

The Light

Of
St. Michael
the Archangel
Roman Catholic
Church
Lake Jackson,
Texas



Jesus said, "I am the
light of the world.
Whoever follows me
will never walk in the
darkness, but will have
the light of life".

John 8:12

Adult Faith Formation

Spring 2017

(March - May 2017)



The Spiritual Light

The Spiritual Light

Save the Date

Clergy's Corner

From the Deacon's Desk

Lent: Enter the Desert in order to Find Life

The Liturgical Season

Attending Mass Every Sunday

A Conversion Story

The Holy See

The Saints

Bible Studies / Prayer Groups

After celebrating the Christmas season, we went into a short season of Ordinary Time to prepare ourselves to enter into the coming Lent and Easter seasons. It's our hope that the information in this new issue will help you to find ways to make these seasons as Deacon Gary says: *The Best Ever!*

Save the date for a concert with *David Kauffman* in April in the church. David writes and sings about God's embrace in everyday life connecting the Sacred to the Ordinary. Check the bulletin for more information, this is a show that you don't want to miss.

In this issue, you will find in *Clergy's Corner* Fr. Leo talks about Cardinal DiNardo's upcoming Capital Campaign, and Fr. Giovanni invitation to be "the light and the salt of this world." In *From the Deacon's Desk*, Gary encourages us to aim and prepare for our Best Lent Ever! And Blake Novosad in *Lent: Enter the Desert in Order to Find Life*, tell us how the Church is calling us into the desert, with the Lenten penitential practices, not to punish us, but to give us the means to find life by getting closer to God.

The *Liturgical Season* presents Solemnities and Feasts of the season with articles from the inspiring hands of contributors to the Magnificat magazine, and our Adult Faith Formation team member Allen Faulk. May you find inspiration and have the best Lenten and Easter seasons.

In *"Attending Mass every Sunday"* Elizabeth Betczynski interviews some of our parishioners asking the question why people don't come to Mass every week? And extends an invitation to come experience Jesus at Mass. In *A Conversion Story*, Margaret Kana tells us how profoundly God has touched her life.

In *The Holy See* we present excerpts of Pope Francis' Lenten message, several articles on his new catechesis on Christian Hope, and his message for the World Day of Social Communication. We also include *the Saints* that we celebrate during this season, *Bible studies* and *Prayer groups* that you may want to get involved with.

We welcome your comments so please contact us and let us know your thoughts. May our Living God bless you and your family this Lent and Easter.

Have a blessed Lent and a Happy Easter!

Margarita Prinz

Editors:

Margarita Prinz
prinzmh@yahoo.com
979-297-0297

Pam Walker
pamwalker56@gmail.com
979-297-9746

*Blessings on your Anniversary of
Ordination Fr. Leo!*

May 27



THE LIGHT

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Save the Date



David
Kauffman

IN CONCERT

Singer/songwriter David Kauffman's music ministry was born in San Antonio while he performed at Sunday night youth services. After his song "Come and See" was chosen as the 1989 theme song for the National Catholic Youth Conference, Kauffman expanded his musical horizons to include performances at youth rallies, colleges, and churches across the United States. His debut album, Simple Truth, was released in 1999, followed by Be Still in 2002 and Behold in 2003. In 2010, Mass of Renewal, co-composed by Kauffman and William Gokelman, was voted as the winner of that year's New Mass Competition sponsored by the National Association of Pastoral Musicians.

Saturday, April 29, 2017

7:00 PM

Saint Michael's Church

Admission: Love Offering





Clergy's Corner



Sixty year ago (September of 1957), I entered St. Mary's Seminary in Houston. Bishop Nold wanted to move the Seminary from La Porte to Memorial Drive. George Strake had donated 53 acres to the Diocese and the Seminary was built and opened in 1954.

What a beautiful place! Growing up in Freeport on the banks of the Old River, I had never seen a place like that. It was new! Most of our priests today went to school there. The years have taken their toll on the building; now they need some updating or renovation. You'll be hearing more about this process in the coming months. In 2000 we built our new co-cathedral, so now we turn our attention to the Seminary. It needs to be expanded and the old buildings brought up to date.

So Cardinal DiNardo has called for a Capital Campaign for this and other much needed projects... namely our Catholic Schools and the C.C.E. process. Soon you'll be hearing about his vision for our Diocese and what each parish is expected to do. So our Cardinal will be asking for a sacrificial gift to these worthy projects.

I hope and pray that you choose to be part of His plan to see "thy kingdom come".

Msgr. Leo Wleczyk

You are the light and the salt of the world. Matt 5:13-16



Two children, a boy a girl, were playing *Playhouse*. The neighbor heard that they were fighting and shouting at each other. So this neighbor went to the house in order to find out what was really happening. "*Are you quarreling?*" he asked. "*No, we're just playing,*" said the boy. "*We are playing Playhouse. I act as the father and she acts as the mother,*" continued the boy. So, parents watch out!

