

# An Interview with James H. Kurt

October 2008 Featured Author

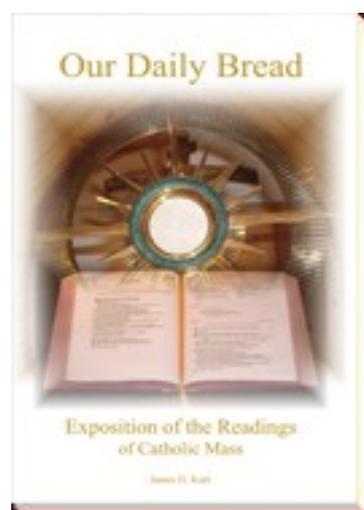
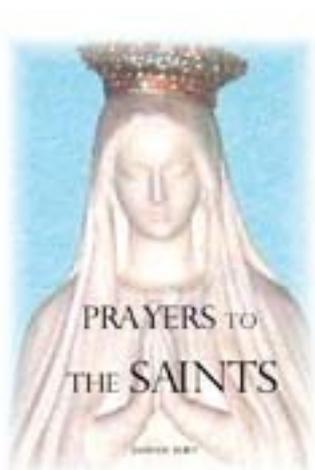
at

Time with Tannia

( <http://timewithtannia.tripod.com> )

By:

TANNIA E. ORTIZ-LOPES



## 1) **Tell us about yourself**

I am a cradle Catholic born in Jersey City, New Jersey, where I still live. I wandered away from the Church in my late teens but returned to the faith after college. It was at the time of my reversion that I began to take my writing seriously and devoted it entirely to the Lord. So for the better part of the last twenty-five years I've been praying and writing and doing a little teaching to help support myself. I got married a few years ago and so now my wife and I share our spiritual life together.

## 2) **In your desire to purify yourself and become a proper vessel for the Holy Spirit and a worthy servant of Christ, you underwent some soul searching to the point of living as a hermit and considering life as a monk. What events in your life led you to walk that road and how did you benefit from those experiences?**

After college I finally woke up from a rather dissolute life not unlike that of St. Augustine. The death of my little sister and realization of how my sins affected others, as well as my own soul, served as the catalyst for the change. This 'awakening' brought many tears over a two-year period.

It also brought a strong commitment to the practice of artwork, eventually focussed on writing, the pursuit of which led me to give up all other work for several years, living much as a monk in my parents' house. In fact, I sold all my possessions, including records and books (except for a Bible and a dictionary), and paired down my clothing to a single set of clothes. I was trying to really live the Gospel call to renounce all for the sake of the kingdom, which, I realized, is all that really matters, and found such sacrifice quite liberating.

**3) Who is James H. Kurt? On several of your books the "About the Author" description changes. First you describe yourself as a hermit, a monk, a graduate student, a convict, and finally as a married hermit. Do all these descriptions of you define a process of growth? Please share your story with our readers.**

I think my life for most of the last twenty-five years could be termed "hermit in the city", though certainly there has been a progressive intensity. Though perhaps the first couple of years were the most radical, my commitment to the Church is much greater now and increasingly so... and obviously marriage constitutes a change, perhaps a fulfillment. Also, after taking up teaching seven years in, I gradually reduced the number of hours spent in this pursuit, to the point where for the last several years I have taught only a five-hour course on Saturdays.

**4) How do you balance your spiritual and your married life?**

Well, the fact that my wife was running along a parallel track when we married helps a lot. If I was much like a monk, she was much like a nun. We married much later in life, so though that presents problems of being set in one's ways, we also made our ways known clearly to each other before marriage, and found our ways much in line - we both rest very much on the Lord for all, and so He is our firm foundation, and really our all. Actually, I would say that my marriage has improved if not perfected my spiritual life because it has balanced the rigor I have known all along with a more genuine love. Both of these are needed for a truly religious life. Of course, it is still a marriage, and so not without its challenges... but these, too, serve the perfecting of one's spiritual life. They are a call to love more deeply.

