Pew 13 seat 7

by Michael Guillebeau in the June 1, 2004 issue

The girl in the pew next to me is doing her math between prayers. I peek at the certainties on her page yearning for a time I knew clearly that the sum of e to the minus x from nothing to the infinite was always and everlasting one and I could prove that everything that rises must converge.

Now the slow hardening of my brain's arteries has rubbed those crisp clear certainties until they're ragged with doubt and experience. Was the sine the one next to me over over the big one? Or the opposite? Was the answer a precise one or pi, that vague pipe dream that we've chased to 51 billion places and still don't know exactly?

I chant my beliefs and wonder what proofs I am seeking here. Add up the blessings of the world and subtract the sins and you've got what? Add up my own petty closed set of real and imaginary without limit. Can it ever exceed zero?

The mass is over and the little girl kneels in the aisle crosses herself, the sign of our shared belief in a world beyond or the mathematician's plus sign, the sign that says with a certainty: something more.