The Gospel of the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle A (*Matt 5:13-16*) was the continuation of Fourth Sunday's gospel. The Fourth Sunday's gospel showed us the basic attitudes or qualities of the members of God's Kingdom. These qualities are best described in the beatitudes. Our gospel for the Fifth Sunday told us about the task of those members: to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

I will focus on the salt and its characteristics why Jesus Christ compares us to a salt.

First, the salt flavors things and makes the food tasty. We know how tasteless and sickening to bite a food if there is no salt. We eat food because it tastes well and salted perfectly. So also with us Christians, we have to radiate Christ and make Christian values credible and attractive to other people.

Second, salt preserves food, keeps things from going bad and rotten. Meat is a dead body and if left to itself, goes bad. But salt preserves it and keeps it fresh. For us Christians, we must know how to preserve those Christian values so that we may be able to defeat evil ones and may help other people to be good.

An actress was interviewed in one of the television talk show on how she was able to become an actress. She was gifted with beautiful face and attractive body. In other words, she was beautiful. According to her, she studied in a catholic school and was brought by her parents in the catholic faith and values.

After her graduation, a movie director approached and offered her a leading role in a movie he is doing. So she was thrilled. The contract gave her a large amount of money and a vehicle for her to become popular.



She agreed with the role after reading the script. But one day, the director told her that they have changed a scene by which she would have a bed scene with her leading man. And for this, she was offered a large amount of money again as a bonus, but she declined the offer. It is because she studied in a catholic school and she taught of the grave moral harm and scandal that bold scene would do to millions, particularly young people. So the shooting went on minus that bed scene.

Third, Salt creates thirst. Do we ever make anyone thirsty for the Lord?

Jesus said: "You are the light of the world." But what happen to our world today? Our world is not a better world because we, Christians, the representatives and the image of God, are not better persons, rather we are bitter persons. As Mahatma Gandhi said: *"I like Christ but I don't like Christians and the way they live."* This is the reason he was not converted to Christianity.

We hear so many preachers today who do nothing other than remind us that we are sinners. Well, this is true. Then, they quote some verses from the Bible, reminding of the suffering ahead of us if we will not accept Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior.

The gospel of the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle A, was frightening. It said, in effect, that if there was so much darkness and bitterness in the world today it was because we as Christians have failed in our job to be salt and light in the world. But we can decide to make a difference starting from today. We can decide to light a candle rather than curse the darkness. Even the smallest candle helps in a world of darkness. And you are yourself the light of that smallest candle.

Fr. Giovanni Nguyen

From the Deacon's Desk



Hopefully this finds each of you well and preparing for the **Best Lent Ever**. Just an update as I enter my third year as a Permanent Deacon in the Catholic Church. For those who have followed my journey closely, your continued support and prayers are a constant source of inspiration. As most of you are aware, as of January 2016 I now work full time at the parish. My official title is Pastoral Associate and Director of Religious Education. My office is located in the Family Life Center and typically I am there from 8am until 5pm. Besides my day-to-day duties working with the staff and the clergy, I am also involved with Children's Faith Formation on Wednesday evenings, marriage preparation, Baptism classes, Adult Confirmation, Finance Committee, Pastoral Council, and various presentations for RCIA and Youth Ministry. My schedule varies depending on the time of the year, but typically I preach the second weekend of the month at all Masses. On the other weekends, I serve at 8am and 9:30am Mass and facilitate a Bible study group that meets every Sunday from 11am to noon. I preside at Funeral Vigils, Funeral liturgies and Committals and serve at Funeral Masses. I share these responsibilities with the clergy, staff and many volunteers here at St. Michael who continue to carry on the work of Jesus Christ in the world.

The Cardinal has assigned me to work with Special Youth Services and I am part of an incredible team of volunteers from our parish who minister to kids in the Brazoria County Juvenile Detention Facility. These kids receive the Good News and hear, maybe for the first time, of God's love and mercy. Camille and I also work as mentors with the men and women preparing for the Diaconate. This has allowed us to keep in touch with couples we were ordained with and to help those in formation with their discernment.

I have to say, besides preaching, presiding at Baptisms and Weddings is the best. However, I was particular overwhelmed with emotion at the Reconciliation Service held for the children



receiving their First Eucharist this year. Part of the Reconciliation Retreat involves the family remembering the child's Baptism. Stations are setup throughout the church, and after the child receives the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time, they journey from station to station. The child receives a candle, a white garment and water is poured over their hands recalling the main symbols received during Baptism. The family prays over the child at each station and then receives a final blessing from me. Seeing the joy and spirit moving in these children and their families was such an incredible blessing for me and reminded me of why I accepted the call to be a deacon. It has also been very humbling to help people in their personal struggles. To pray with those who are hurting and to allow God to use me to bring comfort and peace in their lives is beautiful and rewarding. Taking the Eucharist to the sick and homebound is another special part of my ministry. Those who are unable to join us for the Sunday Eucharist need our continued prayers and support.

