

The Priest



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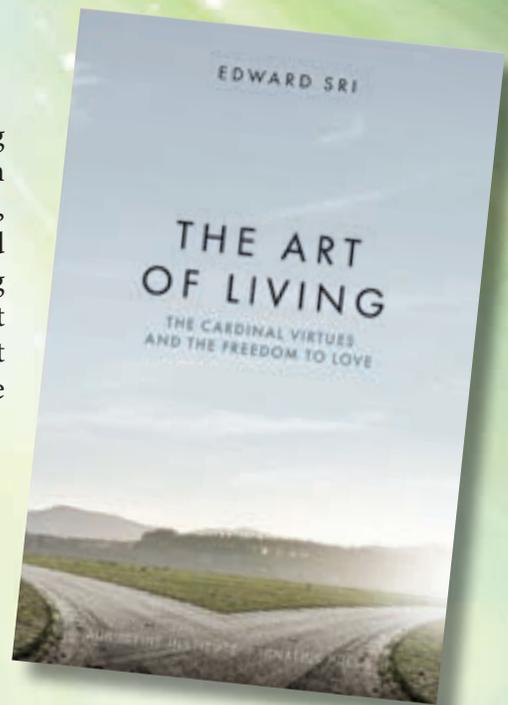
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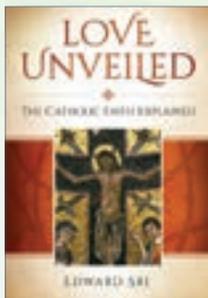
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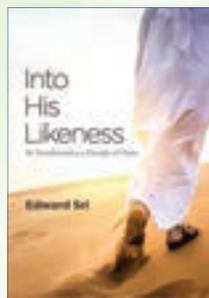


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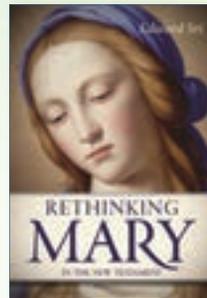
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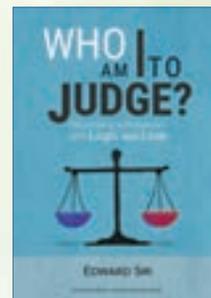
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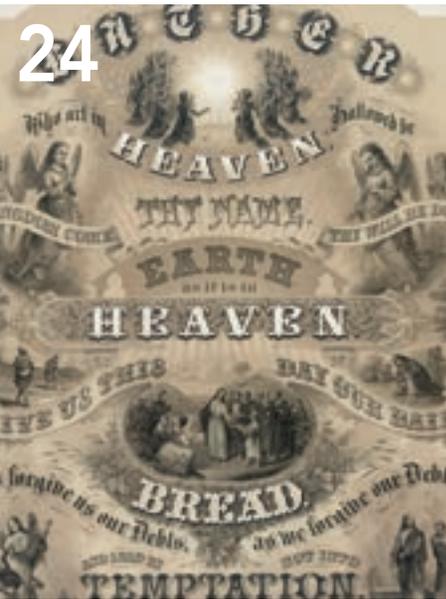


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By Bishop David J. Bonnar

Living in the Moment

Life will never be the same after 9/11

As a person and bishop, I strive every day to “live in the moment.” While I always attempt to be grateful for yesterday and hopeful for tomorrow, I know so well that all we have is today and the moment before us. I am always grounded in the present every time I pray the Lord’s Prayer, especially when I utter the words, “Give us this day.”

Nevertheless, as human beings, it seems that we live in a perpetual tug-of-war between the memories of the past and the dreams of the future. Sometimes, this battle can be so intensely relentless, pushing and pulling us, that we can miss the moment.

For example, who among us has not dreamed about the end of the pandemic and a return to some sense of normalcy? What is more, who has not been caught up in reminiscing about a time that was so innocent, safe and joyful? It is human nature to look back and look ahead, but never at the expense of where we are. The key, of course, is to find a healthy balance in this realm. Prayer can be so helpful in this regard.

In my own life, it is not uncommon from time to time to become “nostalgic.” The dictionary defines “nostalgia” as “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations.” To be nostalgic has also been described as “homesickness” or “returning home.”

Perhaps, my most profound nostalgic moments revert to my childhood. My four siblings and I lived in a three-bedroom ranch with a fenced-in backyard in a paradiselike neighborhood that featured annual block parties and had many of us calling our elder neighbors “aunt” and “uncle.” We were a family not just in our home but in our neighborhood. In our fenced-in backyard, we lived in our own happy world. It was a bubble of safety zone free from all of the dangers and distractions of the world. Suffice to say, it was an unprecedented time of happiness, safety and joy.

This special time, like none other, was extended during the

summers when, as a family, we spent time at our cottage in the heart of an amusement park with a lake where we could freely come and go and enjoy rides, games, water and food. It was like living in heaven. We kids did not have a care in the world.

As we mark the 20th anniversary of the tragic events of 9/11 in which we witnessed the loss of many lives, I am sure we all recall where we were and what we were doing that day. That day will live on in our minds forever. I don’t think any of us will ever forget the faces covered with terror and ash, not to mention the many precious faces that were never seen again. Nor will we soon forget the heroism of so many who rushed to the scenes and did their best to help those in need, even to the point of losing their lives. And I venture to say that none of us will ever forget what life was like before 9/11 and how different life is today. Even with the best exercise in nostalgic thinking, I am sure you agree

that life as we lived it will never be the same again. We need only to visit the airport or go to the stadium to see just how much life has changed. Instead of just implicitly trusting in people’s goodness, we now have to always be wary of evil and bad people. I don’t know about you, but I sure do miss the free, easy and safe life before 9/11. Life is so different.

And yet, hopefully, given all of the loss, we can all say that life is all the more precious. That tragic day cannot help but make us more appreciative of life and how quickly it can end. What is more, I think we are all the more grateful for the lives of our first responders who every day show that they are willing to live in the moment and lay down their lives for us.

Life is different, but hopefully we all are more grateful for the moment and the day that God gives to us. **TP**

A NEW VOICE

We are pleased to have Jem Sullivan, Ph.D., join *The Priest* as our Art Reflection columnist. See Page 9.

BISHOP DAVID J. BONNAR, editor of *The Priest*, is bishop of the Diocese of Youngstown. Sign up for his newsletter at thepriest.com.



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"Saint Jerome and the Angel," Simon Vouet, 1625, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

By Jem Sullivan, Ph.D.

'Saint Jerome and the Angel'

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (1625)



"Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." These words, attributed to St. Jerome, direct our gaze to Jesus Christ at the heart of Scripture. A masterpiece painting titled "Saint Jerome and the Angel" from the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., offers a visual homily on the saint who devoted his life's work to Christ, present and active in his word.

Completed around 1625 by the French Baroque painter Simon Vouet (1590-1649), this image highlights the saint's virtues celebrated at the end of September on his feast day framed by memorials to the archangels and the guardian angels.

Born into a Christian family around the year 347, St. Jerome lived a long, fruitful life during the second half of the fourth century and into the early fifth century. He is believed to have died in Bethlehem about 420.

From a young age, Jerome was immersed in literature and languages. Soon after his baptism in 366, he placed his significant literary talents at the service of God's word.

His life was an ascetic, prayerful contemplation of God's word in a continuous

lectio divina. From the original Greek and Hebrew texts, Jerome translated into Latin the four Gospels, the Psalter and much of the Old Testament.

From the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Septuagint, Jerome produced the "Vulgate."

Vouet seats the aging Jerome at a well-used writing table with an open book and scroll before him. His lean, muscular frame points to his scholarly work as the fruit of

technique of chiaroscuro, the sharp contrast of light and shadow, envelopes this graced moment when St. Jerome, pen in hand, translates the Scriptures.

As he listens to the angel's prompting, his body is bathed in heavenly light that radiates on the angel's pale blue wings and revelatory trumpet.

St. Jerome's left hand and the angel's right hand frame the painting from right to left, as if to enclose both figures in an embrace of the Holy Spirit.

Vouet's masterpiece is a visual invitation to feast on God's word, in imitation of St. Jerome.

For, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, "such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength

for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting font of the spiritual life" (No. 131). **TP**

JEM SULLIVAN, Ph.D., wife, mother and author, is a professor of catechetics at The Catholic University of America. She writes on catechesis, the arts and the New Evangelization.

Vouet bathes the canvas in warm, ethereal light. Here, light evokes the theological and spiritual truth of divine inspiration.

asceticism. The bright red scarf indicates his role as a trusted papal adviser. An inkwell, hourglass and skull evoke long years of prayerful dedication to God's word.

But how may an artist convey the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Vouet bathes the canvas in warm, ethereal light. Here, light evokes the theological and spiritual truth of divine inspiration. The Baroque

Why Consider a Secular Institute?

This form of consecrated life can help diocesan priests live more fully and faithfully



By Father Scott Jones

As a young man, I entered a religious community of priests and brothers and was ordained to the priesthood in 2004. During the nearly 20 years that I was a religious, I was graced with many friendships and a preparation for pastoral ministry that I value to this day. As I approached midlife, however, I discerned that God was calling me to transition to the diocesan priesthood for several personal reasons.

I received many confirmations that this was the right decision, but once I was incardinated into my archdiocese, I realized that I didn't know how to be a diocesan priest.

I had received no formation for it, and my priestly identity was suspended in a kind of limbo. I trusted that things would resolve, but I had to place the specifics of how into God's hands.

Only two things were certain. First, I knew that God had called me to the diocesan priesthood. Of that, I had no doubt. But I also felt that I was called to somehow continue my vowed consecrated life as a diocesan priest.



Father Scott Jones Courtesy photo

As soon as I was incardinated into my archdiocese I privately renewed my vows, resolving to live the evangelical counsels in my new state of life. But something was still lacking.

These types of conflicted feelings are

understandable. At one time, diocesan priesthood and consecrated life were mutually exclusive vocations.

Traditionally, religious priests professed vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and lived a common life together, whereas diocesan priests promised celibacy and obedience to their bishop and lived in a rectory, possibly with other priests. They were separate vocations, albeit with much in common.

What I found in my own vocational journey was a challenge that many diocesan priests face: While religious priests by definition share a communal life and founding spirituality, diocesan priests are left to figure out on their own how to build priestly fraternity and develop a spirituality that is unique to their vocation.

Intentional Community

Due to the structure of diocesan life, this has always been a challenge, but in recent decades it has become even more so.

Diocesan priests are now more likely to find themselves living alone in a rectory, and an ever-increasing workload lim-

its opportunities to gather. The Church recognizes the importance of intentional community and a strong spiritual life for diocesan priests, so much so that it is written into canon law.

Canon 278.2 explicitly states: “Secular clerics are to hold in esteem especially those associations which, having statutes recognized by competent authority, foster their holiness in the exercise of the ministry through a suitable and properly approved rule of life and through fraternal assistance which promote the unity of clerics among themselves and with their own bishop.”

Various associations of secular priests offer such opportunities, including Jesu Caritas and other more informal groups. Less known is a unique form of consecrated life specifically suited for diocesan priests: secular institutes.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines consecrated life as follows: “The state of consecrated life is one way of experiencing a ‘more intimate’ consecration, rooted in Baptism and dedicated totally to God. In the consecrated life, Christ’s faithful, moved by the Holy Spirit, propose to follow Christ more nearly, to give themselves to God who is loved above all” (No. 916).

Evangelical Counsels

Consecrated life always involves a canonical juridic bond, normally in the form of a vow, to live the evangelical counsels of poverty, celibate chastity and obedience.

The Church has traditionally recognized four forms of consecrated life: religious institutes, consecrated virgins, widows and hermits.

In 1947, Pope Pius XII added a fifth form, that of secular institutes (discussed in Canons 710-730 of the Code of Canon Law). These institutes of consecrated life permit celibate laymen, laywomen and diocesan priests to profess the evangelical counsels in vows that are recognized by the Church.



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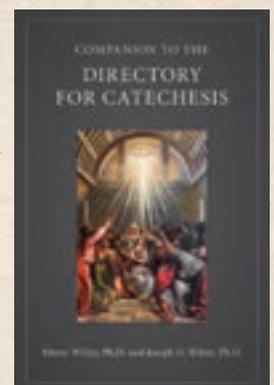
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— Message to participants at the Italian Conference of Secular Institutes, Oct. 23, 2017



Father Scott Jones holds a newly baptized member of his parish. Courtesy photo

Consecrated lay members live in their own homes and do not use religious titles or garb. They are free to work in secular professions.

In the case of diocesan priests, they continue to live and work in their dioceses and wear the clothing of the local presbyterate. (In fact, priests in secular institutes in no way distinguish themselves from their fellow diocesan priests and often refrain from revealing their membership except for recruitment purposes.)

Regarding poverty, both the consecrated laity and diocesan priests continue to own their own property while committing to live simply. Obedience is vowed to the institute’s basic rule of life, but this commitment in no way conflicts with their primary obedience to their bishop (in fact, it strengthens it).

The vow of chastity for both the priests

and laity includes a lifelong commitment to celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God.

In short, members of secular institutes are fully consecrated in the state of consecrated life while living an entirely “secular” life as laity or diocesan priests.

The goal is to bring the leaven of the Gospel to those places in secular society that members of religious orders are normally unable to reach.

Benefits

One might ask, what is the benefit for a diocesan priest to enter a secular institute if he continues to live and function fully as a member of the local presbyterate?

First and foremost, it is a supernatural vocation from God — the priest simultaneously feels called to diocesan priesthood and consecrated life.

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SECULAR INSTITUTES

Some of the secular institutes for priests include the Company of St. Paul; Institute of the Heart of Jesus; Opus Spiritual Sancti; Schoenstatt Fathers; Voluntas Dei Institute.

In no way is it a quasi-religious order; the sole focus in a secular institute is to live the diocesan priesthood fully and faithfully.

While the vows are the same as those taken by religious, it is not in imitation of them, for all members of the faithful, including diocesan priests, are called to live the evangelical counsels.

Secular institutes assist the diocesan priest in living them specifically as diocesan clergy.

There are other aspects of secular institutes that are well-suited for the diocesan priesthood. Chief among them are these three: fraternity, spirituality and ministry.

As I have found in my own transition from religious to diocesan life, fraternity is perhaps the greatest challenge diocesan priests currently face in healthily living their vocations.

Diocesan priests frequently live alone and busy schedules prove to be obstacles to fraternity. Secular institutes can help in this area.

While members do not live the common life of religious, there is still a strong emphasis on community outlined in the rule of life. Such is the case in my community, the Society of the Priests of the Heart of Jesus (see sidebar).

Spirituality is an important aspect of life in a secular institute. Each institute is required to have its constitutions approved by Rome and must include a basic outline of a spiritual life (with plenty of room for flexibility). In the case of the Priests of the Heart of Jesus, in addition to the daily Mass and Divine Office expected of all priests, members commit to a daily hour of personal prayer, normally before the Blessed Sacrament. For me, this was a practice I began only after I entered the

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A powerful way for parishes to affirm the Eucharist is through Corpus Christi Eucharistic Processions on June 19, 2022—Father’s Day! Imagine the grace that will be obtained when thousands of Eucharistic processions are held on this weekend nationwide. What better witness to our culture and an affirmation of the Real Presence. We would truly light the world on fire!

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The Catholic Father’s Day website has the tools you need to organize and run a prayerful and meaningful Eucharistic Procession. CatholicFathersDay.com



*“Starting
a Fire ...”*

**Thanks to the many who
participated in the first
Catholic Father’s Day
processions in June, 2021.**



institute, and I wasn't sure I would be able to fulfill it in the course of a busy schedule. I will be eternally grateful for the challenge to be faithful to that hour of prayer; it has radically transformed how I live my priesthood. It has led me to encounter Jesus on a much deeper level than in my early years of priestly life.

Finally, ministry is a major focus of clerical secular institutes. The ministry of each member is always his normal diocesan assignment received from his bishop. The institute has no say in the matter and would never try to interfere. What the institute offers the diocesan priest is a means by which he can renew his zeal for sacramental and pastoral ministry after the heart of Jesus.

Priestly zeal is not unique to consecrated life; every priest in apostolic ministry has the same goal. Some diocesan priests reach it through increased study or programs of priestly renewal. Others attain it through ongoing formation courses

Every diocesan priest must discern for himself what is the best means whereby he can maintain good fraternal relations, a strong prayer life, fidelity to the evangelical counsels and a vibrant ministry.

offered by their diocese. Members of secular institutes get there by encouraging one another and reflecting on how to more effectively live out their pastoral care for the People of God. It is one more opportunity the Church provides to ensure that priests minister with holiness and integrity.

Challenges

A challenge I faced when discerning to enter a secular institute is that of proximity. Most dioceses do not currently have local members living within their boundaries; such was the case in my archdiocese.

The normal pattern for establishing a local chapter of a secular institute is for one priest (or a small group of priests) within a diocese to contact the institute and request admission.

Formation can be done long-distance, and the advent of Zoom and other means of communication have opened new opportunities for communal gatherings. (My community has monthly online meetings.)

In the case of a member who is isolated in a geographic region, once he has completed formation he can invite other priests in his diocese to consider joining. This is the normal process of development for nearly every secular institute of priests or laity, and the structure exists within canon law for it to work well.

Discernment

Every diocesan priest must discern for himself what is the best means whereby he can maintain good fraternal relations, a strong prayer life, fidelity to the evangelical counsels and a vibrant ministry. None of these are unique to secular institutes.

What I discovered on my own journey was that the secular institute I entered provided me with a lens through which my vocation and identity as a diocesan priest were brought into focus. Clerical secular institutes go to the very heart of what it means to be a diocesan priest: to live the life of Jesus among his people, ministering to them and witnessing through the evangelical counsels that there is nothing to be preferred to the love of Christ. **TP**

ABOUT THE SOCIETY OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE HEART OF JESUS

The Institute of the Heart of Jesus was founded in France in 1791 by Father Pierre Joseph de Clorivière, a secularized Jesuit. (The Jesuits had been suppressed by the pope in 1773 and all religious orders were banned in revolutionary France.) Father Clorivière founded the Priests of the Heart of Jesus specifically so that diocesan priests could live the "state of perfection" in their dioceses. From the beginning, he required that members gather monthly for a Review of Life and annually for a communal retreat.

The Review of Life provides members with the opportunity to share their joys and struggles in an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality. It also helps members to hold one another accountable for spiritual and ministerial integrity. In my institute, some members have walked with each other for over 40 years through the deaths of parents, the transition between ministries and the diminishment of health.

In no way has it proven to be a "clique" that separates them from other priests; in fact, one of the areas of accountability is how members build fraternity with the rest of the presbyterate. On a personal level, it has challenged me to extend generosity to fellow priests in a way that I often neglected to do in religious life.

FATHER SCOTT JONES is a priest of the Archdiocese of St. Louis and a member of the Priests of the Heart of Jesus. To learn more about his institute, go to www.uspcj.org. More information on secular institutes is available at www.secularinstitutes.org.