**5) Once a week you change your hat from mystical writer to an adjunct ESL (English as Second Language) instructor for a local university. Why did you choose to become an ESL instructor? How has this job helped you have a better understanding of the Word and prepare you to share it with others?**

I didn't really choose it; I suppose it chose me. As mentioned, I started teaching to help support myself. I began with tutoring in college, and ESL students were the ones to whom I was assigned. I later got my Master's so I could teach as an adjunct on the university level, for which the pay is better (and so my opportunity to work fewer hours). But teaching English, particularly writing, certainly has helped my writing, first of all. It has helped me to know the language, which is obviously a necessity for a writer. I write without revision and that comes principally from trust in the Holy Spirit, but it also important to know one's craft, of course. Also, my students and I often get into discussions. They find out quickly who I am and what I believe. I am always careful to respect everyone's beliefs (I may have students from any number of cultural and religious backgrounds), but I do manage to witness to the Word, as I say, to the love of God and His ways - which, most of my students tend to recognize as truth. So it is a kind of evangelization primer.

6) **Your book *Silence in the City* is a reflection on the saying: "Listening to the sound of silence." What inspired this book and how can the reader benefit from its message?**

The book is "simple yet profound", as one writer friend has said. The poems are just short contemplative pieces, each capturing a moment of silence (the silence of God) in city life. I suppose it is a good expression of what has come to be the heart of my spirituality, that is, speaking the Divine NAME of God - YHWH. I understand this to be a silent Word, a Word that silences the tongue and leaves one in stillness and peace, much like the "still, small voice" spoken of in Scripture (to Elijah). When this NAME is upon one's soul, one is simply in awe, a silent awe, as a child before the Lord. And so silence in the city is a recording of those moments when the Lord's silence fell upon me, a description of the circumstances of its occurrence, in order to evoke that silence in the reader's heart. I would hope it would help to bring people into the presence of God. I have found it particularly beneficial while adoring the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

7) **In the summary of your book, *Songs for Children of Light: Ten Albums of Lyrics*, you explained the lyrics were "oriented toward the composition of a film script, whose purpose was to depict, abstractly, scenes common to the lives of all mankind – from birth to death." Did you reach your goal? If not, how did you redirect the final goal to get the message to the general public?**

Actually, the lyrics came later. The film was to be silent. After orienting all the notes I was taking toward a film script for two years, suddenly these song lyrics came pouring out of me. I had never really written a song before, but now I couldn't stop. I had to stop myself, to limit myself to two or three a day for a month or so... it was a very overwhelming experience. I then put simple, original music to the ten albums of lyrics that had developed; that was followed by four tracks of dance for two people (a man and a woman) and, finally, stages and stage action for each album. All of this work was quite inspired and I think very creative. Unfortunately, much of it has still gone unproduced. The dance and drama entirely. I've published the lyrics, but not many copies have sold. I played all the songs in one day - about 15 hours in a church before the tabernacle - and I do use the basic guitar track (there are 24 tracks altogether) to accompany the BreadCast podcasts... but that's about all the publication this seven-year project has known. To answer your question: I think the movement of the ten albums does fulfill the original intent. I kept this concept even as the medium changed.

8) ***Turn of the Jubilee Year : A) Christmas in Medugorje 2000! B) Five Days in the Desert C) Morning* is a description of your pilgrimage to Medugorje at the end of a Holy Year. Do you recommend this pilgrimage to readers who are looking for ways to develop a closer relationship with Christ? What are the spiritual tolls of such disciplinary exercise? What are the challenges and how can they be overcome? Share your insight and the birth of the book with our readers.**

As Pope John Paul II said: "Ahh, Medugorje." Every time I have gone I have not wanted to leave. One finds oneself on the edge of heaven; the presence of Our Lady and the Holy Spirit is palpable. I would recommend the pilgrimage to everyone, bar none. No one goes there without being changed. And I have seen children and the elderly and even the blind climbing the hill and mountain. No one should fear! Ahh what peace is there - my eyes tear as I think of it. My wife and I spent our honeymoon there. If you are blessed with suffering, you will find joy. The book describes principally a pilgrimage wherein it rained every day - and a miracle occurred morning, noon, and night. As in every pilgrimage the Lord is close, and His presence He makes known, if we keep our eyes open. But ahhh, Medugorje! Actually, only the first part (about half) of the book is

about Medugorje. Generally it is about vocation search there and to a couple of hermitages.

