ phobia. He stutters. And periodically has panic attacks. He can be explosive; and destructive. He's afraid to go to school; and to Church. He feels lonely; and depressed. He wonders why all this had to happen to him, and he sometimes wishes he wasn't alive."

*From Our Guest Writers*



*Michael Lynch, Ph.D.  
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## **Only in God is my Soul at Rest**

Great are you O Lord, and greatly to be praised ...  
And man desires to praise you, for he is part of your creation.  
For you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.  
*St. Augustine*

My 11 year old son has Tourette's syndrome; an obsessive compulsive disorder; and a germ phobia. He stutters. And periodically has panic attacks. He can be explosive; and destructive. He's afraid to go to school; and to Church. He feels lonely; and depressed. He wonders why all this had to happen to him, and he sometimes wishes he wasn't alive.

And then we both cry.

When he was born, he was perfect – such a beautiful boy. Although he was our second child, he was our first-born son, and we were very proud. My early memories of him are all very happy. He was always very affectionate and loving. He woke up happy ... and stayed happy throughout the day. Life was very good.

By age five, he started developing some “tics” that were soon diagnosed as Tourette's syndrome. From that time on, his life got progressively harder. He started getting anxious, especially about the thought of getting sick. His fears and anxieties gradually took more and more control of him. In 4<sup>th</sup> grade, he started having panic attacks. By 5<sup>th</sup> grade, it was hard for him to go to school. And now that he is in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, he essentially is incapacitated. He hasn't been to school in almost six months. He misses his friends. He misses learning new things. He wants to go to school ... but he can't. And recognizing his inability to do the things that kids his age do – the things he wants to do – makes him feel hopeless and depressed.

We have our happy moments, but they are fleeting. Most of our lives revolve around my son's intense and draining needs. It's very hard for our whole family, but mostly it's hard for my son.

He wonders "why him". I tell him that I don't know. I try to explain the mystery of suffering ... suggesting that God has allowed this in order to bring about some greater good. I remind him that Jesus himself suffered greatly, and as a result He perfectly understands our suffering. I encourage him to use his times of suffering as an opportunity to unite with Jesus. I truly believe all of this – but I'm an adult. It's hard for an 11 year old boy to fully comprehend and embrace these things, especially when you're the one that's suffering.

Other times he reflects on his struggles, and acknowledges that his suffering gives him some insight into the challenges that other people face. He is a remarkably compassionate boy. He often is moved to tears when commercials come on TV trying to raise money for poor and hungry children. Many times he has pooled together his small pot of money and deposited it in the "poor box" at our parish. He occasionally will say that when he grows up, he may want to help other people who are going through the things he has gone through ... maybe as a counselor ... or as a priest. But usually he says he wants to design video games when he grows up. He is an 11 year old boy after all.

And sometimes he asks questions about Heaven. Mainly he asks if he will be completely healed when he gets to Heaven. I say yes, and he seems hopeful and smiles. I'm glad that he can experience hope. But this line of questioning also makes me a little worried.

Day to day life for my son is very hard. Each day is filled with battles and struggles – about big issues and small. I routinely have to encourage him not to give up. One night when he was only about nine years old, I gave him a pep talk after an especially difficult day. I pleaded with him, saying "You can't give up. If you want to get better, you have to keep working hard." And he burst into tears, saying "But I'm only a kid."

Despite all the difficulties we face, I am aware of God's presence, even during the most trying times. I believe that God does not give us more than we can handle. So when He gives us a lot to handle, it must mean that He is with us more than ever. I find this very comforting. Often on my drive to work I reflect on how we are surviving through all of this. I know it's not because of any skill or virtue on my part. But we get through each day, and we all still love each other. I am very, very grateful.

The challenges we face surrounding my son's very real and very sad problems have made me more aware of the suffering of others. So many people experience heart break and tragedy every day – from the sudden loss of a loved one, to the gradual dissolution of a family. I would not trade our lives for anyone else's. I love my wife, and I love my children. God has given us to each other and kept us intact. Thank you, Jesus, for this great gift and consolation. The love we have for each other gives us the strength to persevere, and we can bear anything with your grace. In you we find great comfort, peace, and rest.