The Lapsed Controversy and Church Teaching

What can be learned from St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr



By D.D. Emmons

We often fail to appreciate how our Catholic teachings have developed over the centuries; the beliefs we take for granted, issues long ago resolved, were in many cases very complex and controversial when they initially surfaced. Such was the case in the third and fourth centuries, parts of which can only be described as tumultuous times to be a Christian.

These were eras when the Roman emperors inflicted extreme persecutions on the followers of Christ. The way the fledgling Church and the faithful responded to these persecutions would have a major impact on what we believe about the Church's role in the forgiveness of sins, about reconciliation and baptism.

Roman Persecutions

Among the most notorious in his methods was Emperor Decius (r. 249-51). When Decius came to power in 249, cracks were beginning to show in the fiber of the Roman Empire: invasion by barbarians,

economic crises, poor government policies and internal division, all contributed to a weakened state. Decius concluded that many people under Roman rule were neglecting not only sincere worship of the Roman gods but the divinity of the emperor. He believed this was contributing to the empire's widespread problems. Among

The way the fledgling Church and the faithful responded to these persecutions would have a major impact on what we believe about the Church's role in the forgiveness of sins, about reconciliation and baptism.

the scapegoats Decius sought, Christians were easy targets. According to the emperor, even natural disasters were caused by Christians who focused on one God and refused to worship the many pagan

gods of the Romans. The great Tertullian (155-220) of Carthage had written decades before about this Roman blame game: "If the Tiber rises to the city walls, if the Nile does not rise to the fields, if the weather continues without change, if there is an earthquake, if famine, if pestilence, immediately, 'Christians to the lion! So many for one beast'" ("Apology").

Emperor Decius' solution was to mandate that every person, under the threat of persecution, make an oath, a sacrifice, to the Roman pagan gods and acknowledge the deity of the emperor. In return, they would be given a certificate, known as a *libellus*, indicating that the individual had made the sacrifice and thus would avoid persecution. Anyone who refused was subject to being tortured and jailed with the expectation that they

would be put to death.

Lapsed Christians

Indeed, hundreds of Christians were imprisoned because they refused to com-



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ply with the edict, refusing to deny Jesus. These pious individuals gave credence to the words of Our Savior: “But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father” (Mt 10:33). There were other Christians in large numbers who submitted to worship the pagan gods as well as Caesar and, at least in public, renounced their faith to avoid arrest, jail and worse. Most Christians that acquiesced to the Roman law did so by making an act of sacrifice or worship before a pagan statue. Some, instead of an act of worship, bribed Roman officials and obtained the certificate, which indicated that the person had complied with the Roman mandate.

Considered as traitors, they were excommunicated by the Church even though, in some instances, the sincerity of their oath-taking and worship may have been feigned. The Christians who chose to deny Christ in the face of persecution would become known as the lapsed, or *lapsi* — that is, they allowed their faith to lapse, fallen away.

Emperor Decius was killed during a military campaign in 251, and the persecutions soon ended. Numerous of the lapsed now wanted to renew their relationship with the Christian faith. This led to a dilemma in the Church: Could these people, these *lapsi*, be accepted back? Could they be forgiven for the grave sin of denying Christ and, if so, under what conditions?

Bishop of Carthage

Cyprian (c. 210-58) converted to Christianity at age 46 and, after only two years as a Christian, was elected as bishop of Carthage where he reigned until his death. As the Decian persecution began, Cyprian hid in a cave and stayed in touch with his flock through letters encouraging them to maintain their faith and prayers. He encouraged them that God would deliver every Christian from the hands of his enemies. Criticized for what some considered a cowardly act, Cyprian believed he would have been imprisoned by the Romans, as

were many bishops, and hence would not have been able to serve the Christians within his domain.

When the persecutions ended, he resumed his role as bishop and disagreed with the position that Novatian — a self-proclaimed spokesman for the Church who claimed to be bishop of Rome — and others were advocating about the *lapsi*. Cyprian instead supported the actions of Cornelius, bishop of Rome, who claimed the lapsed could return. The lapsed person could rejoin the Church, but only with the approval of his bishop, who would decide about confession and level of penance. A rift soon developed, with Cyprian and Cornelius (r. 251-53) on one hand and Novatian on the other.

Cyprian made no distinction between the *lapsi* who had chosen to worship a Roman god and those who bought a certificate. Writing that “God cannot be mocked” (“The Lapsed”), he addressed those who believed they had done less wrong because they had obtained a certificate through bribery: “Nor let those persons flatter themselves that they need repent less, who, although they have not polluted their hands with abominable sacrifices, yet have defiled their conscience with certificates” (ibid). The lapsed might be readmitted to the Church, but only under the conditions as described by Cyprian and Cornelius.

Complicating this issue were the Christians that had been jailed for their refusal to worship the pagan gods. Called confessors, they wanted to assist their lapsed brethren by providing letters or certificates to the proper bishop pleading that their time in jail, and their likely martyrdom, was being offered on behalf of one of the lapsed Christians who was seeking to return to the Church. Cyprian’s position was that no matter the good intentions of the confessors, the lapsed seeking a return to the Church had to be approved by the bishop, which meant confession and completion of, in most instances, an ar-



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CERTIFICATE OF SACRIFICE

Called a *libellus*, a certificate of sacrifice was issued to Christians who adhered to the Roman edict of Emperor Decius and made a sacrifice to the Roman gods. Sacrifices often consisted of burning incense, eating sacrificial meat or pouring wine as an offering before a pagan statue or image of the emperor.

duous and lengthy penance. He wrote to the confessors saying that the lapsed had acted “contrary to the law of the Gospel, contrary even to your respectful petition, before penance has been done, before a confession of the most grave and extremist sin has been made, before a hand has been imposed in penance by the bishop and the clergy — to offer on their behalf and give them the Eucharist; that is to profane the holy Body and Blood of the Lord” (“Letter to Certain Martyrs and Confessors”).

For all this, and indifference to the Novatians preaching that only God could forgive mortal sin, the *lapsi* controversy established that there is no sin that the Church cannot forgive.

One Baptism

During the debate about the *lapsi*, certain bishops followed Novatian away from the Church in disagreement with the position on reconciliation. These bishops not only ordained individuals into the priest-

hood but baptized many converts. Later some converts wanted to join the universal Church rather than remain outside the fold. Cyprian claimed that the bishops who separated from the Church were heretics and, as such, no longer possessed the gifts of the Holy Spirit; thus the individuals they converted had to be baptized again before being considered Christians. Cyprian said, “How can he who lacks the Spirit confirm the Spirit?” They could not consecrate the baptismal water or the holy chrism, thus could not baptize.

Cyprian’s disfavor of a baptism conducted by a heretic follows that of St. Tertullian, who had advocated that while there was only one baptism, that baptism had to be administered by the true Church. This thinking did not distinguish between what was lawful and what was valid; the erroneous conclusion was that if it was unlawful, it could not be valid.

During three third-century councils in Carthage, the African bishops unanimous-

BISHOPS ST. FABIAN, ST. CORNELIUS AND NOVATIAN

One of the first Christian martyrs under Decius’ edict was St. Fabian, the bishop of Rome who reigned 236-50. After his martyrdom and because of the persecutions, the selection of a new bishop was delayed for some 14 months. At that time, the title “pope” was not limited to the bishop of Rome; all bishops were elected locally and considered equal in stature with the exception that the Rome bishop traditionally held the most prestigious position. It was later, during the time of St. Gregory I the Great (r. 590-604), that the bishop of Rome took on the rule over the universal Church and the title “pope” was applied to him alone.

St. Cornelius (r. 251-53) was eventually selected to succeed Fabian, but in the months during which the Rome episcopacy was vacant, a bishop named Novatian had become the self-proclaimed spokesman for the Church. Novatian expected that he would be acclaimed as bishop of Rome, but instead Cornelius was elected. Cornelius, who was later martyred, believed that after a reasonable time of penance, the lapsed could once again join in holy Communion.

Novatian vigorously rejected this idea. He held that there were no circumstances under which the *lapsi*, who had committed the grievous sin of apostasy, could rejoin the Church; only God could forgive such mortal sin. Novatian claimed for himself the bishop’s position in Rome, then broke from the Church and started his own church. Some clergy sided with Novatian, especially in Gaul and Spain, and he may have made a bigger impact except for a bishop in Africa named Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus, whom we know as Cyprian.



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AFRICAN CHURCH FATHER

Considered a Father of the African Church and highly favored among the ancient leaders, Cyprian is often referred to as the African pope. He was a Christian for just 13 years, yet his thoughts and works helped shape the sacraments and the teachings of the Church. In those years, besides being prominent among the African bishops and debating the most complex Church issues of his or any era, he wrote numerous treatises and letters covering a wide range of subjects including: reconciliation, baptism, prayer, almsgiving, morality, role of a bishop, heretics. Steadfast and highly disciplined, Cyprian is considered the first great writer among the early Church Fathers.



St. Cyprian World History Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

ly agreed with the position Cyprian held. In Rome, the bishop at the time was St. Stephen I (r. 254-57), and he had a significantly differing opinion, an opposite view about the efficaciousness of the heretical baptisms. He said, “The minister of baptism performs the act, but God gives the grace.” He went on to say that as long as the person is baptized with the Trinity for-

mula, the baptism is valid.

Stephen decreed, “Let nothing be changed, but let the ancient tradition be maintained.” Simply, those baptized by the heretical bishops, assuming the correct rite was used, could be received back into the Church by the laying on of hands. No one had to be re-baptized. To make his point, he threatened excommunication

to any of the African bishops who taught otherwise. This issue was widely debated, but both Sts. Cyprian and Stephen would die for their faith before the issue was resolved. Every valid baptism is, of course, accepted by the Church as clarified at the Council of Arles in 314 and at the Council of Trent in the 16th century. The Arles council specifically addressed and rejected the African Church teaching on the need to re-baptize.

Cyprian's Martyrdom

When Valerianus was Roman emperor (r. 253-60), he issued an edict that every member of the Christian clergy should make an oath to worship the Roman gods or face being murdered. Cyprian refused and, on Sept. 14, 258, was brought before a Roman proconsul for sentencing. The Roman official gave Cyprian the opportunity to make an allegiance, an act of worship

to the Roman deity; Cyprian refused. The proconsul ordered that the accused be beheaded, "put to death by the sword." Cyprian responded: "Thanks be to God."

"When the sentence was passed ... Cyprian was led out into the plain of Sextus, and there he took off his cloak and knelt down and bowed himself in prayer to God. And when he had taken off his dalmatic and given it to his deacons, he stood up in his linen under-garment and waited for the executioner. When he had come, Cyprian ordered his friends to give him [the executioner] twenty-five pieces of gold. Linen cloths and napkins were laid down before Cyprian by the brethren, and he bandaged his eyes with his own hands. ... So suffered blessed Cyprian" ("Butler's Lives of the Saints," H Thurston, P.J. Kennedy and Sons, 1956). **TP**

D.D. EMMONS writes from Pennsylvania.



CYPRIAN'S WRITINGS IN TIME OF PANDEMIC

In his book "On Mortality," Cyprian beautifully describes the rewards of heaven to Carthage citizens, urging them to assist and show mercy to others during a deadly plague in late 250.

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'Lord, Teach Us to Pray'

Retrieving the richness of the prayer that Jesus taught us



By Father Jeffrey Kirby, STD

The Lord's Prayer, popularly called the Our Father, was given to us by Jesus Christ himself. In response to the petition of the apostles, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Lk 11:1), the Lord endowed his Church with his short but powerful prayer. As such, it is the oldest prayer of the Christian faith, and — as odd as it might sound — it is oftentimes one of the most neglected.

Since many of us learned the Lord's Prayer while we were still learning to talk, it's easy to have taken the prayer for granted. Growing up in the Faith, it's a part of our spiritual patrimony that has always been with us. The idea that somehow we don't understand the prayer, or that we may have overlooked its depths, is almost insulting. And yet, as we make an act of humility and look into the prayer, we begin to see a structure and inner logic of the prayer that we have perhaps missed, forgotten or not fully appreciated.

As homilists and catechists look for ways to help the faithful appreciate the immense gifts given to us in Jesus Christ, it might prove surprisingly helpful to return to the spiritual bedrock of our faith and to dissect and explore the richness of the

Lord's Prayer.

The invitation given to us by God our Father to accept and reciprocate his love is fully developed in the prayer. Throughout the tenets of this great prayer, which follow the awe-inspiring salutation, the tender care and affection of God for each of us is on complete display. In this systematic way, we can see throughout the prayer how deeply God loves us and wants

It is the oldest prayer of the Christian faith, and — as odd as it may sound — it is oftentimes one of the most neglected.

to bless us.

Children of God, Not Orphans

Before his passion, death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus solemnly promised us: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you. Whoever has my com-

mandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him" (Jn 14:18-21).

In this promise, the Christ — who conquers evil and dispels darkness — teaches us that those who love him, and keep his commands, will not be orphans. When he accomplishes his saving work and departs, those who obey him will be "in him" and dwell with the Father. The Lord also tells his followers that he will send the Spirit to guide them. The conditional aspect of this promise cannot be overlooked or taken for granted.

The Lord indicated that the divine family, and the blessings that come with divine fellowship, will be given to those who love him and obey him. In short, the graces will be given to those who truly want them.

The evil one, who is also called the devil (which means "accuser") or Satan (which means "adversary"), offers us an easier life. The fellowship he offers has no blessing but is consumed with egotism, power, vanity, wealth and pleasure. It calls for no obedience other than to one's own whims and fantasies. It's a glamorous offer, the



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OUR

FATHER

Who art in



Hallowed be

HEAVEN,



THY KINGDOM COME.

THY NAME.



THY WILL BE DONE IN

EARTH
as it is in

HEAVEN.



GIVE US THIS



DAY FOR DAILY

And forgive us our Debts,

BREAD.

as we forgive our Debtors



AND LEAD US

NOT INTO

TEMPTATION,

BUT DELIVER US FROM

EVIL



for thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory,
FOR EVER. AND EVER.

AMEN.

spiritual equivalent of flashing lights, loud music and egocentric celebrations. Rather than love of God and neighbor, we are offered a life of conceit and self-absorption.

Which of these ways of life do we want? Are we willing to accept the fatherhood of God and the abundance of his blessings?

Internal Structure

For those of us who have said “yes” to the fatherhood of God, our task is to deepen our relationship with him and grow in our love and trust of him. As a help to us in this process, Jesus — Our Lord and older brother in the family of God — has entrusted his prayer to us.

The Lord’s Prayer contains a spiritual portrait of Jesus’ entire life. Throughout the prayer, he reveals to us how we are to live as a son or daughter of God. Whenever we pray it, therefore, we should always remember that we pray it through, with and in Jesus.

In Jesus Christ, the prayer provides an interior path for us to follow in our love of God. The path described in the prayer provides us with seven tenets, or signposts, along the way.

After the earth-shaking salutation “Our Father,” the prayer moves into a threefold declaration of praise and a fourfold series of petitions.

The two portions of the prayer reflect the two tablets of the Ten Commandments: the first pertains to our adoration of God; the second pertains to what we need from God and how we are to interact with our neighbors.

The first portion of the Lord’s Prayer consists of his glory: “thy name,” “thy kingdom” and “thy will.”

The second portion of the Lord’s Prayer consists of our poverty: “give us”; “forgive us”; “lead us”; “deliver us.”

As we can see, therefore, the Lord’s Prayer teaches us what we should desire. It guides us to recognize the process of sequence by which things should be desired.

Our Father

The Lord’s Prayer begins with a beautiful salutation: “Our Father, who art in heaven.” In using this greeting, the Lord Jesus uses the plural pronoun *our*. In doing this, he indicates that we are together with him in God’s family. As the Lord is the Son of God by nature, so we become sons and daughters of God by grace. As adopted sons and daughters, we are also siblings to the Lord Jesus and so heirs with him in glory (cf. Rom 8:14-17).

Jesus’ declaration of God’s fatherhood also shows us that the Eternal God lives forever as Father. This is not a metaphor or symbol. This is not a title that we invented, or that we impose upon him. In the infinitely perfect life of the Most Holy Trinity, the First Person is — and has always been — and will always be Father. The All-Powerful One and the All-Compassionate One has revealed himself to us as Father.

The power he holds is synonymous with his paternity. He is Father just as he is love. He has freely chosen to give us this intimate disclosure of himself as Father and so unveil himself to us as he truly is. And so, it’s important for us to put first things first and to acknowledge what has always come first: God is Father. We are not forcing him into any human standard or social construct. By his own revelation, God dwells forever as Father.

Who Art in Heaven

As we pray with Jesus and hail “Our Father,” we also announce that our Father dwells in heaven. This declaration is both an assertion of God’s sovereignty — he is All-Holy — as well as of our belonging — he calls us to be with him in heaven forever.

Truly, God lives in the abode of glory, far above us in majesty, but his home is also our eternal home as he walks with us and calls us to be with him. And so, when we pray that God dwells in heaven, we are reminding ourselves of our final end and of

our everlasting homeland.

As every family has a father, so every family has a home. Our Father is the Ancient of Days, the All-Holy One, and our home is heaven. Heaven is the presence of our Father, who dwells in majestic light, eternal majesty and infinite glory. It is our true homeland, and our Father “who art in heaven” calls us to be with him. Our life on earth is a time of blessing and preparation. It is the path that can lead us to accept our Father’s invitation and to dwell with him in the everlasting joys of heaven.

Eternal Belonging

When we address our Father in heaven, the pronoun *our* indicates that we have a place in God’s family and, therefore, we have a place in his home. This means our whole life has been arranged and designed in such a way as to help us prepare well for heaven. It means that whatever happens to us in this world as we seek to love God, we have an eternal homeland waiting for us in heaven (cf. Rom 8:28-30).

Heaven, therefore, will be a place of reconciliation and homecoming. If traveled according to his law of love, then after our life’s journey, God will welcome us home (cf. Jn 14:23). As such, in heaven we’ll share in his glory and partake in his divine nature. We will participate in the joy of God’s Trinitarian life (cf. 2 Pt 1:4). St. John the Apostle describes this union between God and those in heaven: “They will be his people and God himself will be with them [as their God]” (Rv 21:3).

As we are fulfilled in heaven by sharing in the communion of life and love within the Holy Trinity, we will also see others who have been perfected by God’s grace. This means that we will also participate in God’s union with Mary, the angels, our canonized saints and all the holy ones in heaven. This further means that we will be reunited with all our loved ones who are in heaven! And so, we will see and dwell forever with beloved spouses, missed parents



Read more of Father Jeffrey Kirby's book "Thy Kingdom Come" (TAN, \$16.95), which offers spiritual insights into the Lord's Prayer. It explores the distinct petitions we ask of God: why the beauty of heaven is a model for us on earth; the interconnection of God's name, his kingdom and his will; and how God seeks to protect and deliver us from the evil one. It is a helpful guide and practical resource.

or children, esteemed family members, and close friends who have been mourned and missed in this life. We will see them again, rejoice with them and praise God with them into eternity.

