The revolution, she rolleth.”

A new sexual revolution is stirring on college campuses, and this revolution goes by the name “1Flesh.” 1Flesh is the brainchild of a small group of students at Franciscan University. Among them is Marc Barnes, whose claim to fame is his popular blog, titled “Bad Catholic” (Don’t let the name unsettle you; Marc is a lover of the Church and an avid reader of Chesterton, Tolkein, and Flannery O’Connor. Titling his blog “Bad Catholic” is his tongue-in-cheek way of reassuring us that we’re all fallen). Barnes and his friends capitalized on his strong online presence and introduced the 1Flesh website last year, using “Bad Catholic” to spread the word. Though much of the written work on the site is markedly “Barnesian,” employing a quick-witted, colloquial style, 1Flesh is a clear departure from “Bad Catholic.” The site is devoted to publicizing the harmful effects of artificial contraceptives (defined to include hormonal and oral contraceptives and barrier methods) and promoting fertility awareness using graphics, testimonies, research reports and written responses to articles arguing in favor of artificial contraceptives. Their mission statement reads, “We are a bunch of college students rebelling against the current sexual culture, seeking to elevate it to new heights of awesome by opposing the use of artificial contraception and promoting natural methods of family planning.” Since its debut, 1Flesh has expanded to almost ten college campuses, where students use pamphlets, social media, and a spirit of dialogue to inform their peers about “what sex-ed didn’t teach you about birth control.”

Okay, so what’s the big deal about 1Flesh? We all know what the Church has to say about contraceptives. Folks, I’m telling you, keep your eyes on where this movement is headed. Here’s why: first of all, anyone who stumbles upon the 1Flesh website with no prior knowledge of its existence wouldn’t be able to identify any faith tradition behind it. The team at 1Flesh has founded their arguments solely on science, research, undeniable facts about men’s and women’s bodies, and all otherwise-empirically-based stuff. They make their case and cite their sources, not assuming (or even hoping) that every reader comes to the table with a set of common transcendental assumptions. Equally incredible about 1Flesh is that they’ve managed to shake everyone out of their comfort zone—even Catholics, notorious in the media and culture at large for an unwavering opposition to artificial birth control. With a graphic emblazoned with “It’s better naked,” and blog posts with names like “8 Reasons Ovulation is Pretty Much Witchcraft,” the writers at 1Flesh make few polite attempts at euphemism. Some may find it offensive; to others it is extremely refreshing. Either way, this candid approach to discussing delicate subject matter is a key facet of the “revolution” these college students are stirring up. If nothing else, it gets people talking: just type some variation of “1Flesh” into the Google search bar and the invariable result is a long list of bloggers and columnists and their applause or scorn of this new project. Whatever your impression is of 1Flesh, I believe its emergence is important for us as we continue the great task of the New Evangelization. Even if 1Flesh is unable to change a single person’s mind, there is something to learn from this organization. Finding common ground is critical in evangelization; if we cannot connect on some level with any person, no matter where they’re at, how will we speak the Gospel to
A few weeks ago, a group of us were trekking home after our Italian class at the Angelicum, the Roman university where we’re taking classes this semester. Our one and only redhead male suggested, “Let’s take the quiet way back, past the Spanish Steps.” We all agreed and made good time…until we actually got near the Spanish Steps. The steps, and the surrounding square, were covered with beer-drinking, anthem-singing Germans, complete with matching green jerseys, green scarves and a column of green smoke. We could only assume that this was some sort of pre-soccer game pep rally. To add to this symphony of sound, we could hear the typical Roman accompaniment instruments: sirens and jackhammers. We pushed our way through the crowd, past a woman who could easily adapt the popular kids’ travel song to be “99 Bottles of Beer on My Bench.” We couldn’t help but laugh.

Rome is funny, or maybe I am, but there are many things to see and appreciate here that I’m guessing get overlooked quite often. This may be my general outlook on life, seeing the trees instead of the forest, but I know the things most impressed on my memory this semester will not be obvious or found amongst the “noise” here. I won’t particularly recall the Colosseum, the Via del Corso or even the entirety of St. Peter’s Basilica. What I will remember are the Colosseum birds, hopping from window to window. I’ll remember the first day it really poured when we took the Corso to class, trying to squeeze two girls under a one-person capacity umbrella. I will remember how a statue of St. Anthony, guarding the left side of St. Peter’s Square (fourteen statues in), was one of the few I could immediately identify. I will remember Papa Francesco taking his first, simple steps out on St. Peter’s central balcony to greet a huge crowd of cheering people below. I will also remember, how, in our small Bernardi Chapel, the light that shines through my red, crystal rosary beads matches the glow of the sanctuary lamp a few feet away.

The first time I entered St. Peter’s Basilica, I walked into the center of the aisle, deliberately looking only at the floor until I got there. Then I looked up. I thought, “This is the Church.” Then I thought, “There are a billion little details in here I could spend more than a lifetime writing about, a story for each one.” Maybe it shouldn’t be surprising, but I realize more and more that the Church and Rome seem to have their own surprises and endearing qualities. They aren’t always obvious, and sometimes they are covered by noise, but they still manage to draw hearts, maybe even opening a “quiet way back,” closer and closer to Christ.

