

Reader reviews of *Hunting for God. Fishing for the Lord..*
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When I first read the title to the book "*Hunting for God, Fishing for the Lord,*" I thought of my husband -my great outdoorsman! But this book is so much more than a hunting and fishing book, there are no secret techniques in here. It's another way that God communicates through nature and Fr. Classen puts it on a level that communicates well with any outdoorsman or their wives!

I'm not an outdoorswoman, I fished with my husband a few times and I sat in the tent in the woods during muzzleloading season. But during the time spent in the tent it was cold, we HAD to be quiet and we HAD to be patient... for hours. It's really no wonder why my husband loves the woods. It's so far away from the busy non stop of work. Fr. Classen put this love of hunting and fishing into perspective for me as a wife of an outdoorsman.

It was nice to read a book that brings you closer to God in a hunting/fishing perspective. God works in all different ways to bring us closer to him; I never gave hunting and fishing a thought before this book!

Occasionally, when I'm looking for a book to review I try to choose one that is outside my comfort-zone, that discusses a topic for which I'm, at best, vaguely familiar. *Hunting for God, Fishing for the Lord: Encountering the Sacred in the Great Outdoors* is just such a book – I don't fish (either regular or fly-fishing) and I've never been hunting (either with a bow or a rifle). With a bit of skepticism, I wanted to see how a parish priest could help me "encounter the sacred in the great outdoors".

Superficially, Father Classen's book is a real "guy book." As a matter of fact, I chose to review it because I thought one of my brothers, in-laws or friends might enjoy the book. I thought of my husband and how he loves the outdoors: especially camping and hiking. This book is full of hunting and fishing stories, including the trite "one that got away" stories, with lots of helpful suggestions of how to catch those trophies.

But that's just superficially.

This is a great book about fully experiencing God's creation by doing not just watching. This book, in fact, is almost a companion to the one I wrote on creativity: my *In His Image: Nurturing Creativity in the Heart of Your Home* stresses the need to imitate the creator by nurturing creativity in the heart of the home so that we can fully experience His love and care for us; Fr. Classen's book stresses the need to exist actively in God's creation to fully experience His love for us. Both books stress the need to DO as a way to

BE, a way to exist, rather than just passively accepting God's gift of creation.

Fr. Classen, Associate Pastor of *St. Margaret Mary Alacoque* parish in the St. Louis (Missouri) Diocese, has written not just a classic book on fishing and hunting. His book also helps to place the enthusiast in the spiritual realm by explaining the difference between the childish obsessive pursuit of the "trophy trout" and the child-like pursuit of nature and God's creation. He shows throughout the book the importance of the child-like wonder and peace garnered by being in nature. He also pokes fun at his own obsessive pursuit that ruined his experiences; it wasn't until he became child-like in his hunting pursuits that he was truly successful, both spiritually and literally.

There are many times throughout the book that Fr. Classen hits it dead-on. He shows that the need for our society to try to re-invent peace and calm through our own acts never works. The fishing father rather shows the better way: peace and calm for mind, body and soul by reveling in God's creation, even on a pre-dawn hike to a deer stand in Missouri autumn or hip-deep in the rushing waters with the fly to beat all flies.

Although this book is, as I mentioned earlier, a "real guy's book", much can be gotten from this book if the reader is married to (or mother of) an outdoor enthusiast. Father does a great job of putting the hunting, the pursuit of the prey, the search for the ultimate lure or fly in their proper perspective – all is worthless without trust in God, without love of His creation, without discernment of God's will. The writing is not just informative; it's also written with a gift for the English language, a turn of phrase that says much more than the words.

I would definitely recommend this book for those guys out there who are either outdoor enthusiasts and/or those guys who are searching for the spiritual in their lives. It is a great read – and has many great hunting tips as well as tips on improving the reader's prayer life and getting us all on the road to sanctity. I would also recommend it for the moms, spouses or sisters of nature enthusiasts, especially those who don't really understand the desire of our men to go out and spend hours in a stand, waiting for the elusive buck.

As a boy, Rev. Joseph Classen stumbled upon a deeper understanding and friendship with his maker through the many hours he spent fishing by a stream or walking through the woods. This connection with God through time spent in outdoors activities led to a vocation as a Roman Catholic priest. His book, *Hunting for God, Fishing for the Lord*, sheds light on his deep faith and shows readers how nature can be a source of strength and hope for us all.

Anecdotes about Rev. Classen's adventures seeking game and fishing lead into thoughtful points about the wondrous power and mystery of God shown to us through

nature, and the rewards of faith in the journey of life.

“Going back to my winter trout-fishing story, I never would have experienced that day, which was quite possibly the most beautiful day of my life, if I had not had the courage to venture out on that journey and the faith to know that it would be well worth it...I didn’t know if I was doing the right thing, but it was my faith in what was ultimately ahead that kept me going.” (203)

Fr. Classen addresses questions about God in the pages of this book, using his sporting experiences to illuminate the tenants of his faith. In a story about temptation, Rev. Classen begins by explaining that his sudden desire to get a turkey that he had been hunting for several hours led to a temptation to use unethical tactics to succeed. Ultimately he played by the rules, and lost the hunt that day, but an important lesson was garnered from that experience. Although no one (except Rev. Classen and the turkey would have know if he decided to use illegal tactics to get the bird), it still would have been wrong. He explained that the word “tempt” means to be tested, and in our current culture, even if we make every effort to avoid temptation, it still can “come looking for us.” (179) One small failed test of integrity can lead to bigger slips.

“We often hear that the devil is the source of all temptation and evil. Scripture describes the devil as a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. (1Pet. 5:8) That is a perfect description. ...And of course, his greatest trick is to make us believe he doesn’t exist at all, that there is nothing to be on guard against.” (179)

Tests are good for us, according to Classen, because they make us stronger spiritually. He compares being tested to training to run a marathon.

“If a runner can’t run a few miles without being out of breath and being on the verge of collapse, then he will never be able to run a marathon. The same thing applies to us spiritually. If we can’t pass those small tests in life, we’ll never be able to pass the big ones.” (181)

The stories in this book are often funny and heart-warming, as the narrator is very human, very ordinary in many respects, and therefore, extremely likable. Rev. Classen touches on several teachings of the Catholic faith, including types of prayer, forgiveness, humility, God's love, carrying crosses, views of God, and more, interweaving them into stories of his adventures as a sportsman. Whether you are a fisherman, hunter or just a gardener, this book will make you smile and you will take away some spiritual wisdom from it.

Every now and then you come across a book that is so terrific you just have to tell everyone about it. *Hunting for God, Fishing for the Lord* is one of those books. I've never come across a book that combines two of my passions in one hard-to-put-down volume. A uniquely successful blend of the best of outdoor sportsman writing and exploration of spirituality based on sound Catholic doctrine. Father Joseph Classen really

knows his stuff: as a fisherman, a hunter, and a Catholic priest. His vivid narrative of the trials and triumphs of field and stream sets the hook for the outdoor enthusiasts among us - and then expertly reels you in to an up close and personal examination of Catholic spirituality. Unlike other touchy-feely works on "spirituality" that are more akin to New Age practices, Father Classen sets the reader straight on how authentic Catholic spirituality meets God in the outdoors - and how it doesn't. A must read for the outdoorsman (or woman). As a perhaps unintended bonus, I predict that this riveting book will catch at least one soul for the Priesthood among young men who find his masculine brand of priesthood an appealing lure.