This is the reality and beauty of our belonging to God in heaven. God our Father calls us to be with him into eternity. He invites us to prepare well in this life. As we pray in the words that the Lord Jesus — our older brother and the firstborn of all creation — taught us, we must realize the depth of what it means to declare that our Father dwells in heaven. This assertion is not only a declaration of his majesty, but also a declaration of our call to be with him in paradise forever. Do we zealously desire to go to heaven? Will we follow God's path of love and allow his grace to make us fit to be with him in heaven?

Hope and Boldness

As we step back and look up, we realize that we are the children of God. We see clearly that our Father dwells in heaven and that we are called to be with him. This awareness compels us to give a new direction to our lives. Our new identity as the children of God and our new destiny for heaven pose a challenge to our hearts. We have to change. We need to reorient ourselves.

As our new identity and destiny cry out for fulfillment, we find a spiritual groaning and drive within our souls: We want God

to be the true Father of our lives. We want to be open and teachable sons and daughters. We hope in the reality of heaven. We allow grace to work in us and transform us. We conduct ourselves in ways that could lead us into the joys of heaven. (cf. 2 Cor 5:2; Phil 3:20; Heb 13:14)

The acceptance of God as our Father, and heaven as our home, fills us with great hope and joy. They show us the frailty of evil and darkness and give us filial boldness, which is the fortitude of children who know they are loved and protected, to live holy lives and to fight for goodness, whatever the cost.

When our Father is in our heart, and heaven is in our sight, all things are possible (cf. Mt 19:26). We are willing to take risks, to be daring and to labor for the kingdom of our Father. In imitation of the Lord Jesus, we are willing to give a constant "yes" to all that he asks of us (cf. 2 Cor 1:20) and to surrender all that we are to his glory.

Will we give this "yes" to God? Will we live in the awareness of God as our Father and heaven as our home? Will we boldly live the meaning of the salutation contained in the Lord's Prayer? **TP**

FATHER JEFFREY KIRBY, STD, is the pastor of Our Lady of Grace in Indian Land, South Carolina. He is the author of the recent book "Thy Kingdom Come: Living the Lord's Prayer in Everyday Life" (TAN Books, \$16.95).

A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER

"Jesus does not give us a formula to repeat mechanically. As in every vocal prayer, it is through the Word of God that the Holy Spirit teaches the children of God to pray to their Father. Jesus not only gives us the words of our filial prayer; at the same time he gives us the Spirit by whom these words become in us 'spirit and life.' Even more, the proof and possibility of our filial prayer is that the Father 'sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"' Since our prayer sets forth our desires before God, it is again the Father, 'he who searches the hearts of men,' who 'knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.' The prayer to Our Father is inserted into the mysterious mission of the Son and of the Spirit."

— Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2766

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The Priest

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◆ **PRIEST AND BEGGAR:** The Heroic Life of Venerable Aloysius Schwartz

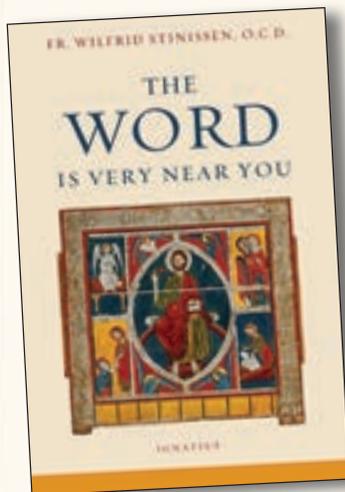
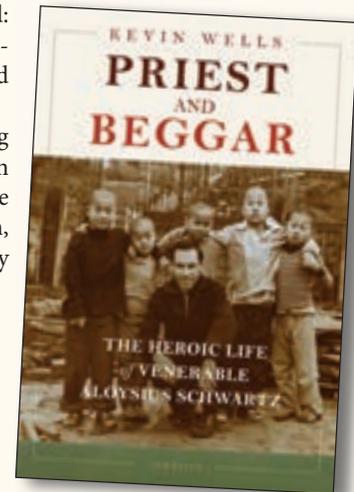
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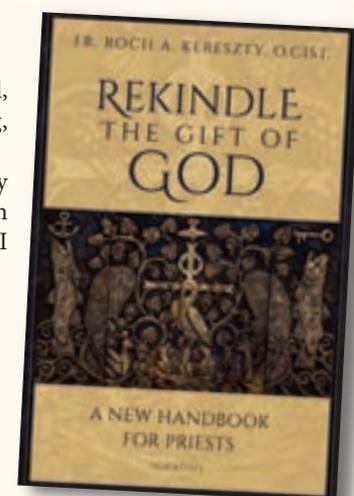
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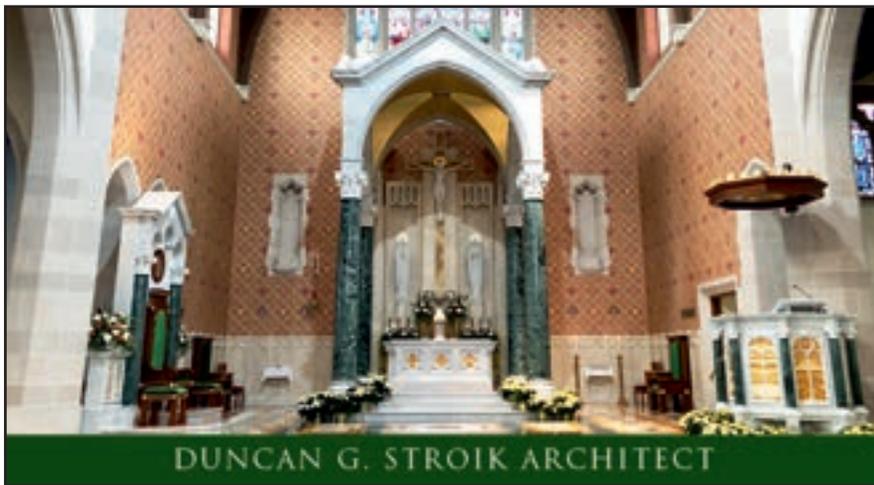


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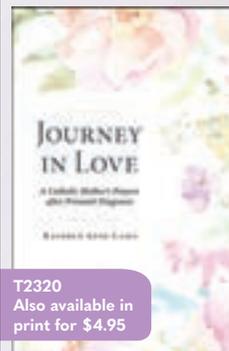


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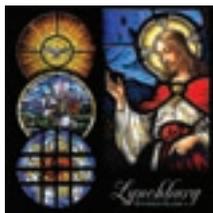


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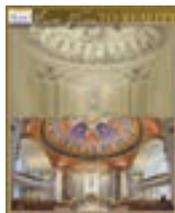


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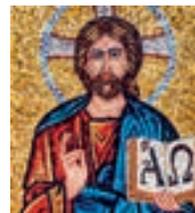


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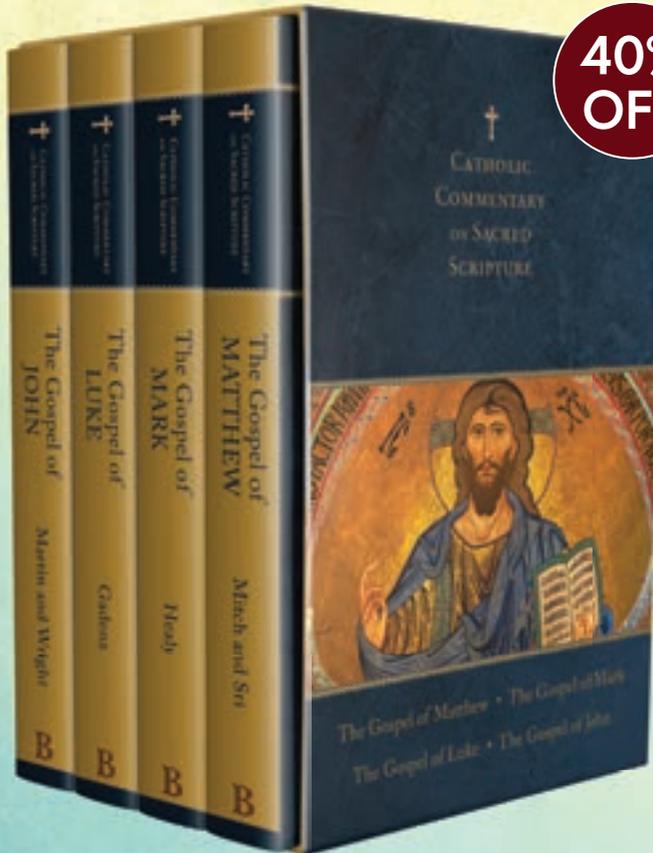
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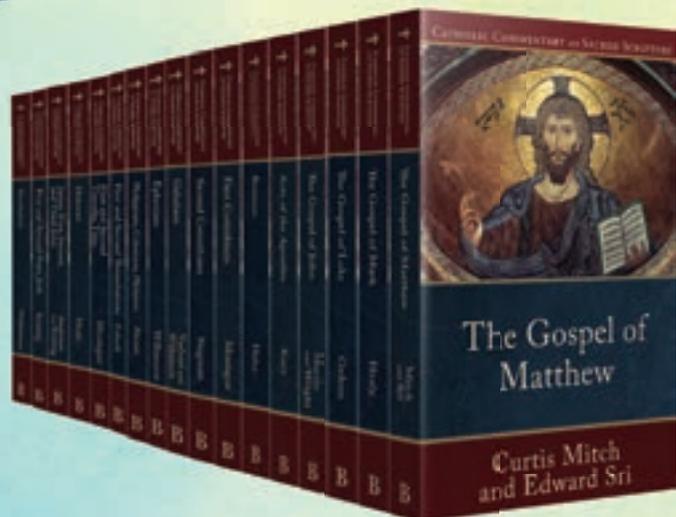
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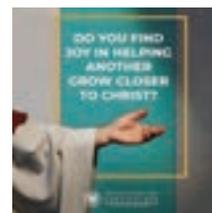


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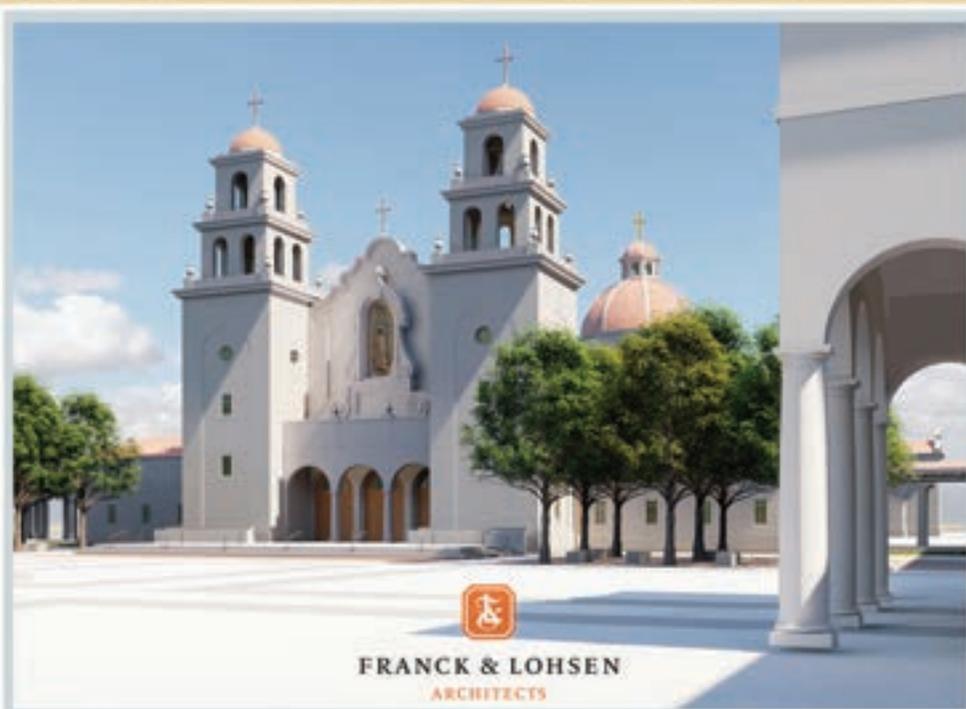
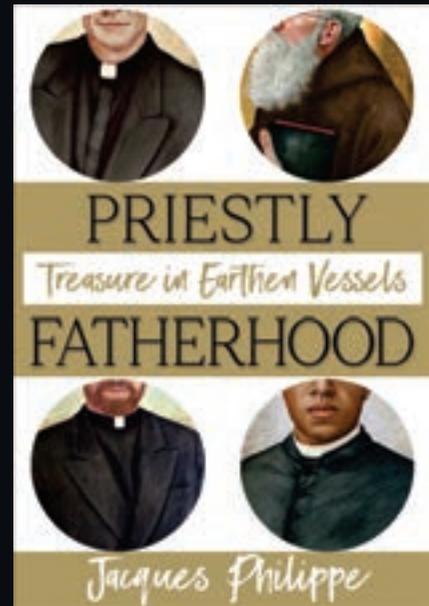
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Cross Catholic Outreach Makes Addressing Food Crisis in Nicaragua a Ministry Priority

Hunger is clearly on the increase in the developing countries of the world — in some cases as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic — and Catholic leaders are working diligently to provide the hardest hit communities with relief.

For one of the larger Catholic ministries involved in this effort, addressing the hardships faced by the poor in Nicaragua has become a special priority [see story on opposite page], and American Catholics are being encouraged to join their cause.

“As a ministry, we are always striving to make poor families self-sufficient, but there are always times — particularly after a natural disaster or a crisis like this — when help with food is necessary,” explained Jim Cavnar, president of Cross Catholic Outreach, one of the key ministries involved in overseas outreaches. “At times like these, parents face incredible stresses, not knowing how they will provide their children with the next meal.”

The reason Cross Catholic Outreach chose to focus on Nicaragua is clear to anyone familiar with the country’s level of poverty. Sandwiched between Honduras and Costa Rica, Nicaragua has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world and the third lowest per capita income in the Western Hemisphere. Its families are plagued by high unemployment and a low literacy rate, so most struggle to survive on next to nothing.

“The men and women living in the remotest parts of Nicaragua typically scrape together a living by working as field hands — the only job available for someone with little education and no skills training. Basic services provided by the government, such as health care, are often located too far away for people to use. Children rarely attend school because their parents can’t afford the supplies, uniforms and registration fees needed to attend ‘free’ public school,” Cavnar said. “As we investigated the situation in remote areas of the country, we learned that families often didn’t have enough food to last a full week, so their children would routinely skip meals. The COVID-19 pandemic only made things worse. It was clear to us



Tragically, children are often at the greatest risk of malnutrition during a food crisis. For that reason, Cross Catholic Outreach makes serving them a priority.

these communities were in desperate need of a God-sized solution to their hunger problem, so we stepped in to help local Church leaders provide food and hope to these struggling families.”

Fortunately, Cross Catholic Outreach excels at addressing problems like this, and its methods are both empowering and cost-effective. Wherever possible, the ministry works through existing parishes or Catholic missions to solve problems, which means an existing infrastructure can be used for distribution and most of a supportive donor’s contribution can be used to obtain food, medicines and the other tangible items the poor need.

“While in-country ministries are well positioned to help the poor, they are usually operating with a very limited budget, so they must rely on us for food, medicines and other important resources,” Cavnar explained. “We communicate a mission’s needs to American Catholics and use the donations of those friends to obtain and ship what the in-country ministries have requested. It’s an incredibly effective program because it supplies a mission with the specific items it needs to

supercharge its work. It is especially important to feeding programs.”

Cavnar added that supporting feeding programs is critical because hunger can easily lead to malnutrition, and extreme cases can do serious physiological harm, producing lasting physical and mental damage — even death in some cases.

“As Americans, it’s hard for us to imagine a child suffering from stunted growth or permanent mental damage for lack of food, but that can and does happen in developing countries because the poverty is that extreme,” he said. “That is why we consider providing food to at-risk children our highest priority.”

Readers interested in supporting Cross Catholic Outreach food programs and other outreaches to the poor can contribute through the ministry brochure inserted in this issue or send tax-deductible gifts to: Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC01858, PO Box 97168, Washington DC 20090-7168. The ministry has a special need for partners willing to make gifts on a monthly basis. Use the inserted brochure to become a Mission Partner or write Monthly Mission Partner on mailed checks to be contacted about setting up those arrangements.

American Catholics Finding Ways to Address Severe Hunger in Remote, Impoverished Communities Within Nicaragua

From the comfort of the Pan-American Highway, you might drive right past an area of extreme poverty and not realize it because much of Nicaragua's most destitute communities are "hidden" by their remoteness. Like Christ, who ventured into the poorest and least desirable communities in Judea, you need to venture off the main byways, going where the terrain is rougher and the way is more challenging.

The drive will take you down one of the highway's branching dirt paths, but before long, you will begin to see signs of the poverty you've come to address.

During the dry season, you could easily mistake the small farming villages you'll pass for the kind of town old films portrayed during the Dust Bowl years in America's past. Unfortunately, this is a poverty that has yet to end — and one that will likely continue from this generation to the next.

Even during the rainy periods, the poverty of these desperate communities endures. At those times of the year, dusty children are replaced by boys and girls with muddy feet and faces, but their hardships are the same. In either season, they live in crude shacks, struggle to find safe water, become ill for lack of proper medical care and rarely have an opportunity to attend a quality school.

More than all of this, they face an alarming daily hardship — there is never enough to eat.

Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America, and its subsistence farmers typically struggle to feed their families. Many children are underfed — some dangerously malnourished — leading to stunting, lethargy, a weakened immune system and a general failure to thrive.

When children reach school age, this lack of food can mean skipping breakfast, arriving for class on an empty stomach, and then — after hours of studying math and grammar — having nothing for lunch either. It isn't surprising that these children often struggle to concentrate in school and often fall behind.

Worse still, they are sometimes pulled out of school altogether to help support their struggling families. Caught in this

cycle of trading future opportunities for daily meals, these children see no way out.

Fortunately, the Church is aware of the hardships rural Nicaraguan families are facing, and local leaders are stepping forward to provide solutions with the help of American Catholics.

"American Catholics can play an important role in the Church's efforts to end hunger and provide the poor with greater opportunities. Local leaders are eager to help families in their area, but they lack the resources to get the job done. It's the contributions of these generous and compassionate people that empower them by supplying them with resources like food and medicines. Without the generosity of American Catholics, their outreaches would not be nearly as successful," explained Jim Cavnar, president of Cross Catholic Outreach, an official Catholic ministry known for its support of Church-run missions in developing countries. One of Cross Catholic Outreach's key missions is to educate U.S. Catholics about the ways they can support the Church's work overseas by funding specific projects and contributing to programs delivering food to areas in need.

"In my 20-plus years of work with Cross Catholic Outreach, I've found that faithful Catholics are eager to help the poor in the developing world, particularly when they can contribute to something specific and see the impact of their generosity," Cavnar said. "Through our current work in Nicaragua, for example, they can fund food shipments that will have a direct and meaningful impact on thousands of lives. They can address severe hunger among the poor



Supported by Catholic donors in the United States, missions in Nicaragua are able to address extreme hunger in their communities and provide relief to the poor. Cross Catholic Outreach has become a major partner in equipping and resourcing these ministries.

and help restore hope in communities that have felt isolated and forgotten in their hour of need."