Sarah Spangenberg

Lisa Weier
As I walked into my dorm on the first day of school, my mind was flooded with terror. Why on earth did I choose to live on the Catholic Women’s Floor? Would they even like me? What if they only wore skirts and banished me from the hall because I preferred sneakers and a hoodie? Clearly, the stress of living away from home for the first time had gone to my head, and I was foolishly panicking. When I finally maneuvered my way to the 6th floor, I found thirty-nine girls completely ready to welcome me into the community. Some looked fabulous in skirts, but many others shared my affinity for hoodies. My fears instantly vanished.

Months later, I have never regretted my decision to live on the Catholic Women’s Floor. In fact, I would say that it has been the best decision of my life. Still, I run into people who are confused by my enthusiasm for community life; what makes it any different from a normal college living situation? Primarily, it removes all romantic notions from the idea of living as a part of the body of Christ. Suddenly, Paul’s metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12 becomes applicable in a very real way. My role in Christ’s body is shown in all its abilities and limitations. I am surrounded all day by people intent on getting me to Heaven, which means ridding me of my every vice and fault. While it’s possible to put on a charade of holiness throughout the day, it’s impossible to maintain such a feat into the late hours of the night and early hours of the morning. As a community, we see each other in the depths of our weakness and love each other in that. When I am too stressed to function at two in the morning and I let myself become an inhospitable groucher, thirty-nine beautiful women of God force me to smile through my frustration and apologize for any rude comments my sleep-deprived head made in a moment of weakness. When I convince myself that I do not have enough time to get to daily Mass, thirty-nine women of God remind me of the reality and Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and gently nudge me into the chapel. All of the lies and weaknesses that I give in to on my own are powerless against the fruits of living with a community, and I am an infinitely better person because of it.

Recently, I was beginning to feel overwhelmed by my ever-expanding mountain of homework. Unfortunately, I had been procrastinating until the looming deadlines became impossible to ignore. In a panic, I went to the floor lounge to complain about my terrible situation. I was hoping to find compassion in the studious faces there, but quickly realized that my floor-mates would not tolerate my self-pity. Several girls immediately dragged me to the adoration chapel, though I didn't go quietly, and waited with me as I poured my stress out before the Lord. Once my spirit was free of that burden, they brought me to my room and sat me down at my desk. I had been very surprised by the reaction I got in the lounge, but I accepted that these girls wanted the absolute best for me, and that went beyond indulging my desire for sympathy. However, in that moment as I sat at my desk, I was even more surprised that the girls didn't leave me. Instead of going back to their own work, they stayed with me. Some girls helped me organize my paper, and others made me a snack, and others still offered to do my laundry. I was shocked by the love that they were so freely giving to me, even though I had brought my struggles upon myself. They truly wanted to help, not in a superficial way, but in a very profound way, and that is when I finally understood community living. Looking at the faces of the girls packed into my room that night, I saw a love that drew from an understanding of the dignity of every person, a love that reflected the ultimate love on the cross. Community living does not just mean living in the same space as other people. It is a task far more intimidating, because it requires you to live every moment with the patience and love of Christ. Community living means being willing to accept criticism, and also being willing to accept love. It is not always pretty, and it is often difficult, but the rewards of living with people willing to hold you accountable and propel you toward holiness are far greater than any trials it entails.
It wasn’t any particular desire to ‘get right’ with God or to find himself. He was simply moved to go on a journey. What was to happen throughout the coming weeks was up to providence alone.

One of the most significant experiences of his pilgrimage involves his nearly failed marriage with his wife Maureen. How can decades of dullness in this relationship change all of a sudden? Harold and Maureen soon realize that the distance that comes between them during Harold’s journey actually brings them closer together. They receive an opportunity to revisit memories and choose to forgive. Distance indeed makes their hearts grow fonder.

A pilgrimage is similar to so many gifts that we receive: while we have them, we don’t always know what we’ll receive from them. The grace comes in the tail. Often, it’s after we return home from a retreat, vacation, or pilgrimage that we experience the graces of such an event. Last summer, I had the opportunity to make the pilgrimage of the Camino de Santiago in Spain. For five days, some fellow seminarians and I walked through the Spanish countryside. In my own experience of such a journey, I usually found myself thinking about memories from the past. In the midst of the journey, it didn’t seem like anything that was going to change my life. However, it’s seven months later, and I’m still receiving graces from that pilgrimage. No, my life didn’t change overnight. I didn’t even have an emotional come-to-Jesus moment on a hill in Spain somewhere. It’s been a quiet reception of little graces that have transformed me since I made that journey. I didn’t know it at the time, but the Camino offered a foundation for the relationships that I formed with my eleven fellow seminarians. We spent the next four months together in Rome, but it certainly wouldn’t have been the same if we didn’t have the Camino to first join us together.

The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry offers a beautiful glimmer of hope for any of us who aren’t perfectly happy with our lives right now, and I assume this means all of us. Harold shows us that you’re never too young, old, uncatechized, unlearned, unhealthy, or unimportant to make a little journey. In the midst of all Harold’s dullness and boredom, he listens to that little something inside him that invites him to take a walk. Unlikely as it sounds, this walk became a pilgrimage that was to bring this dead man back to life.