

GOD & I: Jim Sano

*A member of the American Catholic Writer's Guild,
Jim tells us about his three novels, and the faith
that drives him*

By Mario Conte, OFM Conv.

YOU have written three Catholic novels so far. What qualities are most necessary for a good writer?



That is a great question. I can speak from my own experience as a Catholic novelist. First of all, I think it is necessary to know who your intended audience is, and what your story objective is. Jesus very effectively taught great wisdom and truth through intriguing and relatable stories, and what better model is there to imitate?

When I started writing I didn't know how hard it would be, but I have felt the Holy Spirit guiding my pen in writing my three novels. Once the Holy Spirit started inspiring and guiding me, writing became an enjoyable experience as I felt His presence in making each story unfold.

Another quality is persistence. Writers often have to be patient and persistent with letting their stories unfold, with the editing process to continually improve the quality of their storytelling and writing, and in the process of finding a publisher who believes in your work. I've been

Two of Jim Sano's novels have earned him the Catholic Writers Guild's Seal of Approval Award for editorial integrity and faithfulness to Catholic teaching

incredibly fortunate to be working with Ellen Hrkach from Full Quiver Publishing.

A third quality is prayer. Catholic writer Michael O'Brien, whom you interviewed in this year's March issue, once advised me to never forget prayer during this process. After writing my first novel I couldn't find anyone willing to publish it, but I prayed to Our Lady, and sure enough, a publisher came forward soon after. Mary is certainly behind the publication of my novels.

Your first novel, *The Father's Son*, was the recipient of the Catholic Writer's Guild Seal of Approval Award for editorial integrity and faithfulness to Catholic teaching. Could you explain to our readers what makes a good Catholic novel?

I would say a good Catholic novel has good storytelling and relatable characters that help spread the Good News. In *The Father's Son*, the main character is a very successful person. He's got everything going for him, but something is missing in his life because of a childhood trauma that has kept him from having close relationships. It is an unexpected friendship that brings him on a journey from brokenness to truth and wholeness. The story must be strong and interesting enough to captivate the reader's attention and create a connection with the characters they journey with to realize the meaning and purpose of their lives, and their ability to love, forgive, and live the life God intended for them.

Talking about *The Father's Son*, a critic said, "There are a lot of Catholic books written for women, but this particular novel really speaks to the heart of men!" Had you really intended to address the male half of humanity in that book?

I wanted a story that would ap-

peal to both women and men. Since men tend to read non-fiction, I did want to make sure that these novels were relatable, thought-provoking, fun, and intriguing enough for a male reader, as well.

The Father's Son focuses on the journey of the main character, David Kelly, who hasn't been able to face the pain and truth of his past, and to find out what it means to be an authentic man in God's eyes. The story does have enough sports, crime, pub debates, humor, and unpredictable twists that will keep a male reader's interest alive, while strong themes of love, relationships, family, forgiveness and faith will appeal to both male and female readers. It's been moving and humbling to hear back from male and female readers alike; they have told me how much this book has changed their lives in a powerful and positive way.

Your second book of the series, *Gus Busbi*, tells a touching story interwoven with memorable characters that confront many of today's social and cultural issues. The main character is still Father Tom Fitzpatrick, to whom the whole series is dedicated. For this extraor-



BORN IN 1957 near Boston, Jim Sano hails from an Irish/Italian family. Jim is a husband, father and a life-long Catholic. He has worked as a teacher, consultant, and businessman.

Jim holds degrees from Boston College and Bentley University and is currently attending Franciscan University for a Master's degree in Catechesis and Evangelization. He has also attended certificate programs at The Theological Institute for the New Evangelization at St. John's Seminary and the Apologetics Academy.

Jim is a member of the Catholic Writer's Guild, and has so far written three novels; *The Father's Son* (2019), *Gus Busbi* (2020), both of which have won the Catholic Writers Guild's Seal of Approval Award for editorial integrity and faithfulness to Catholic teaching, and his newly-released novel titled, *Stolen Blessing*.

Jim resides in Medfield, Massachusetts, with his wife, Joanne, and he has two daughters, Emily and Megan.



inary fictional man, were you inspired by a priest you met?