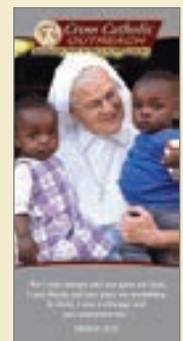
Feeding programs like this one are also popular because so much can be accomplished with each donated dollar.

"Our methods and expertise in shipping can turn a \$75 donation into 500 meals for families in need," Cavnar said. "That's an incredible 'bang for the buck,' as the saying goes. Our hope is that American Catholics will see the enormous potential of this outreach and will be eager to get involved. The more support we get for this feeding program, the more children we can serve."

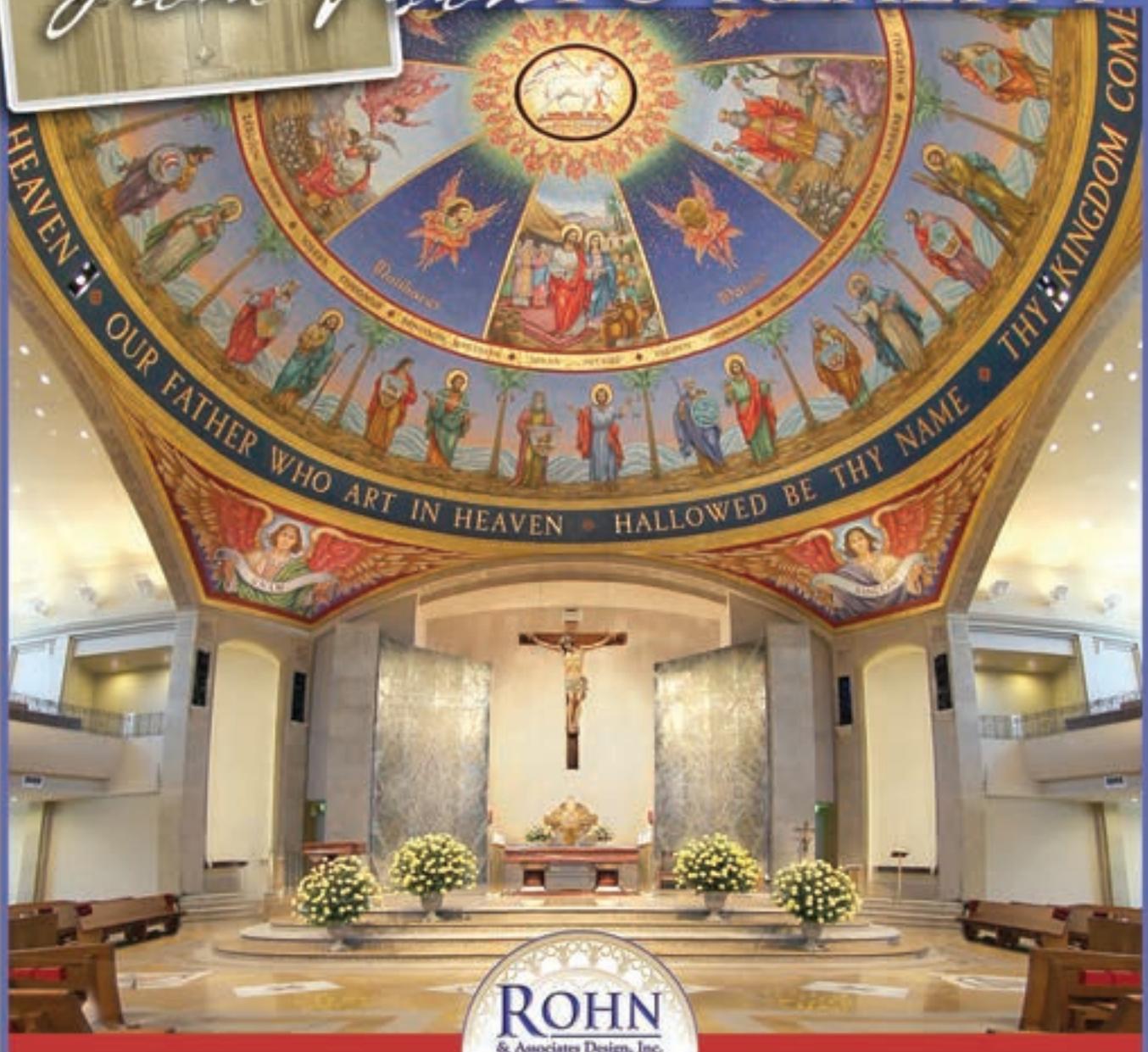
How to Help

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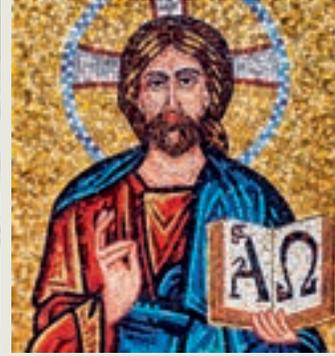


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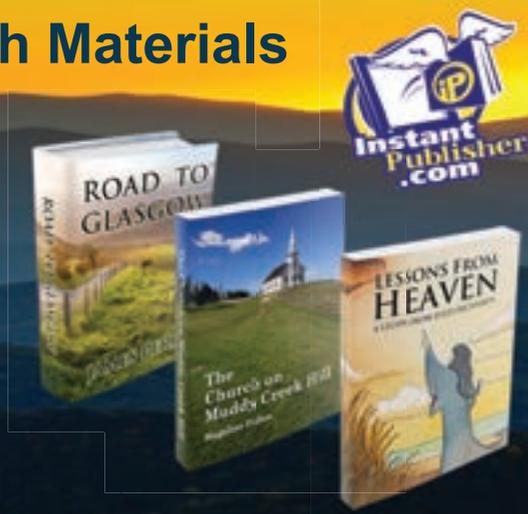
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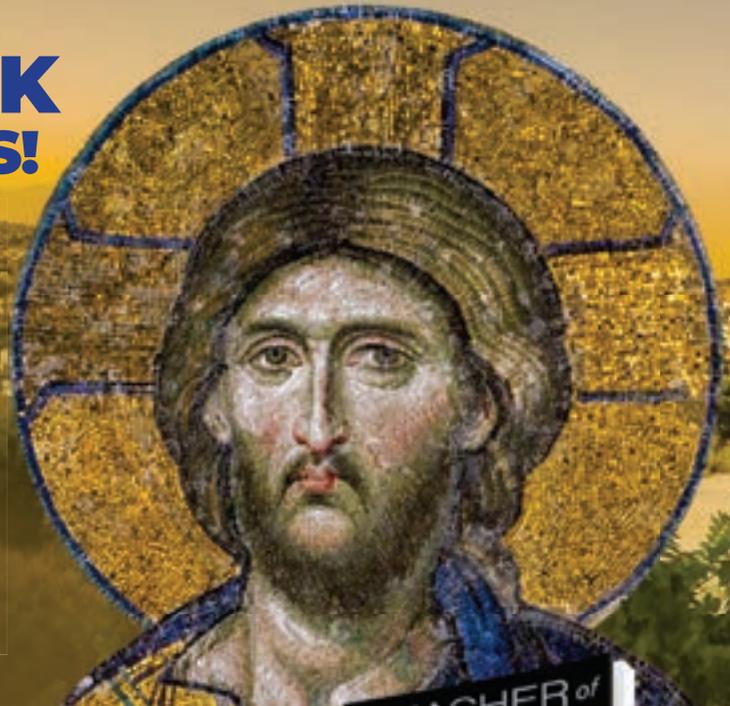
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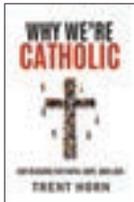
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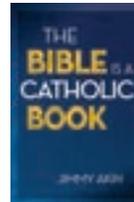
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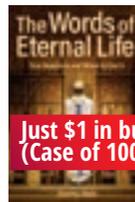


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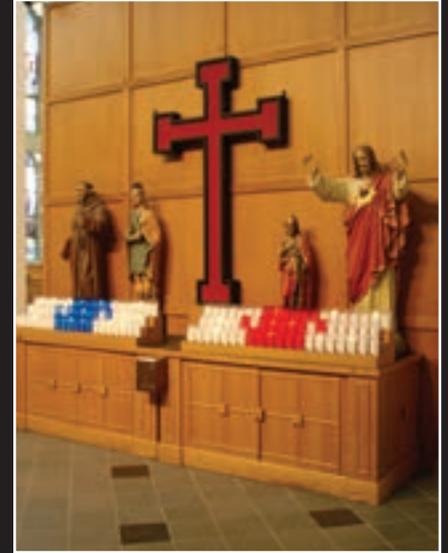
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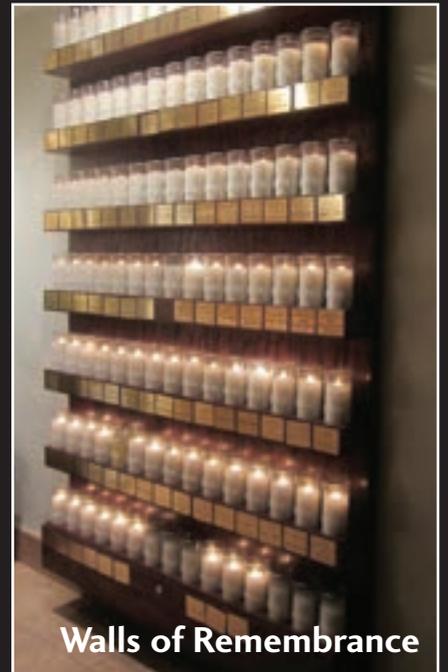
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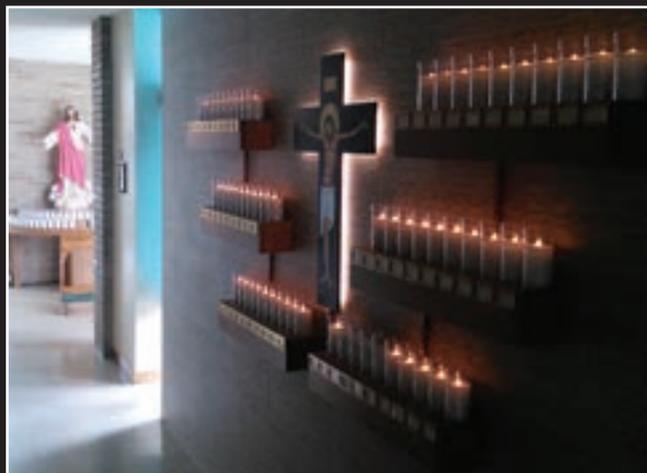
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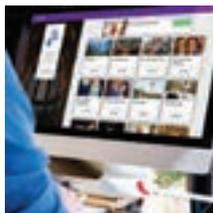
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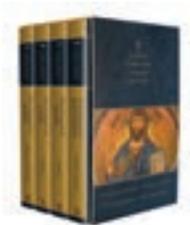
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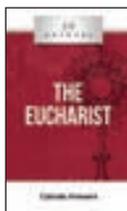
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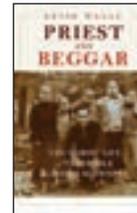
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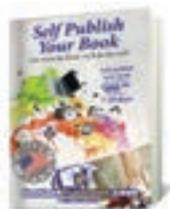


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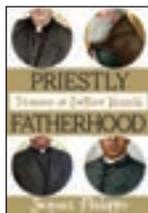


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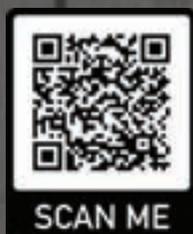
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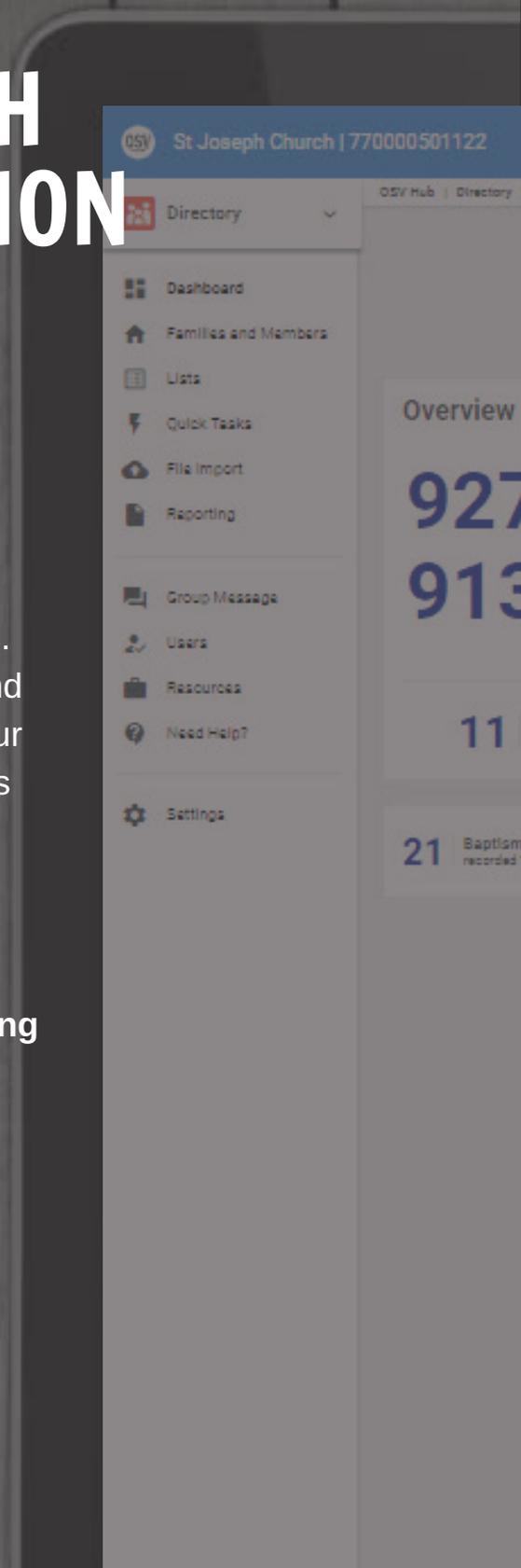
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By Jim Lundholm-Eades

When Money Is Missing

What should the pastor do?

What follows is a true story, told to me by the pastor himself.

After three months at an unnamed parish, the pastor has asked his parish finance council to provide an overview of the financial state of the parish.

The chair of the Parish Finance Council (PFC), who has been on the finance council for 35 years, tells the pastor that there is no debt, the bills get paid on time and through great financial discipline the parish has about \$3 million in a savings account at the local bank. The pastor is puzzled because the roof of the church leaks, the plumbing in the school has failed three times during his short time in the parish, and he has gotten late notices on a mortgage held by another bank.

He asks the chair of the PFC to help him understand all this. He is told that the finance council is saving the \$3 million for a rainy day and that he, as a pastor, cannot have access to it.

Meanwhile, three wealthy parishioners are telling the pastor that they want the money that was donated for a new school building 20 years ago returned to them because it was never built, a total of about \$3 million.

The pastor looks again at the parish books. He cannot find the \$3 million mentioned anywhere in a current parish bank statement or the balance sheet.

What should the pastor do?

Among the multitude of issues involved in this scenario, there are very practical questions and issues of parish culture and practice that grab attention.

In terms of practical issues, a question is: Where is the \$3 million that he cannot find? Most commonly, finding a large sum of money is more complex than just looking at bank statements. Most pastors would need help in a case like this. He needs either the expertise of the diocese or expertise recommended by the diocese. But he needs expertise from outside the parish.

The second practical matter is that he does not have a good

answer to his original question: He asked for an overview of the financial state of the parish. When there is a possibility that financial records are compromised an external audit or review is needed. A clean set of comprehensive financial reports is a necessary tool for every newly appointed pastor.

The third practical matter is to use that overview to answer key financial questions:

- Can the parish meet its ordinary financial obligations (utilities, salaries, etc.) for the next 12 months?
- What are longer-term financial obligations of the parish (external debt, program funding, diocesan assessments, etc.), and can the parish pay them?
- Is there a current-year budget and how does that compare with the actual income and expenditure in that budget period?

In terms of parish culture and practice, there is something awry with the finance council. Fundamentally, it is a matter of who governs the parish. The Church has an unequivocal answer to that. It matters, however, how the new pastor goes about making corrections. Before he does anything else, the pastor needs to listen.

This stance allows him to approach correction with a pastor's heart. There is so much to correct here that the temptation is to go into fix-it mode and forget the ultimate good that he is obliged to do with this parish community: to bring the people to Christ. It means the pastor will use the principles of synodality. He will seek collaboration. He will lead far more than coerce. He will respect the parish narrative of the past while trying to influence it for the future. **TP**

JIM LUNDHOLM-EADES is a consultant for Leadership Roundtable, a Washington-based organization that promotes best practices in the management, finances and human resources development of the Catholic Church in the United States.



By Father Ronald Patrick Raab, CSC

Carrying Life's Burdens

Nothing is too heavy when we allow God to carry our frets

Many years ago, I visited the Holy Land. Early one morning in Jerusalem, I viewed from a small garden the bustling marketplace nearby. I noticed from the garden an elderly gentleman carrying a washing machine on his back, walking uphill. The washer was tied with a rope to the thin man who had bony legs and wrinkled skin. I sat on a bench and watched him carry his heavy load home.

This image reveals for me Christ carrying his cross. The man carrying this burden still haunts me. I have prayed with this image my entire priesthood. When I feel overwhelmed, I seek him in prayer to help me carry loss and anger. When I know I can't control the outcomes of others' burdens, I ask for his intercession. When I experience life's unfairness and needless cargoes of heartache or grief, I pray to see this man's face again. This image gives me consolation when I face the heaviness of life and vocation.

On Sept. 14, the Church celebrates the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This feast, much like Good Friday, invites us to reflect on our burdens. The cross becomes our place of victory, no matter how heavy. Our inner burdens are redeemed in the resurrection of Christ Jesus. We lift high our burdens before the cock crows in our personal prayer and in the light of morning Eucharist with those who long for healing.

The Holy Cross reminds me that nothing is too heavy when I allow God to carry my past frets and even my illusions. I am not alone when I listen and walk with him. Faith in the dying and rising of Christ is a lifelong journey. Our shoulders will be lighter, we will not stumble or fall when at last we rest our lives in Jesus.

I realize we all carry afflictions we should not have to carry. The secrets of our lives, the long-term regrets, our histories of shame, the carelessness of sins are all burdens that pile up within us. As priests, we all face moments of darkness, our loneliness, our lack of intimacy. My body tightens on days when I still don't think I am good enough or holy enough.

We all experience many days or even years where these burdens become our only identities.