9) **What is your target audience for your book, *Our Daily Bread: Exposition of the Readings of Catholic Mass*? Were the meditations based on personal experiences or were they inspired?**

Well, I dedicated it to daily communicants and all who hunger for the Word of God. I suppose one would not have to attend Mass every day to be interested in it, perhaps just want to do so (and who in their right mind would not want to meet the Lord God so really every day!) There are no personal experiences related; I have tried simply to reflect, or expose, the readings themselves. So the entire focus is on the Word of God. It is the book that has sold the best. It has gotten very good reviews. I suppose the best recommendation is that Cardinal George bought 40 copies. I read it myself every day, as if I hadn't written it, which, in a very real sense is true - I gave the writing over entirely to the Spirit.

10) **Your book *Prayers to the Saints* is a beautiful collection of poems/prayers dedicated to the holy ones of the Church. Is this book intended to be used as a stand alone or as a companion of your book, *Our Daily Bread*? Tell us about this book.**

Either way, I suppose. It serves as a kind of companion because it covers all the saints on the liturgical calendar for the United States, and so could be used as an almost daily devotional, much like *Our Daily Bread*. But one could certainly read one without the other, as there is no direct correlation between the two.

11) **Podcasting is another means authors are using to promote their work. Based on your experience, what are some of the advantages and disadvantages of podcasting? Tell us about your podcast, *The BreadCast*. (<http://hermitinthecity.libsyn.com/>)**

Podcasting is an inexpensive, rather easy, and generally well available way of spreading the Word. I have used it to put both *Our Daily Bread* and *Prayers to the Saints* into spoken form: I just read the passages for the day and send them out into cyberspace. The Sunday and Feast days for *Our Daily Bread* are produced with music, but the daily ones are just the reading, as is *Prayers*. The potential is there to reach a good number of people; I can't say that I have one of the larger audiences in Catholic podcasting. That becomes a little disappointing because I do spend a fair amount of time on it, since I am posting something every day, usually twice a day. So I'm podcasting a lot, but don't really have the audience to match. But those who do listen have offered good encouragement. And hope springs eternal! (If anyone needs further info about podcasting, he might consult *Disciples with Microphones*, a Catholic podcasting group of which I am a member.)

12) **Do you have a website where our readers can contact you?**

[writingsofjameskurt.org](http://writingsofjameskurt.org) All my writings are there.

13) **Are you working on new projects?**

I just published YHWH: Order of the Divine NAME, which I had been trying to complete for about four years. It is not really intended for sale, though it is available; I hope to use it to promote devotion of the Divine NAME and hopefully to find interest in founding a kind of order on the NAME. I have sent out forty copies or so to bishops, priests, and other devout souls, including founders of religious movements, seeking prayerful reaction and perhaps acceptance and guidance... a place where the ideas within it might find a place to flower. It seems to me the world greatly needs to know the silence of God; and it amazes me that I have not read the interpretation of the NAME I offer here. It seems to remain but an enigma to all; though the Lord gave His NAME to Moses to be remembered for all generations, it seems to have been quite universally forgotten. So there may be some significance to this book beyond that of the others.

14) **A word of advice for new writers...**

Two things: trust in the Spirit, and write. One cannot be a writer if one doesn't write, and one's writing is not worth much if it is not guided by the Lord.



**Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopés**, author of *The Window To My Soul; My Walk With Jesus* (ISBN 0975393359; 2004 Tate Publishing; [www.tatepublishing.com](http://www.tatepublishing.com)).

Author's websites: <http://timewithtannia.tripod.com>, [www.shoutlife.com/tanniaortizlopes](http://www.shoutlife.com/tanniaortizlopes), <http://www.myspace.com/tanniaortizlopes>, <http://www.myspace.com/tanniaortizlopesmusic>

The author also has a blog at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Copyrighted September, 2008, Tannia E. Ortiz-Lopes – All Rights Reserved