Father Tom is a great character and favorite of many readers. I was inspired by a combination of the characters seen in novels, films, and real life. I wanted to create a priest who was a very approachable, wise, and pastoral priest, one who meets people where they are in life and establishes a relationship of friendship and trust with them. Father Tom fosters the lost art of friendship, soliciting their curiosity and trust as they take a life-changing journey with him. This priest models the powerful nature of being an intentional disciple of Christ, someone who moves people forward through personal example and conversation.

What can you tell us about your third novel in the Father Tom series, *Stolen Blessing*, which has just been published?

With wife Joanne; Jim has sensed the Holy Spirit in guiding him to marry his beautiful wife, who is also his best friend

The story is about a couple who have a good life in Boston and finally have the baby they've longed for. Then the unimaginable happens - Elizabeth goes missing the day after her baptism at St. Francis' Parish. Father Tom and Angelo are pulled in to help solve the mystery of her disappearance in a race against time and the complicated dynamics of the relationships involved. This modern retelling of the story of Esau and Jacob is a story that offers suspense, mystery, intrigue, and a journey of love, redemption, family, and forgiveness.

Are you thinking of continuing with the series or of changing?

I go where the Holy Spirit leads me, but the next novel will be a timely story that takes place on the border of Mexico and Texas, and the first without Father Tom as a main character. I do have many people asking me to continue with the Father Tom series, and I am sure there will be more. I really enjoy the different story possibilities that can take place within Father Tom's parish neighborhood.

Interview

With wife Joanne and, from left, daughters Emily and Megan



One of the words most used in all the languages of the world is 'love'. What does this word mean to you?

I've come to understand and appreciate what love really is more and more as I've lived and grown in my faith. The Trinity certainly models a community of oneness and self-giving love. I think that love is not a feeling, but that it means truly willing the good of others, not for what they can do for you, but actively wanting the best for them. Father Tom exemplifies that type of selfless love Jesus gave to us.

Growing up, I remember realizing how much relationships were what life was all about; our relationship with God, with ourselves, and with others – all built on love.

Who was the most influential person in your life?

I was blessed with a wonderful family of two brothers, two sisters, and a good father, but without a doubt, the most influential person in my life was my mother. She was Irish and had a very strong faith. She never worried about things; she was always focused on the people around her despite coming down with multiple sclerosis and being bedridden for 25 years. Her example during those years was an inspiring time for me; she never complained,

and she always had a smile for everyone. She used to say, "This is not what I expected, but God has a plan for me." She knew she was going to heaven, and I believe she did.

How would you define God?

For me, God is not just a power, but a person. Since I was young, I've always had conversations with Him, so it's natural for me to think of Him from a relationship standpoint. I see the Holy Trinity as a community of love, and it is Jesus, love incarnate, who revealed to us the true nature of God, which is love and mercy. God is always there waiting for us to accept His invitation of love and to turn away from sin. He is the source of our meaning and purpose in life.

There is a rose window on the cover of *The Father's Son*, showing that life only makes sense when we put God at the center.

What was the most painful moment in your life?

Watching my mother's demise was difficult, but she made it easy on us. In college, I had a very good

friend who battled severe depression, and she ended up taking her life. We were very close, but I felt helpless in trying to help her. Elements of her story are woven into *The Father's Son*. She grew up in a Catholic family, and I pray for her to be with God.

In those painful moments in your life, did it seem that God was with you or did He seem distant?

I've always felt God close to me; rather it is me who has drifted away from God at times. He has been a source of strength and grace when times are difficult, and I find strength in all the three persons of the Trinity. I've had a strong sense of the Holy Spirit since my confirmation, in guiding me to marry my beautiful wife and best friend, Joanne, and most recently in my writing. God is right there, all the time.

One of the best loved saints of the Catholic Church is St. Anthony of Padua, whose feast we are celebrating on the 13th of this month. What is your opinion of this great man?

Being of Italian heritage, I've grown up praying to St. Anthony, who is a prominent saint in the US. Despite the difficulties he may have faced along the way, I love his courage and commitment to his faith. He trusted in God's love and plans for him, and was always concerned for the needs of others. St. Anthony of Padua's life is a model for every Christian. ♦