There are encumbrances we carry on our shoulders that

need redemption. I can't speak for us all. I feel the tightness in my shoulders when I am confronted with financial concerns beyond my expertise. I feel burdened when even more requirements and expectations are put on my shoulders from the chancery. The false expectations of parishioners pile up on me. The gossip, the excuses people make for leaving the parish, the abuses from my brother priests, the lack of leadership in our world all remind us that we need the freedom of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we deal with the heavy burdens on our backs by turning inward. We may fuel the fires of addiction to alcohol, food or pornography when we feel crushed in life. When we do not feel appreciated or when people treat our priesthoods as a commodity, we so often fall. We may even lash out at those we love when fear burns our inner lives.

The beauty of this feast is that all burdens are redeemed. We are not alone. The Holy Cross teaches me to walk with people who carry such unbelievably heavy loads. I listen to a veteran recall accidentally shooting a civilian in wartime. I listen to a mother bearing a sick child over her shoulder. I listen to parents who lost careers because of the pandemic. They cannot shoulder their responsibilities. My ear is sharper and my heart kinder when I celebrate the wood of the cross even in September. The purpose of my priesthood is to give hope to those who carry unexpected burdens.

As I reflect on the man carrying a washing machine on his thin body, I remember his determined face. I don't know why he carried the machine. It was obvious to me that he had spent his life carrying many items on his back. I long to find serenity in helping others face the burdens they bear. All I know is that Jesus redeems the weight on our shoulders. **TP**

FATHER RONALD PATRICK RAAB, CSC, serves as pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, Colorado Springs, Colorado, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Chapel in Manitou Springs, Colorado, and Holy Rosary Chapel in Cascade, Colorado.

9/11: What pastoral lessons did you learn in leading people?

“On 9/11, I was only three years ordained and a new pastor. Amid the shock, it did not occur to me that our community needed to pray and to support each other that evening. I blew it, out of inexperience, but with the conviction that when something wildly unexpected happened again, I would be ready! So when the churches here shut down with COVID restrictions last year, we immediately sat down and began plotting out all the ways we could make the parish as available as possible. A missed opportunity can become an asset the next time!”

— **Father Gary L. Zerr**, Keizer, Oregon

“Listen! Listen! Listen! People’s grief, people’s confusion, people’s questions; listening leads to the healing and the comfort that comes in the face of the unimaginable. Sometimes, the conversations are individual. Other times, they are demonstrative of a necessary group dynamic for healing and hope! Listen! Simply listen! Just listen. The Holy Spirit will be known in the listening.”

— **Father Michael Lynch**, Richmond Hill, New York

“I have learned to be more patient with people. Everyone reacted to the pandemic differently, with different levels of adaptation to the situation. It was important to take everyone where they were at and to deal with them accordingly. I also learned to appreciate the internet as a means of evangelization.

— **Father Joseph A. Escobar**
Providence, Rhode Island

“9/11 was a time of profound national grief, raising more faith concerns for people than any cogent explanations I could offer folks. This tragic time led me to ‘stand with’ the People of God as one among them who searched for answers. 9/11 prompted raw healthy conversations about the existence of God, theodicy, ponerology, the body and eternal life.”

— **Father Patrick Flanagan**, Jamaica, New York

“I recall that first weekend after the attacks of 9/11 and how the Scripture passages for the weekend Mass were timeless to what had just occurred in our country. It was a gentle reminder that no matter how dark the world may seem, the light of Christ is brighter. It was a reminder that Scripture will always be timeless.”

— **Father Tim Biren**
St. Charles, Minnesota

“As pastor of a parish close to the site of that plane crash in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, many persons came to express anger toward God. While very aware that God was not the cause of the events of 9/11, I had to reinforce that anger toward God is a periodic experience in most people’s lives. I encouraged them to express that anger in prayer.”

— **Father John J. Slovickovski, PhD**
Johnstown, Pennsylvania

NEXT QUESTION:

Which saint inspires your priestly ministry the most and why?

You can offer your feedback (100 words or less) via thepriest@osv.com or The Priest magazine on Facebook. Selected answers to this question will appear in the November issue.

9/11: Twenty Years Later

Suggestions for communal and private prayer



By Rita A. Thiron

Most of us remember where we were on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001. We watched in horror as images of the terrorist attack flooded the news media. Thousands perished in the World Trade Center, at the Pentagon and in a field in Pennsylvania. The victims were Americans and citizens of 77 other countries.

Churches, synagogues and mosques opened their doors as people tried to find meaning. These worshippers entered with a range of emotions — grief and fear, shock and rage, insecurity and uncertainty. Preachers often struggled to formulate the right words.

Jesus came to bring peace, but he also brought the sword (cf. Mt 10:34). Our God is full of mercy and compassion, yet he is a just judge (Ps 7:12). Jesus said to love our enemies (Lk 6:27), but could we love so despicable an act? Could we forgive as God has forgiven us? Believers — old and new — found comfort, strength and challenge in prayer.

Since that day 20 years ago, war continues to be waged against terrorists. Politics, diplomacy and military tactics have been forever changed. In Afghanistan alone,

2,312 Americans have died, and twice that many soldiers and civilians have perished. Security measures, which were implemented in airports, stadiums and office buildings, have become commonplace. Children not yet born in that fateful year are now grown. More recently, the world has faced catastrophic loss during the pandemic — yet again, and still, we grieve our dead.

This September, our assemblies will

*While politics and patriotism
will certainly be visible, prayer
should take the more central role
on this somber anniversary.*

be faced with renewed turmoil. Media coverage, national observances and family gatherings will refresh their minds and open their wounds. Our nation will again express its grief and try to understand. While politics and patriotism will certainly be visible, prayer should take the more central role on this somber anniversary.

In what follows, I offer a few suggestions for communal and private prayer.

The Roman Missal

Certainly, the parish will want to commemorate the day with Mass. In 2021, Sept. 11 falls on Saturday of the Twenty-third Week in Ordinary Time. During the day, the priest celebrant may choose from several options in the Roman Missal.

Certainly, Masses for the Dead provide appropriate texts. The Lectionary for Mass provides a rich variety of options for the readings (cf. Nos. 1011-1016). It would be appropriate to choose Eucharistic Prayer III with embolisms for the dead. Any of the five Prefaces for the Dead may be used, but Preface I and V are particularly suitable. Solemn Blessing No. 12 (Ordinary Time IV) offers a fitting conclusion.

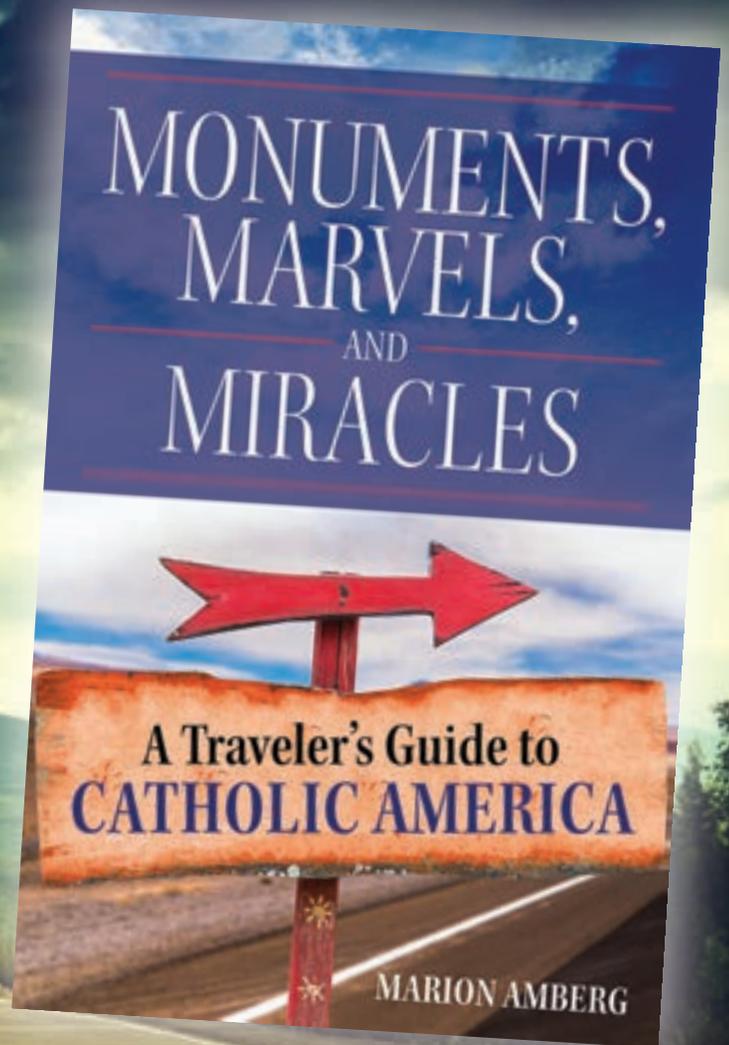
One will find several worthy options among the Masses for Various Needs and Occasions. “30: For the Preservation of Peace and Justice” has several options for the collect, and the Lectionary (cf. Nos. 887-891) has many options that provide rich fodder for preaching. One might choose to use the Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions III — Jesus on the Way to the Father. Solemn Blessing No. 10 (Ordinary Time II) would complement the rest

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Monument engraver Kyle Fricke prepares to add names to the memorial wall at 9/11 Responders Remembered Park in Nesconset, New York., on Sept. 11, 2020, the 19th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the United States. CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

of the Mass texts.

Another option might be “31: In Time of War of Civil Disturbance.” Again, there are two options for the collect. The readings may be found in the Lectionary, Nos. 897-901.

Finally, Masses for Various Needs and Occasions offers only a collect at “21: For the Nation or State,” but this might be used at other times or as a prayer to begin parish meetings.

Order of Christian Funerals

This liturgical book provides prayers and resources for a variety of pastoral circumstances. Chapter IV offers texts for the Liturgy of the Hours: Office of the Dead. Consider drawing from the beautiful psalms and prayers used at Morning

Prayer (cf. OCF, Nos. 373-383) or Evening Prayer (OCF, Nos. 385-395).

The section entitled “Prayers and Texts in Particular Circumstances” has some particularly appropriate selections, including General (cf. Nos. 1-13); One Who Died Suddenly or Violently (No. 43); or Several Persons (Nos. 46-47). The presider may also wish to choose from among the Prayers for Mourners (No. 399) or the Litanies for the Dead (no. 401.4).

A Celebration of the Word

The parish may also wish to prepare a prayer service for use outside Mass. This might be a fine choice for a school assembly or as an evening prayer service to begin meetings. This option will be best for an ecumenical or interreligious prayer

service. It would be important to meet with the representatives of various faith communities beforehand and have them be involved in the actual preparation of the event (cf. Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, No. 111). The readings may be drawn from any of the aforementioned Lectionary citations.

An Act of Remembrance

The following ceremony might begin a prayer service or be used before Mass. As each phrase is read, minister(s) could light a candle. At least 15 seconds of silence should be maintained between each phrase. A somber tolling of a bell or a sung acclamation might conclude each invocation.

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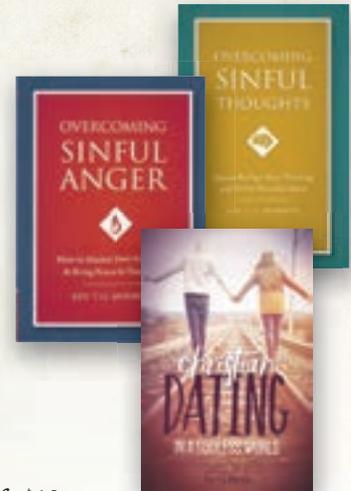
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- For the passengers on American Flight 11 and United Flight 175, which were flown into the World Trade Center.
- For all the workers who perished in the World Trade Center and neighboring buildings.
- For the firefighters, police and rescue workers who died trying to save others.
- For the crew and passengers on American Airlines Flight 77, which was flown into the Pentagon.
- For the military personnel and civilians who were killed and injured at the Pentagon.
- For the heroic crew passengers on United Flight 93, which crashed into the field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.
- For all military personnel who have died in the battle against terrorism.
- For all those who have died as the result of terrorist activity and for those who mourn them.

Environment and Art

Consider the environment for the church building on Sept. 11 or for that entire weekend's liturgies. Though the American flag is ordinarily not to be displayed in the sanctuary or nave of the church, on this occasion it might be appropriate.

The Paschal candle might be placed next to a Book of Remembrance. (The names of those who perished on Sept. 11, 2001, may be found at www.911memorial.org or other websites.) Flowers or plants might also adorn this space.

A candle stand could be placed in the sanctuary or alcove with a sufficient number of candles for the prayer service. It is recommended that the sacristan use large, glass-enclosed votive candles, which may be lit for all the weekend Masses.

Prayers

Consider preparing, printing and distributing prayer cards. Alternatively, post something on the parish website. This will

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PAPAL PRAYER WHEN VISITING GROUND ZERO

*O God of love, compassion, and healing,
look on us, people of many different faiths and traditions,
who gather today at this site,
the scene of incredible violence and pain.
We ask you in your goodness
to give eternal light and peace
to all who died here —
the heroic first responders:
our firefighters, police officers,
emergency service workers, and Port Authority personnel,
along with all the innocent men and women
who were victims of this tragedy
simply because their work or service
brought them here on September 11, 2001.
We ask you, in your compassion
to bring healing to those
who, because of their presence here that day,
suffer from injuries and illness.
Heal, too, the pain of still-grieving families
and all who lost loved ones in this tragedy.
Give them strength to continue their lives with courage and hope.
We are mindful, as well, of those who suffered death, injury, and loss
on the same day at the Pentagon and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.
Our hearts are one with theirs
as our prayer embraces their pain and suffering.
God of peace, bring your peace to our violent world:
peace in the hearts of all men and women
and peace among the nations of the earth.
Turn to your way of love
those whose hearts and minds
are consumed with hatred.
God of understanding,
overwhelmed by the magnitude of this tragedy,
we seek your light and guidance
as we confront such terrible events.
Grant that those whose lives were spared
may live so that the lives lost here
may not have been lost in vain.
Comfort and console us,
strengthen us in hope,
and give us the wisdom and courage
to work tirelessly for a world
where true peace and love reign
among nations and in the hearts of all.*

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MORE RESOURCES AVAILABLE

For additional resources —
including prayers, the full text of a
prayer service, sample intercessions,
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be particularly helpful for those who are still confined to their homes due to advanced age or to coronavirus health concerns.

These will also be fitting remembrances that parishioners can routinely use at home for family prayer time.

Certainly, one can compose an original prayer for this 20th anniversary. The prayer in the sidebar might serve as an example.

It was prayed by both Pope Benedict XVI (on April 20, 2008) and by Pope Francis (Sept. 25, 2015) when each visited Ground Zero in New York City.

Looking Forward

Certainly, Sept. 11 will always be a day of solemn remembrance. Certainly, once again, we will mourn our dead and pray for their souls — knowing that they rest in the arms of their merciful Father. Certainly, we should console those who lost loved ones. Certainly, we must give comfort to those who still suffer from injuries incurred that day. It is right that this day should never pass from our collective memory.

On this 20th anniversary, let us also acknowledge a longing for peace. Let us pray for peace — fervently, continually, vocally. Let us work toward a lasting peace in all our actions — personally, communally, nationally. And in all things, give praise to almighty God who gives us the peace of Christ. **TP**

Rita A. Thiron is the executive director of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions.

Lessons from St. Paul

Why the apostle's experiences and qualities are especially pertinent to priests today



A painting of St. Paul from St. Severin Church in Paris. Renáta Sedmáková/AdobeStock

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**HIS LIFE AND
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By Father Donald Senior, CP

Both personally and in the wider social and religious world of his day, Paul the Apostle witnessed an old world die and a new one born — not unlike our experience at this moment in history. Paul, of course, was not a priest but an apostle and dedicated lay missionary. But some of the characteristic experiences and qualities of Paul's ministry, I believe, have special significance for today's priesthood.

Perhaps more than any other figure in the early Church, Paul embodied profound conversion and transformation for the sake of the Gospel — both on a personal level and within the religious tradition to which he was passionately committed. Sometime around A.D. 5, Paul was born in Tarsus, a provincial capital in south-central Asia Minor, present-day Turkey.

Tarsus was a city noted for its culture and learning, a thoroughly Greco-Roman city, yet one with a significant Jewish minority population. We know that Paul was born into a devout Jewish family — a heritage he would always cherish and respect. Yet, he was also born of a father who was a citizen of Rome — we do not know how Paul a Jew acquired his Roman citizenship, perhaps because his father had been part of the military or was a freed slave. From this dual heritage — devotedly Jewish and proudly Roman — Paul would embody within himself the cultural and religious mix that would be key for his future mission.

From his Jewish heritage came a tenacious faith in the God of Israel, the compassionate, liberating God who had created the world and held it in his loving providence. And from Judaism, as well, Paul was endowed with a strong moral sense of translating one's belief in God into a life obedient to God's will. From his Roman heritage and his classical education in Tarsus, Paul would draw on a broad vision of the Mediterranean world in all its diversity and dynamism and be schooled in the art of rhetoric and persuasion that

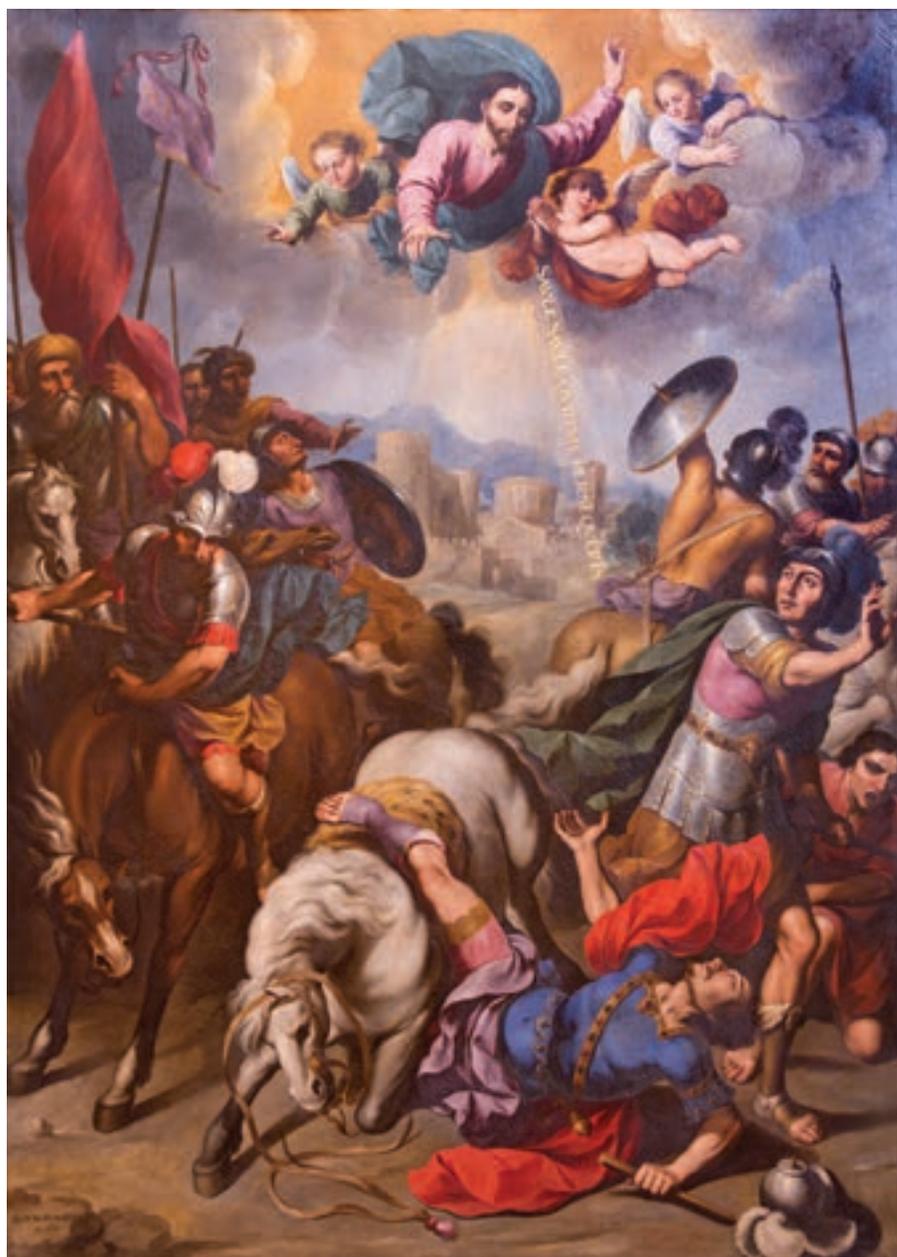
Rome had inherited from its Greek predecessors. Paul's family tree, his DNA if you like, would be translated by God's dynamic Spirit into a figure who would bridge the Mediterranean world.

Paul and Conversion

The New Testament gives us two portrayals of a crucial turning point in Paul's life where his vocation from God would burst into flame. One is found in the dramatic conversion stories of the Acts of

the Apostles. Paul, whose cocksure zeal drove him to persecute the followers of Jesus, would be knocked to the ground by the power of Christ's redeeming presence. Blinded by the light of God's forgiving love, Paul, paradoxically, would begin to see the truth for the first time (cf. Acts 9:3-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18).

In Luke's account of the unfolding history of the early community, Paul, the tormentor and persecutor of the Christians, would now become the "chosen vessel "



"The Conversion of St. Paul," a painting by Ignacio de Ries (1612-61), is in the Segovia Cathedral in Spain. Renáta Sedmáková/AdobeStock

BUILDING THE CHURCH FOR CHRIST

We might also recall that Paul was someone who made no small plans, even though in those days, too, we might say vocations were sparse and finances precarious. As he indicates in Romans 15, Paul intended to plant churches all around the northern rim of the Mediterranean world, eventually going even to Rome and on to Spain, thus winning over the gentiles for Christ, a glorious accomplishment of God's grace that he hoped would, in turn, convince all of Israel itself to accept Christ.

— the one who would bring the Gospel of Jesus from Judea to Antioch, westward to Greece and, ultimately, to Rome.

Thus, in the portrayal of the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's conversion is, in a certain sense, forced from the outside — an experience beyond his control turns his religious world upside down and transforms his life forever.

The striking account of Paul's conversion in Acts takes a very different form in Paul's own words in his Letter to the Galatians (cf. Gal 1:11-24). Looking back, Paul now sees that God had been calling him to this extraordinary transformation from all time — even before he was knit together in his mother's womb. He cites the great prophetic words of Isaiah 49 and Jeremiah 1 — “The word of the Lord came to me: / Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, / before you were born I dedicated you, / a prophet to the nations I appointed you.” (Jer 1:4-5).

The catalyst for radical change was not simply the turbulence of outside events but the fulfillment of a God-given destiny, an act of providence to which God had called Paul from all time.

Thus Paul steps into a beautiful and profound biblical tradition — that of the “call,” accounts of God's mysterious call that stretch from Moses to the prophets and on to Mary and the disciples of Jesus in the New Testament. The Spirit of God beckoning mysteriously, tenaciously — inviting one to set out on a new and often unexpected way of life for the sake of God. Paul is one of these. “It is too little,” God

whispers to Isaiah, “for you to be my servant, / to raise up the tribes of Jacob, / and restore the survivors of Israel; / I will make you a light to the nations, / that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Is 49:6).

Authentic Modalities

All of us, I think, can reflect on these different but authentic modalities of our life and our vocation. On one level, we are driven by factors outside of us: world events, the threat of a pandemic, the economy, the changing face of the Church, the movements of culture and history, the encouragement of friends and mentors. And we surely need wise and caring people to help us sort through such experiences and to make sense of them. Like Paul, we need people to help us shed our blindness and see our life and the people around us from the perspective of our Christian faith.

But on another, equally important, level we also believe that we are held in God's hands, our lives both individually and collectively a response to God's profound call to us, a call imbedded in God's loving providence for all time. And here we know the importance of reflection on the deepest wellsprings of our faith; reflection on the Scriptures and the great characters and saints of our heritage who also responded to God's call and drank deeply of the wellsprings of Christian spirituality to understand what God was doing in their lives, just as Paul drew on the stirring words of Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the example of their prophetic ministries to make sense



ST. PAUL ON SOLITUDE

“At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.”
— 2 Timothy 16-18



PAUL ON PRAYER

"And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God."
— Philippians 1:9-11

Paul did not shrink from the demands of leadership or the responsibility of authority, but he exercised that calling in a manner compatible with his own theology of the passion and of the community that belonged to Christ.

out of the unanticipated turns in his life. Perhaps, this is some of the work that needs to take place during sabbaticals or programs of reflection for ministers of the Gospel of all times.

The Passion of Paul

Paul, as you know, was not an original or charter member of Jesus' disciples. Paul never forgot his second-generation status — or his wrongheaded persecution of the Christian movement. He would forever remain in his own estimation as one "born out of due time." But that did not take away from Paul's passionate commitment to Christ or the Gospel.

Paul's passion was undoubtedly a product in part of a naturally fiery temperament. No even-tempered phlegmatic would express in a public letter like Galatians the hope that those Christians who proposed circumcision for his gentile converts would have the knife slip in their own case — or begin a letter to a prominent Church with the address: "O Stupid Galatians!" Paul, I fear, may not have been easy to live with. Perhaps it is no accident that his ministry was primarily an itinerant one!

But it is equally clear that the sustaining fire of Paul's passion came from the intensity of his commitment to Christ. At one point in his life, Paul affirmed to his community the startling confession: "Christ lives in me." It was this that drove him in his ministry, and from this came his preaching and his theology.

It was the passion of Paul that led him to write letters whose imagery and force changed Christian consciousness forever. Letters written in rapid, often tortured prose; letters so bursting with ideas that more than one scribe at a time had to take Paul's dictation; and even another inspired biblical author had to say, with some understatement, there are things in the writings of our brother Paul that are hard to understand (cf. 2 Pet 3:15-16).

My point is that Paul's ideas — his

PAUL'S LIFE AND THEOLOGY

From the very first moment of his encounter with the Gospel not just to his fellow Jews but to the gentiles led after time to this decision. From his own testimony for all of humanity from the very first instant of

Paul's urgent missionary logic is clear in this famous "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" — have not believed? And how can they believe in him if they have not heard without someone to preach? And how can people hear without someone to preach? "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring [the] good news!"

Even though Paul testifies that he was called to be a missionary, he encountered the Risen Christ (cf. Gal 1:15-16), still others for Paul to further develop his initial vocation in prayer and solitude in Syria, near Damascus, and then with Peter and James (cf. Gal 1:17-20). Afterward, he went to Asia Minor and eventually to the major city of Antioch, where he was called to be a missionary.

Paul was drafted by Barnabas and brought to Antioch to proclaiming the Gospel to the Mediterranean world. Acts tells us, the followers of Jesus were first called "Christians." Barnabas and others, would hone his message for gentiles. His missionary journeys west through Asia Minor and the Mediterranean what would be European soil and where he would evangelize (Acts 16:11-12).

preaching, his writing, his theology, his teaching, his sense of authority and governance — were welded to his own passionate discipleship. Paul’s theology was not borrowed or trendy or merely speculative. Paul derived his vision from the living soul of the Church and his own passionate commitment to it. He was the recipient and responsible guardian of tradition: “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received” (1 Cor 15:3). But he also was able to draw out a theological vision from the genuine Christian experience of his people: the Church as the Body of Christ in response to the factionalism of Corinth; a theology of weakness in the face of his, and his Christians’ own experience of limitation — physical and spiritual; a theology of a law-free Gospel because of his confidence in the religious experience of gentiles; a theology of a cosmic Christ triumphant over the cosmos to offset the paralyzing fear of fates so prevalent in the Greco-Roman world.



Fresco of St. Paul preaching at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls in Rome. zatletic/AdobeStock

the Risen Christ, Paul felt called by God to proclaim the world. There was no gap, no long pondering that day, Paul was convinced of the Gospel’s life-giving power in his encounter with Christ. This passage from his letter to the Romans: “For I have loved. But how can they call on him in whom they have not heard? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘Good news!’” (Rom 10:13-15).

As a missionary to the gentiles from the first moment, no doubt, it took time and the assistance of others. By his own testimony, he spent considerable time when went for a brief time to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles. He went to Cilicia (his home region in southern Asia Minor) which would be his first true missionary base. He invited Barnabas to join him in the new adventure of evangelizing those that lay beyond the perimeters of Israel. Here, he gathered “Jewish Christians” and here Paul, under the guidance of Barnabas, gathered Gentile Christians and, from here, he would launch his mission and eventually to Greece when he first set foot on the island to establish a Christian community at Philippi (cf. Acts 16).

The heart of Paul’s theology and his spirituality was linked to another experience of passion — namely, the passion of Jesus. For Paul, the dying and rising of Jesus Christ was the reality that explained all reality, that revealed the true face of God. In the light of the Passion, of the Paschal Mystery, Paul rethought and rediscovered the heart of his Jewish tradition. The God of Abraham was also the God of the Nations. The God of Jesus crucified was revealed not in the trappings of power and splendor but in the marvel of what some humans counted as weakness: a life

poured out for others.

“For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” (1 Cor 1:22-25).

From this center, Paul would contemplate everything: the heart of Christian life was love, as it was unconditional love that

animated the crucified Christ; the experience of limitation and weakness, as Paul himself experienced in his own mortal body, would find meaning in the crucified body of Jesus who gave himself for us; the Body of Christ that was the Church would give the greatest honor to its most weak and least honorable member because God had revealed himself to the world through a crucified Messiah, and thus the Body of Christ was a crucified body in which the wounds were still visible; and the apostolic sufferings and wrenching heartache Paul experienced in the course of his ministry, and which his communities experienced in their struggles and sufferings, were not in vain because the cross of Jesus had forever affirmed that through God's grace from death comes abundant life.

Confident Leader

I think all of us who work in the Church today can learn something about

authentic apostolic leadership from Paul, too, and about the image of the Church we need to project to those we serve. Paul was very conscious of his role as an "apostle of Jesus Christ" and cites it frequently.

Yet, it would be a misunderstanding of Paul and his ministry to think of him (as has sometimes been the case) as some solitary colossus standing astride the early Church or as a lone ranger, moving fearlessly and alone across the map of the Mediterranean world, planting the seed of the Gospel without dependence on or connection with others.

This image is false, and our evidence is Paul's own testimony. One of the most remarkable and important insights we have gained into Paul in recent times is that he operated within an extraordinary network of co-workers.

Paul did not shrink from the demands of leadership or the responsibility of authority, but he exercised that calling in a

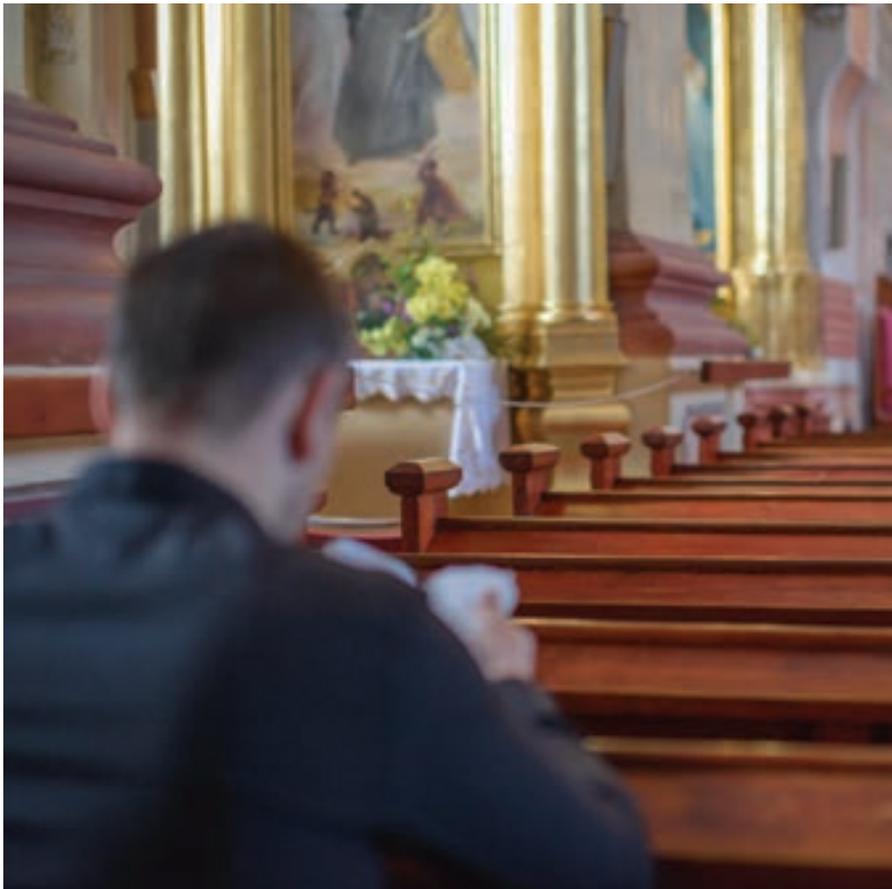
manner compatible with his own theology of the passion and of the community that belonged to Christ.

The famous concluding passage in Romans 16 is one of the best sources of evidence for this. As Paul concludes this letter to a Church he has never visited, but one that had great importance to him, he adds a series of greetings that gives breathtaking insight into the range of his contacts and his non-possessive spirit, as well as testimony to the mobility and networking of the early Christians themselves. He cites by name 29 Greek and Jewish co-workers and fellow "apostles" (10 of them women), drawn from nobility, freedmen and slaves.

Paul never traveled alone; he hands out the title "co-worker" liberally throughout his letters, and even his letters themselves are collaborative pieces, all but two of them are explicitly co-authored. Paul's sense of collaboration was not simply a personal style or imposed by necessity, but flowed from his vision of the Gospel, rooted ultimately in his image of the God who gathered all people, who was the God of Jews and gentiles. A conviction that spills over into Paul's consistently collaborative images of the Church as a body of many members, as a profusion of gifts welded into one Spirit, as an array of many instruments and materials fashioned into one living temple of God.

The building up of the community of the Church was his restless apostolic goal, and he knew that every gift, no matter how brilliant, was subordinate to the gift of charity and the bonding of the community.

Paul's own theology of weakness put the ultimate check on the temptation to possessiveness about one's status or authority. Paul's own evident physical disability, his wrongheaded persecution of the Church early in his life — all these experiences had taught Paul his own moral fragility and led him to find his strength, paradoxically, in his own weakness, because where he was weak, God was strong. Above all, Paul's contemplation of the



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Passion protected him from conceiving of himself or his authority in arrogant terms. Jesus, God's Suffering Servant, who gave his life that others might live, was the ultimate sign of how authentic authority was exercised.

That memory of Paul is needed now. Those who exercise authority in the Church — no matter at what level — need confidence in their apostolic vocations, but also need to hold them in a non-possessive way. Collaboration with others in our ministry and vision of the Church is not a fad but an expression of the Gospel.

Boundless Man of Hope

I am convinced from reading Paul's letters that he was a man who suffered greatly from his ministry, yet at the same time it was the consuming passion of his life. Paul's ardent zeal for Christ and the Gospel ran headlong into unyielding reality. Paul's heart was broken not just by the dreams that never took flesh but by the constant drumfire against the few things he had been able to build.

Truth squads of other Christian leaders seemed to have stalked his steps, questioning his orthodoxy, turning the heads of his converts to a different understanding of the Church, planting doubts about his apostolic authority.

Paul's anguish and frustration come to a rolling boil in a famous passage from 2 Corinthians 11, as if on some blue Monday, Paul's patience breaks and out comes a torrent of frustration and pain, directed not at the leaders of the synagogue, or at the threats of Roman officials, but at his own fellow apostles and the leaders of his own communities:

"Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I am talking like an insane person.) I am still more, with far greater la-

bors, far more imprisonments, far worse beatings, and numerous brushes with death. Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I passed a night and a day on the deep; on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own race, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst, through frequent fastings, through cold and exposure. And apart from these things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is

Paul's ardent zeal for Christ and the Gospel ran headlong into unyielding reality.

weak, and I am not weak? Who is led to sin, and I am not indignant?" (vv. 22-29).

Paul lived at a time when his vision of the Church was contested by others. There must have been nights in Corinth or Thessaloniki or Ephesus — surely in Jerusalem or during house arrest in Caesarea and Rome — when he wondered if he was on the wrong track after all.

Maybe thoughts like these have passed through the minds and hearts of priests as they exercise their ministry and take stock of its results.

Holding on Tightly to Hope

But, at the same time, Paul managed what every great pastoral leader has done. Paul held tightly to his hope. Paul never let go of his foundational experience of faith.

The love of the crucified Christ for him was the pledge of God's unbreakable covenant, of God's unceasing redemptive love

for the world: "What will separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom 8:35), Paul asks.

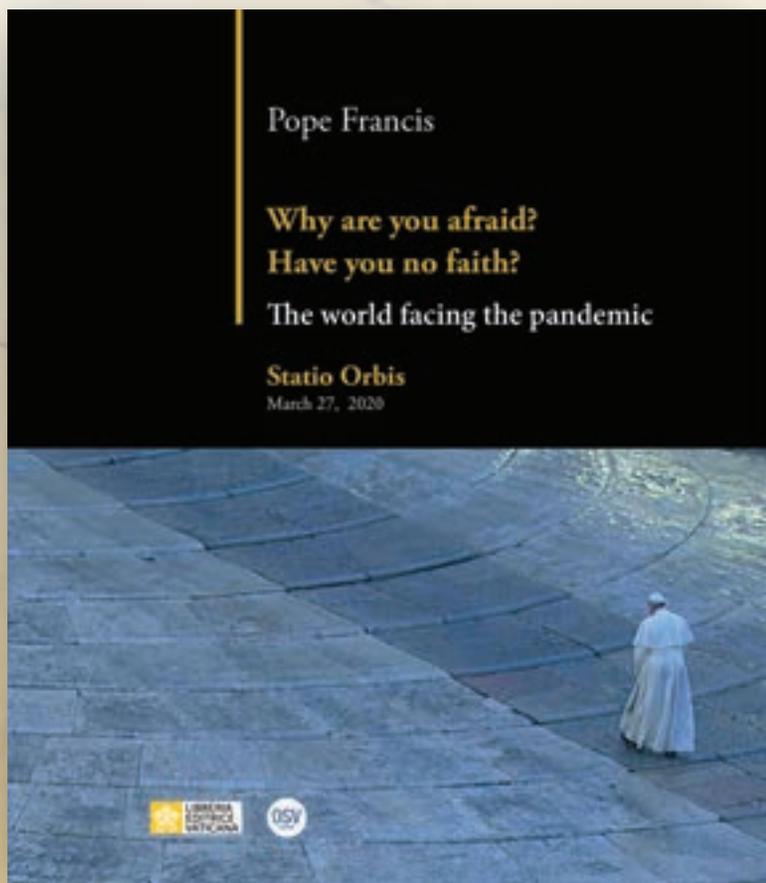
It is a question wrung from the heart of a minister of the Gospel, of one called to mission, of an adult who has lived in the Church from the inside and who still refuses to be undone by its scandals and frustrations; one who had lofty ideals of community but also knew the sad realities of divisions and conflicts; one, in effect, who knew the reality of suffering and yet nourished great hopes.

He says in the most soaring passage of his letters, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

As priests and ministers of the Gospel, called to live out our faith in the Christian mission at this moment in history, a mission that takes many forms and that has its moments of joy, no doubt, but also its share of discouragement and frustration and solitariness, we might do well to remember Paul: a passionate disciple of the crucified Jesus and theologian of experience; one whose God-given call to service was nourished by others; a man confident in his apostolic vocation and identity but exercising his authority in a collaborative and non-possessive way, holding that treasure with others not because it was an attractive management style but because it was expressive of Christian faith; a man open to new possibilities, one whose restless, bold dreams for the Church brought him suffering but whose hope, rooted in faith, never dimmed. **TP**

FATHER DONALD SENIOR, CP, is president emeritus and chancellor of Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, where he is a member of the faculty as professor of New Testament.

English Translation Available *Exclusively* from OSV



The COVID-19 pandemic has left an indelible mark on our lives, and the same is true for the Church. Masses were suspended for months, people could not receive the sacraments, and during that time, Pope Francis celebrated Mass alone every day. *Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?* collects some of the words from the pope's daily homilies when the world was in isolation during the "long Lent" in the spring of 2020, as well as Angelus messages and prayers he delivered.

This book is filled with poignant photos that bring to life Pope Francis' words of support and encouragement, especially from his extraordinary blessing "*urbi et orbi*" in an empty St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on March 27, 2020. The dozens of photos in this book illustrate the themes often evoked by the Holy Father during the pandemic, including fraternal love, solidarity, the common good, and the virtue of hope.

Commemorating an historically important chapter in both the papacy of Francis and the history of the modern world, this book is another avenue by which the Holy Father shares his uplifting message of wisdom, hope, and love with those who have suffered in pain, loneliness, and fear. Despite the dire challenges we have faced during this pandemic, Pope Francis reminds us that evil does not destroy confidence in God, and it does not break the solidarity of humanity.

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Father, Meet PAPI (the Process, Assessing, Prioritizing and Implementing Plan)

A path to helping your parish recover from the impact of COVID-19



By Owen Phelps, Ph.D.

“COVID shot holes through our parish’s bottom line and the pastor just crawled into a hole.”

That’s the way a lay friend of mine recently described the toll taken on his parish by the COVID-19 pandemic. He continued: “He just stopped communicating. Staff and volunteer leaders waited weeks for email responses to their questions.” As spring dawned and restrictions eased, my friend was hopeful his pastor would crawl out of his bunker.

Another pastor, halfway across the country, handled things differently — with a different outcome. In the first several months after the COVID shutdown, his parish’s revenues had risen compared to the prior year. I joked that his people would spare no expense to avoid listening to his homilies.

In truth, his parish was thriving because he is an exemplary innovator and a great communicator. Within days of his parish’s mandatory shutdown, he was producing an online Mass seven days a week and a weekly kitchen sit-down show where he and his associate chatted with and took questions from parishioners. Think family

*In many cases, the question is,
How can we do more with less?
But a better question may be,
How can we do better with less?*

around the dinner table.

Something else: This pastor was not shy about engaging his parishioners in the effort to keep their parish financially healthy. As he chatted casually with them on Zoom, the kitchen memo board

on the wall above his head proclaimed in huge letters: GIVE! You can be frank with friends.

Disparities of Impact

These two extremes are typical of what happens in a disaster. There are huge disparities of local effects. Some pay a terrible price. Others escape unscathed. No two situations are entirely alike. So it has been during the pandemic. Some businesses thrived, others shut down. Some people worked longer hours, others were laid off. Some people died, others suffered terribly, and still others escaped unscathed. Some relationships thrived, others withered and disappeared.

The little mission parish in a vacation area where I’ve been chair of the pastoral council during the pandemic actually came out of the ordeal in financially good

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"The Church of Christ today must be in nature, in power, in teaching, what it was when it served men through the twelve Apostles."

—Archbishop John Francis Noll,
founder of OSV



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shape. Government payroll aid helped. But a portion of our parishioners really stepped up and provided their support. We're grateful. Now, we just have to get all our parish activities back up and running — and let people know where we are in that process.

Other parishes face more daunting challenges. A Villanova University study projects a 24% decline in parish collections for the 2021 financial year. That means parishes are asking themselves what organizations, what ministries — in some places, even what parishes — can or should continue.

As if the challenge of rebuilding after the pandemic shutdown isn't enough, parishes across the country share another challenge. Nearly all are confronting declining member participation. While visionary pastors and advisers are strategizing about how to turn spectators into disciples, nearly every parish in the country is facing the challenge of fewer people in their pews.

The sense I get from everything I hear is that church life is rife with uncertainty. Will people come back? How many? When? Will they be more eager to don the yoke of discipleship, or less? Should we be preparing for success or failure? And to what extent do our expectations of the future become a self-fulfilling prophecy?

If we can't muster confidence that

the Holy Spirit will guide us and "renew the face of the earth" (Ps 104:30), starting with our own parish, how can we expect to endure and serve the People of God? So, prayer is the first order of the day. In many cases, the question is, How can we do more with less? But a better question may be, How can we do better with less?

Whatever a parish's circumstances, there is a way to proceed to assure that it does its very best with the resources it has been given. There are many ways to proceed, especially if we drill down into the details. In the end, no two approaches will be exactly alike. But let me propose one approach to help you get started, or at least better organize your efforts.

Don't think of it as a solution, a silver bullet to resolve all your concerns. Think of it, instead, as a framework, something on which you can hang, organize and appraise your work. It's the PAPI approach. PAPI stands for Process, Assessing, Prioritizing and Implementing a plan for recovery from COVID and cultural challenges. Father, meet PAPI.

Who Should Be Involved?

The first question to consider is who else should meet PAPI? It's axiomatic that responding effectively to major changes in a parish budget is not something a pastor can do alone. Yes, it's quicker to just develop a plan yourself and announce it.

VILLANOVA STUDIES COVID-19 IMPACT ON PARISH COLLECTIONS

The Villanova Center for Church Management study "COVID-19 Impact on Parish Collections" surveyed 169 parishes and examined giving during the pandemic. The study, posted at villanovachurchmanagement.com, revealed that in 1 in 6 parishes collections increased.

The key insights of the study reveal:

- Collections can go up.
- Offer online Mass.
- Reach out to people.
- Share the financial reality.
- Be bold and courageous.

But then look forward to spending all your time and energy trying to sell your plan and fighting off active resistance.

Getting buy-in from staff, councils, commissions, volunteers and parish members is hard. But the more who own the process from the start, the fewer people you will have to convince later. It's not true that "more is always better." More people make the process more cumbersome. But they can also make the outcome more promising. Error on the side of inclusion.

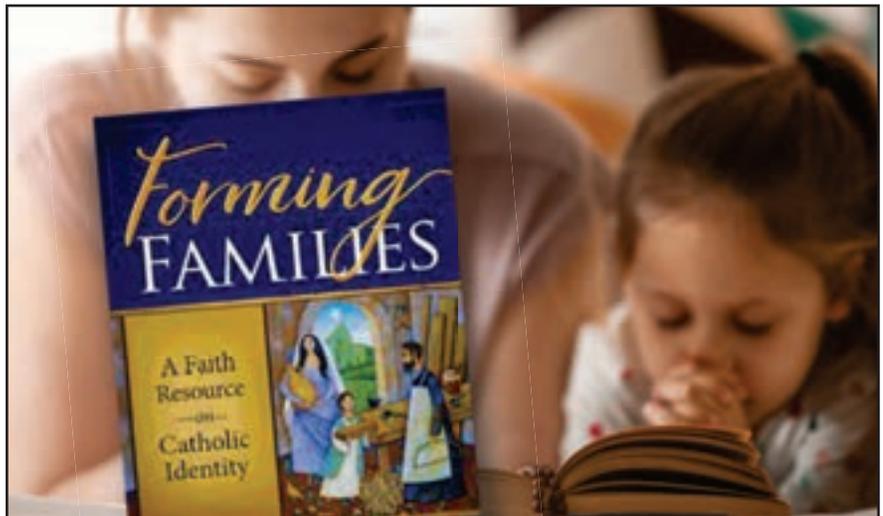
Of course, don't just schedule a parishwide meeting and expect consensus to emerge. Consultations need structure. Think about that. Consult about the issues. Develop a plan with a process for how to obtain sufficient input. If you're just dealing with a small crisis, you can probably design a process to include members of the pastoral council and finance commission, along with your staff. But as a general rule, the broader and more long-term your discernment process, the more people you should invite to participate.

Assessing

In the first stage of assessing, two broad questions come to the fore: What are we doing? How well are we doing it?

The relevant answers to the first question are both qualitative and quantitative. Develop a list of all the ministries and activities in your parish. Look at how many people each of them is reaching and how much each cost. But also consider how important each activity is in terms of your parish's mission and the mission of the Church: to go and make disciples. Remember, building relationships matters, so commit some resources to do that.

If you'd like to develop a long-range plan, consider reaching out to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) to develop and analyze a parishwide survey, which can help you assess which parish ministries matter most to people and how well the people think you are doing in providing them. Despite all



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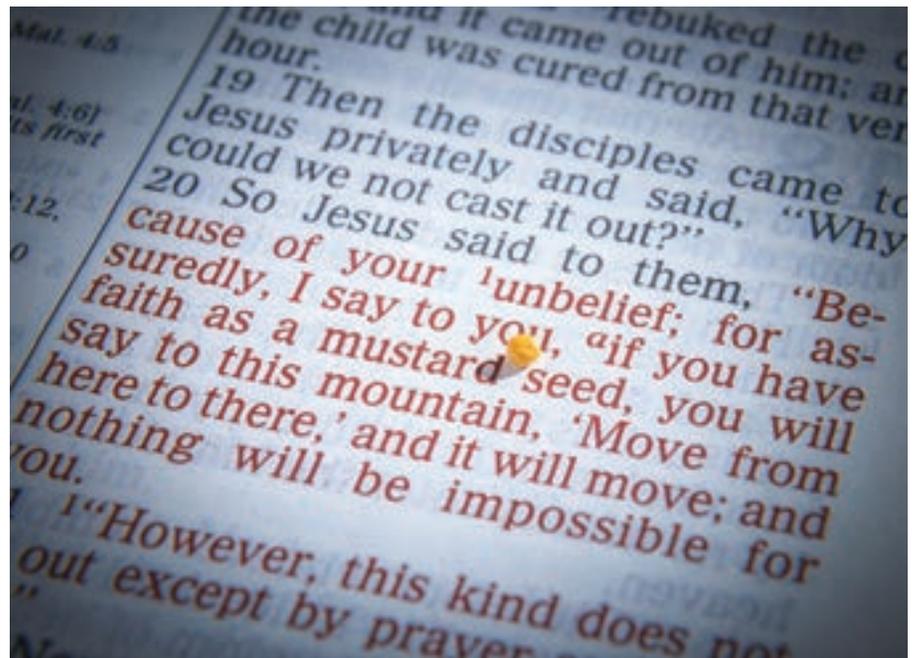
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PPP LOANS

The Villanova study reveals that 80% of parishes received Payroll Protection Plan (PPP) loans from the government through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020. Allocated to direct payroll costs, the funding kept people employed.

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the uncertainty afoot, there are things you know or can learn. Start with those.

Prioritizing

When you begin to consider the importance of each of your parish's activities, you have begun to prioritize. In this stage, you are asking, What matters most? But you don't need a strict rank order. Worship, evangelization and religious education are all essential. They can share the pinnacle.

Still, this is a time to do a little digging. Yes, religious education is a huge priority. But what about the importance — and cost — of its various components? Within each broad ministry area, its components should undergo a prioritization process. And this process should involve the people being served, as well as the people doing the serving. The better our assessment process, the better and easier our prioritization process.

It should be no surprise that staff members will each give high priority to their own ministries. Council and commission members can be very helpful in providing a broader context in which to conduct your prioritization process.

Implementing

But the better job you have done assessing and prioritizing — and bringing people on board in consensus about the results — the easier this part of the process will be. Here are a few tips to help make it bearable and ultimately better:

Communicate constantly. Know what you intend to accomplish and state it over and over again. Build your chorus: Get as many people to sing the same tune as often as possible. For your efforts to work, invest in building consensus. This is not about you; rather, it's about a process. And remember, the most important part of communicating is listening.

Pay great mind to the outliers. Are there programs and/or staff members who have to go? Focus first on the people affected — providers and recipients alike. Be present to them. This is when, as Pope Francis urged, you get “the smell of the sheep” on your hands. It may not be the most important part of the priesthood, but it is the most important part of pastoring.

Let people vent. For some, it will be therapeutic. For others (as you surely know), it will be habitual. Do everything you can to let love win. Don't let their an-

ger define your relationships. Remember, anger nearly always masks pain. Try to provide a safe place where the pain can surface. Then try to help heal it. Feel their pain. Wear it. But don't let it become personal.

If cutbacks are happening, leave time and space for grief. And remember its stages: denial, anger, bargaining and depression all come before acceptance. The process takes time. There are relapses. Help people work their way through it. And recognize that, sadly, not everyone will get there.

Moving Mountains

Some years ago, I was teaching Jesus-like leadership to a diocesan ministry formation class. I asked class members to talk about their very best leaders. One woman said the best leader she ever had was a person who had let her go. I listened for a trace of sarcasm but didn't detect any. Mystified, I asked her to elaborate.

The higher-ups in the big company she had worked for decided to shut down her department. Her boss shared the heartbreak. But he then got everyone on board with the goal to help one another find other jobs — and not just other jobs, but better ones. In the end, they achieved their goal. She was forever grateful — for the better job and for the model of effective and caring leadership her boss had bequeathed to her.

In Matthew 17:20, we hear Jesus tell his disciples that faith as small as a mustard seed can move mountains. Surely, our faith can handle more modest tasks, even when they are incredibly difficult. It's always good to remember we never proceed alone. **TP**

OWEN PHELPS, Ph.D., is executive director of the Yeshua Catholic International Leadership Institute and author of the book "The Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus: Introducing S3 Leadership — Servant, Steward, Shepherd" (OSV, \$15.95).

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—Parishioner who came to her pastor for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and spiritual support

To learn more about how you can help those who suffer from abortion, contact your diocesan Project Rachel Ministry director. Or visit the national web site for those seeking help:

www.HopeAfterAbortion.org

www.EsperanzaPosAborto.org



project rachel

Peace starts here

* Name changed for confidentiality. Model used for illustrative purposes only.



Prayers and Reflections from the COVID-19 Pandemic

When the world was in the depths of despair with the COVID-19 pandemic, Pope Francis, on March 27, 2020, presented an extraordinary moment of prayer in St. Peter's Basilica. On that day, the world prayed with the pope and was inspired by his reflections. The prayer service from that dark, rainy and mournful night, will long be etched in the memories of the faithful throughout the world.

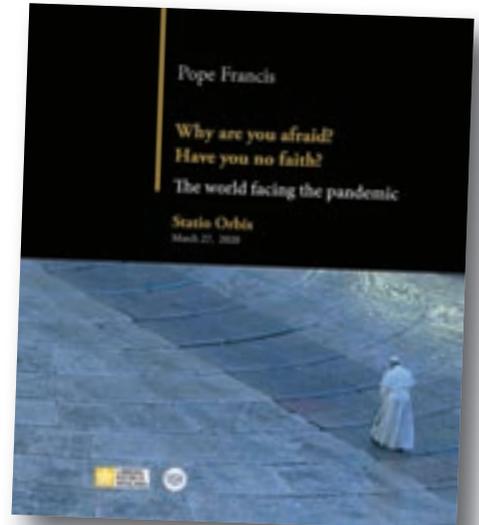
Why Are You Afraid? Have You No Faith: The World Facing Pandemic (OSV, \$19.95) highlights the prayers and meditations of the prayer service. Who will forget the pope's words of encouragement? "Just like those disciples, who spoke anxiously with one voice saying 'We are perishing' (v. 38), so we too have realized that we cannot

go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this." The pope reminded us of Jesus' words: "When [Jesus] wakes up [in the boat], after calming the wind and waters, he turns to the disciples in a reproaching voice: 'Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?' (v. 40)."

The prayers and reflections are accompanied throughout the first half of the book by vivid photos, thus making the book a reflective piece in times of tribulation and a keepsake.

The book's second part is devoted to reflections, catechesis and homilies for Masses throughout the pandemic.

"Why Are You Afraid" is produced by the Libreria Editrice Vaticana and edited by the Dicastery for Communication.



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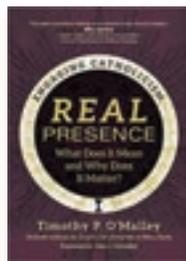
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The Priest

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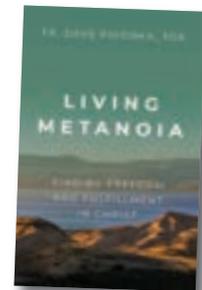
Promoting the Real Presence

In **Real Presence: What Does It Mean and Why Does It Matter?** (Ave Maria Press, \$14.95), author Timothy P. O'Malley clears up some confusion by explaining the biblical origins and long tradition of the Church's doctrines of the Real Presence and transubstantiation. The book, part of the Engaging Catholicism series from the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame, can be a helpful resource for all Catholics.



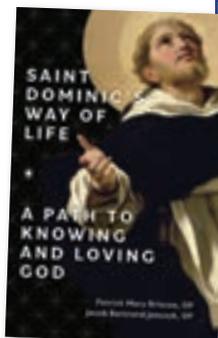
Finding Freedom and Fulfillment in Christ

Father Dave Pivonka, TOR, in **Living Metanoia: Finding Freedom and Fulfillment in Christ** (OSV, \$18.95), explores the command, "Repent and believe in the Gospel." Repent, or "metanoia" in the Greek sense of the word, means to change, to turn, to think differently. Father Pivonka encourages readers to go deeper in their relationship with Jesus. Rather than thinking of Jesus in terms of who we think he is or who we want him to be, Father Pivonka explores who Jesus actually is.



St. Dominic's Way of Life

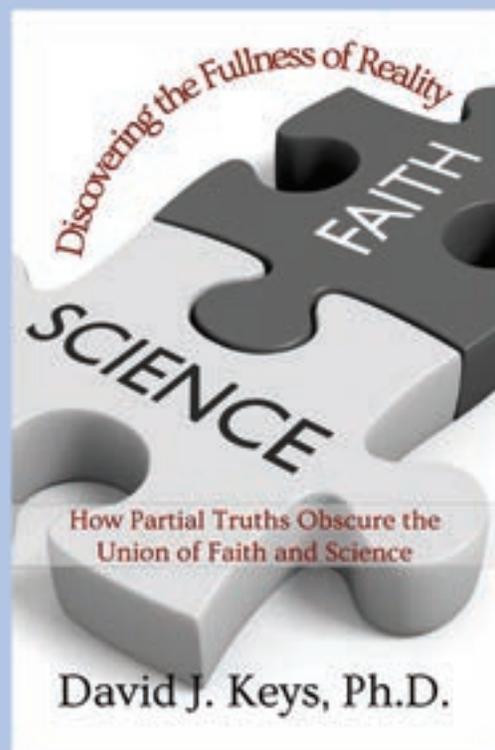
One could say the 21st century remains in need of the witness and ministry of St. Dominic, a saint who did not leave a deposit of writings yet offers a rich approach to Christian living. Fathers Patrick Mary Briscoe, OP, and Jacob Bertrand Janczyk, OP, co-wrote **Saint Dominic's Way of Life: A Path to Knowing and Loving God** (OSV, \$15.95), which highlights the saint's deep spirituality through his dedication to prayer, penance, the Word of God and love of neighbor. St. Dominic can help draw readers into the reality where one seeks and asks: What is good? What is justice? What is love?



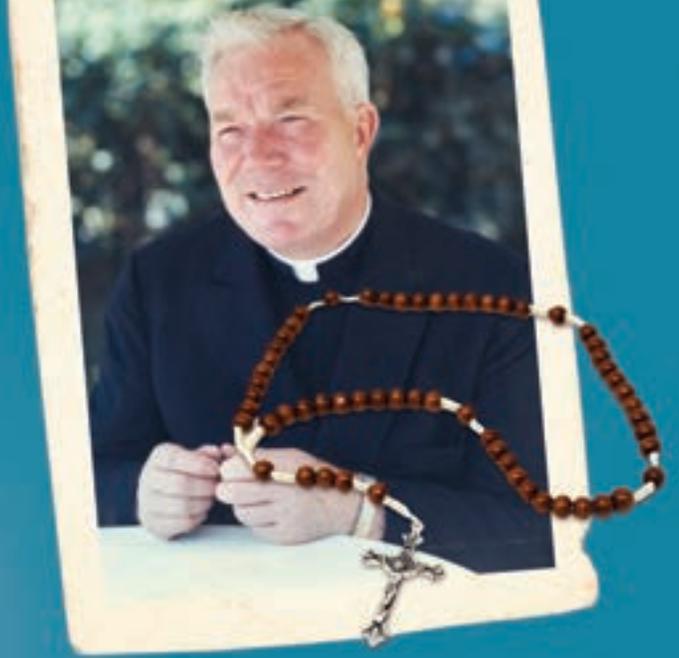
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PRAY

THE STORY OF PATRICK PEYTON

October 3, 2021 | Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

A CREATOR'S LOVE

Today's first reading tells us something very significant about our Creator. I think that it is often overlooked that after God has fashioned the first human being from the dust of the earth, the Lord senses the loneliness and alienation that is "not good." God then goes through a kind of checklist of creation until arriving at a "suitable partner."

It is as if the divine impulse coming from the Creator is fashioning what Pope Francis has called "our common home." It is literally a holy, empathic imagination that builds from the ground up as the first remedy for our essential loneliness, which ultimately leads God to create a life partner for the first human being. All of creation comes from the Creator's love for the first human being.

Adam is unique among humanity because he was created directly by God without mediation. The rest of creation — the earth itself and its inhabitants — comes as a complete gift for humanity through our interaction with one another and creation. As the pope says in *Laudato Si'*, "Our very bodies are made up of her [the earth's] elements, we breathe her air and receive life and refreshment from her waters" (No. 2).

Surely, we must sense the divine empathy coursing through the course of salvation history as we contemplate Respect Life Sunday. The alienation of sin — the sense that we are cut off from God — moves God to surrender his very self as a complete and total self-gift. As we heard today in the Letter to the Hebrews, "He is not ashamed to call them 'brothers.'" Christ reconciled all things

in himself in perfect unity so that we might live in the peace of reconciliation. The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, of course, becomes the indelible print on creation, moving from alienation to fulfillment.

All creation has been made one in Christ, meaning there is a binding moral obligation for the care of every living being in our "common home," and to respect life from conception to natural death.

Jesus' confrontation with religious leadership discloses his ability to grasp the Father's kingdom as one, certainly clear in the Gospel today.

The Lord recognizes that self-exile, self-alienation or hardness of heart can only be answered by a radical openness to the kingdom.

That response means receiving the Kingdom as a child, long before our heart becomes

hardened by rejecting the "suitable partner" that God's mysterious will has intended for us.

Remembering God's care for creation invariably brings us to the locus point of our own lives where Christ dwells in our baptism. Each day, our call is to recognize the signs of our own longing to be closer to the God who made us, seeing in those closest to us — and indeed all of creation — an invitation to co-create in grace with Christ the work the Creator has begun.

OPENING *the Word*

First Reading: Gn 2:18-24

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6

Second Reading: Heb 2:9-11

Gospel: Mk 10:2-16 or 10:2-12



QUESTIONS *to ponder:*

- How does my celibacy participate in co-creation?
- How do I respect life, including my own?
- How does my prayer anticipate the Kingdom?



THEMES *to consider:*

- God loves us from the moment of creation
- Jesus has saved us from the alienation of sin
- Hardness of heart turns us away from God

Homily Helps for the September 2021 issue were written by FATHER GUERRIC DeBONA, OSB, professor of homiletics and director of spiritual formation at St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology.

October 10, 2021 | Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

THE ABIDING WORD

Information has quickly become a disposable commodity. The news breaks, and then it is forgotten until the next info cycle. As ministers of the Gospel to God's holy people, we can fall prey to treating the Word of God as yet one more message to be consumed and passed along rather than savored as a sharing in divine power. To recognize that the word is "a lamp for my feet, / a light for my path" (Ps 119:105) as *lectio divina* is to grow in a trust in God's promise to abide with us. Wisdom does not break into cycles and disappear; it endures in the community of love. The tradition of sacred Scripture that undergirds Judeo-Christian history maintains that God's word dwells among the upright of heart and comes daily to those who wait faithfully to receive the wisdom of the Lord in prayer.

Unlike receiving a string of information, I think deep reading comes when we ask the Word to read us. Conversion after conversion occurs with the great saints who put themselves at the disposal of the Word of God with the exclamation, "Speak to me, Lord!"

As we are reminded in the first reading, we have to ask for that which is mysterious when we hear, "I prayed, and prudence was given me; / I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me." Like any relationship, our intimacy with God increases the more vulnerable we become in prayer, allowing us to be the object of

the Word, which is "sharper than any two-edged sword." This progress amounts to what has been called the "fear of the Lord," a recognition that God is everywhere present in our lives, as St. Benedict designs it for his monks in the first step in the Ladder of Humility. Psalm 139 explains that everywhere presentness: "Behind and before you encircle me / and rest your hand upon me" (v. 5).

If there were an icon for the Word reading us, I think that I would nominate today's Gospel as the first exhibit. The young man comes disposed to interpret the Law, genuinely open to the Word. But Jesus pushes his relationship deeper with the simple phrase: "No one is good but God alone."

This is the invitation not just to interpret the Law, but rather to a discipleship in which the Word interprets him. This counterintuitive reversal threatens to overwhelm him since it calls not for having all our ducks in a row from our youth, but embracing true poverty of spirit and abandonment in faith. No wonder he went away sad; he just could not let go of the chance to get a glimpse of the Kingdom. As we seek the one thing necessary, we might find that we need to ponder the wisdom of our relationship with the living God. Perhaps the Word among us can discover us, today waiting for an answer.

OPENING *the Word*

First Reading: Wis 7:7-11

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 90:12-13, 14-15, 16-17

Second Reading: Heb 4:12-13

Gospel: Mk 10:17-30 or 10:17-27



QUESTIONS *to ponder:*

- Does my priestly ministry involve building a wisdom community? How?
- How does it feel when the Word comes to me like a "two-edged sword"?
- Who helps to mentor me with the wisdom of the Word?



THEMES *to consider:*

- Information comes and goes, but wisdom builds relationship
- The Word of God reads us like a book of love
- Letting go of what binds us frees us for life in the Kingdom

October 17, 2021 | Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

MERCIFUL JESUS

God has already answered our deepest prayer. I mean that God has already shown us his love and our continual life-breath moves along the lines of something like today's responsorial refrain: "Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you." God's mercy has been present from the beginning, manifested definitively because we have "a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God." In asking God for his mercy we are begging the Lord to let us see Jesus every day of our lives in ways that will help us trust in the providence of divine assistance.

We know that the early Church community was discovering ways to embody God's mercy through the rich Jewish tradition of worship and Scripture, representing Jesus as the great high priest, who, like us has "been tested in every way, yet without sin." Israel's own identity as the suffering servant, four songs of which appear in the Book of Isaiah, came to represent another dimension of Christ, the high priest, as the one who suffered for his people as the intercessor for all time.

Today's first reading is an echo of Holy Week, disclosing to us the suffering Christ: "Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, / and their guilt he shall bear." As a Church community,

we celebrate the liturgical tradition of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ once a year, but where is the suffering servant the rest of the time? Are we, like the sons of Zebedee, James and John, more interested in the corridors of power than a call to a life of service to God and others without much recognition?

This is a lifelong question for many priests, and it is not an easy one to answer. Somehow, even those closest to Jesus missed the reality of a suffering servant, thinking that they were really

called to share in messianic glory rather than to be poured out like a libation for others. This attitude may be an apostolic legacy we had not counted on from our ordination.

If our Achilles' heel is thinking that we are entitled to sit at Christ's left or his right, then we might consider the mercy we have been shown rather than the credit we believe we deserve from ministering to God's people. The gift of the parish is serving those who are ungrateful, both cheerfully and faithfully. It is there that we will find the hidden presence of Christ, who seeks not glory but the will of the Father. That does mean a graced determination is needed to be mindful of the mercy God endlessly shows to me and to those I serve.

OPENING *the Word*

First Reading: Is 53:10-11

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

Second Reading: Heb 4:14-16

Gospel: Mk 10:35-45 or 10:42-45



QUESTIONS *to ponder:*

- How does my ministry manifest Christ as the suffering servant?
- Does my clerical status hold me back from true service?
- Can I name a divine mercy in my life each day?



THEMES *to consider:*

- Christ suffers as our servant every day of the year
- God's mercy will discover us in unexpected ways
- The Lord intercedes for us in ways that we will never know

October 24, 2021 | Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

NEW COVENANT

Artistic representations of the prophet Jeremiah, such as those by Michelangelo or Rembrandt, typically render this major figure of the Hebrew Scriptures with his head bowed down in grief, pondering the fate of his people facing the Exile. Jeremiah rightly deserves the title “weeping prophet.”

But we would never guess that reputation from today’s first reading. We find ourselves in an utterly different space than the previous 30 chapters in the Book of Jeremiah. While we have faced a prophetic voice that ranged from dark despair to disgust at the Chosen People’s apostasy and idolatry, we have now stepped into a wonderland of forgiveness and grace, undeserved and unmerited. It is no wonder that patristic interpreters have judged this passage a kind of prelude to the New Covenant, an anticipation of God’s gracious gift in Christ.

“I will lead them to brooks of water, / on a level road, so that none shall stumble.” This small but powerful claim certainly stirs the Christian imagination to ponder the Sacrament of Baptism. It is Christ himself who has given his Church those waters, by the blood and water flowing from his side. This is the New Covenant, of course, taking us out of the exile of our wandering into sin, the fundamental marginalization of humankind, back to the heart of

love. We are no longer slaves but children of God, not based on our merits but Christ’s.

I cannot help but think that a concrete representation of this New Covenant comes into view with a question put to Bartimaeus from Jesus: “What do you want me to do for you?” Scholars tell us that because this street person has a name he might have once been a prominent person in his community. Maybe he was once somebody, but now he is a blind nobody who matters because

Jesus has affirmed his humanity by asking him to claim his desire. “I want to see,” he pronounces. Sound familiar? It should.

The minister of Christian baptism asks those seeking the sacrament what it is they desire? They need to hear what they have come for. The Lord wants to hear what we want so that he can deliver on a promise.

This profession of desire, I reckon, is key to the New Covenant because it means entering into a relationship as a child of God. Those who are experiencing blocks in prayer would do well to repeat the words of Bartimaeus: “Son of David, have pity on me. ... I want to see.” If we want to seek God, then we will have to ask for insight and for our blindness to be removed. The God of all mercies is asking us to do so.

OPENING *the Word*

First Reading: Jer 31:7-9

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

Second Reading: Heb 5:1-6

Gospel: Mk 10:46-52



QUESTIONS *to ponder:*

- What do I really want from God?
- Am I threatened by needing to ask the Lord to remove my blindness?
- Do I live as if I have been redeemed by the New Covenant?



THEMES *to consider:*

- We only have to ask for the Lord to erase our blindness
- God has shown us his mercy and love. Do we?
- What is “new” about my covenant with the Lord?

October 31, 2021 | Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

CALL TO WORSHIP

The call to prayer was a hallmark in antiquity, a signal that the community of believers was forming for worship. The *adan* is the Islamic invitation to pray at particular periods during the day. The *Shema* (alluded to in today's readings) was recited in ancient Israel as the summons to the prayer of the heart, the focal point of the life of prayer. The use of bells in many Christian churches remains the legacy of these ancient calls to worship.

For thousands of years, the faithful believer has turned toward an activity that involves neither self-interest nor profit; it is the sound that gathers the pious in the name of the holy. In a certain sense, all true believers respond with the refrain of today's responsorial psalm: "I love you, Lord, my strength."

In the Rule of St. Benedict, the author tells his monks that each member of the community should set aside whatever he is doing and make with haste and gravity to the oratory (cf. Chapter 43). Why? It is because "nothing is to be preferred to the work of God."

We might say that Christ himself gathers us in prayer. That the *vox Dei* summons us to Eucharist each Sunday could not be clearer, since the liturgy itself tells us that it is at Christ's command that "we celebrate this Eucharist." All else can wait because the "source and summit" of the life of the Church, the very heartbeat of the People of God, has been set in motion by the Lord's

voice. Our worship becomes the affirmation of a baptismal commitment to love God with all our heart and to love our neighbors as ourselves. How else do we hope to taste from the banquet of the Kingdom?

The Christian call to prayer and its response becomes the tangible witness to the worship of God and love of neighbor. Christ brings together his Church. If we are to take the Letter to the Hebrews at its most basic level, at its broadest reach, then Jesus the

high priest intercedes for us absolutely and continually as the eternal one; he ministers to us precisely as *vox Dei*, asking us to prefer nothing to the love of God and to lay down our lives in loving service for one another.

"There is no other commandment greater than these," Jesus tells the scribe. The Lord might be encountering one of us in a similar scene, sharing

with his disciples his wisdom drawn from the tradition of Israel. This particular exchange between Jesus and the scribe suggests that the Word becomes the gateway to the ages, reminding us of our fundamental priority. It is comforting to think of ourselves as part of the countless men and women of different religious traditions, languages and historical backgrounds listening to the same voice to summon them to prayer. The pitch of that call may have varied through the ages, but the direction has remained the same.

OPENING *the Word*

First Reading: Dt 6:2-6

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51

Second Reading: Heb 7:23-28

Gospel: Mk 12:28-34



QUESTIONS *to ponder:*

- What is at the core of my faith?
- How does this central belief drive my day?
- Who or what calls me to gather my prayer?



THEMES *to consider:*

- Christ gathers his Church, and we respond in gratitude
- The Lord is our strength
- Christ never stops calling us to sanctification in love and service



By Father Michael Ackerman

New Beginnings

Seeing things through, even amid our stubborn opposition

New beginnings can be especially challenging, but they can also be great periods of renewal. As a school chaplain, I have often greeted students at the beginning of the year as they stepped off the bus, eager to begin learning ... well, usually.

One particular year, a third grader was not the least bit excited to be back to school. He stood in front of the school with his arms crossed. "I hate school!" I heard him say, "and I'm not going in!" His mother desperately tried to plead with him, as did his teacher and several of his peers, but he was having none of it. I actually began to imagine them wheeling him into the school like Dr. Hannibal Lecter from "Silence of the Lambs," kicking and screaming the whole way.

A little incentive broke his will. There was an announcement made that an ice-cream truck was coming during the lunch periods for students. By the time that recess ended, he was the happiest child in the class and triumphantly declared that he was coming back tomorrow.

As amusing as this story is, times of change and transition can become contentious. I have a priest friend who told me that when he was named a new pastor, the outgoing pastor refused to leave. He was not happy with being transferred and did not move one single thing out of the rectory. Eventually, the vicar for clergy had to intervene and liberate the rectory.

It was a very difficult and divisive situation for my friend to be in, but he took everything in stride. "How'd you resolve this situation?" I asked him. "Prayer," was his response, and "watching

'Saving Private Ryan,' imagining I was storming Normandy." He went on to be very successful at that assignment despite the inauspicious start. His attitude, serenity and trust in God, no doubt, sustained him all the way.

Some years ago, I was given the book "Searching for and Maintaining Peace" (Alba House, \$7.95) by Father Jacques Philippe,

and I have often referred to it during difficult moments. I have often reflected upon the words of Venerable Francis Libermann, as quoted in the book: "Don't ever allow yourself to become upset by your misfortunes. In face of your misery, should you find yourself in this situation by the will of God, remain humble and lowly before God and be at great peace."

I am fairly certain Libermann was not thinking of third graders, belligerent pastors or

parish and diocesan meetings when he wrote this, but it certainly does fit for so many occasions. God is teaching us many things in our new beginnings and our struggles, but he always sees things through, even in the midst of our stubborn opposition. **TP**

FATHER MICHAEL ACKERMAN is the parochial vicar at the parish grouping of Holy Sepulcher in Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania, and St. Kilian in Butler, Pennsylvania.

I have often reflected upon the words of Venerable Francis Libermann: "Don't ever allow yourself to become upset by your misfortunes. In face of your misery, should you find yourself in this situation by the will of God, remain humble and lowly before God and be at great peace."

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