Thank you again for your prayers and support. Please pray for vocations to the priesthood and the diaconate. As you can see from this update, there is plenty of work for all who are called. May this Lenten Journey lead you to the **Best Easter Ever!**

Deacon Gary Forse

Lent: Enter the Desert in Order to Find Life



By Blake Novosad

As Lent begins we are all aware of the penitential practices the Church asks of us during this period, both the personal penances we take on and the fasting from meat on Fridays. While this has become routine for we Catholics, have we ever stopped to think about *why* it is that we fast? Is it simply because the Church asks us to? Or do we do it because Jesus suffered for us and now He wants us to suffer for Him? While these reasons are partially true, they in themselves are too shallow and if we enter into Lent with these as our sole motivation we will either fail to maintain the penances we began at the outset, or, and much worse, we will entirely miss the depth and richness of this liturgical season. In order to understand our reason for fasting, however, it is important that we first understand the season of Lent itself, which I will present through the analogy of a desert, a desert we enter into in order to find life.

We enter the desert of Lent to find life not because the desert in itself is life giving, but because the desert has always been the place where the Living God reveals Himself to those whom He desires. We recall Moses and the burning bush where God revealed His name (Exodus 3:13-14), the Israelites and their forty years in the desert where God gave them the Law, the sign of His covenant and favor (Exodus 19-20), and Elijah and his forty days in the desert cave where God revealed Himself in the whispering of the breeze (1 Kings 19:8-18). These are all moments of great intimacy between God and His people as in each instance God drew the person(s) into a deeper relationship with Himself.

We also see Jesus going out into the desert to fast for forty days immediately after His baptism and before beginning His public ministry (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). While Matthew tells us that Jesus entered the desert "to be tempted by the devil" (Mt 4:1), it is also true that He entered it in order to focus solely upon the Father and His will. Thus Jesus teaches us that the desert is in fact a place of life since He entered it for its solitude in order to intensely focus on His unity with the Holy Trinity, the source of life itself. But this is not the only desert that Jesus entered for our sake. No, Jesus entered the greatest desert of all and returned victorious, namely, the dark and mysterious desert of death. All these other deserts only



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symbolize the lifeless void of death that Jesus entered through the Cross and that He rose from on the third day, thus conquering both sin and death. What a mystery! Jesus, the Living God, brought life to that terrible desert of death by journeying there Himself. We see this clearly as immediately after Jesus dies (entering death) His side is pierced and blood and water flow out (John 19:34), both of which are signs of life. Thus, as soon as God enters into the realm of death He makes it a place of life, the doorway into divine life! We too should rejoice with St. Paul: "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor 15:55)

Now we can understand the true meaning of Lent. The Church is calling us into the desert, not to punish us or to deprive us of happiness, but to give us the means by which we can deepen our lives by coming into more intimate contact with the Living God. This is what the fasts and penances are all about, they are to remove us from the monotony of our daily routines in order to place us in contact with God Himself. Yet, they not only draw us out of our comfort and lead us into the desert, but they also invite us to die to ourselves so that we can live in and with Jesus, and thus, in and with the Holy Trinity. But in order to truly live we must follow the path that Jesus laid out for us as He Himself taught, "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt 16:25). Jesus is calling us into the desert of death, our death to self, because this desert is the place where we receive true life, the life of God. If we trust Jesus, if we follow Him and embrace His Cross by denying ourselves out of love for Him, then He will give us the life that He poured out for us on the Cross. Rather, Jesus has already given us His life, but we will open ourselves up to receive it, for we cannot love God if we love ourselves.

We should review our Lenten practices in light of this great truth. While this mystery is itself intense it doesn't mean that our Lenten practices have to be. Rather, our love for God and our desire to deepen our intimacy with Him are what should be intense! Do our Lenten practices reflect this intensity? We should be doing things to foster our relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, not making ourselves miserable. For example, instead of giving up chocolate (or fill in the blank) maybe we could set aside some time every day to spend in prayer with God. Perhaps we could spend less time watching television or doing things on our smartphone and instead take a walk outside, a walk in which we are aware of the Lord's presence and His *great pleasure* in our sacrifice. We know the practice that will be best for us, but we should make it something that will give more of our time and attention to God, for He longs to bless us in a greater abundance than we can imagine (Malachi 3:10), since by our baptism we share an equal dignity with Jesus Christ (Rom 8:15-17). We all have the potential to live the life Jesus is living now in His humanity (the life of God in the Trinity), but we have to allow God to lead us into this infinite love, because honestly an infinite (and by definition, *limitless*) love received all at once would be too overwhelming for us. Do you realize what you have just read? God is offering us *infinite love*, His love. Will we accept it or will we choose the empty promises and pleasures the world offers us because they require nothing from us? True, the pleasure is cheap, but how long will it last?

I am going into the desert this Lent. I go in search of the Living God. I go as His son, but I go also to seek His Son. I for one have had enough of the world's empty promises and its fleeting pleasures. I seek a joy that is everlasting, a joy that flows out of the bosom of the Trinity. The desert is naked and stark, but it is also peaceful and calm. The emptiness drives out all attached to distraction, but it purifies and frees all those fleeing distraction. The freedom the desert gives is real for it is the freedom that allows love to flow uninhibited between the Bride and the Bridegroom. Look! Someone approaches in the distance and I hear a voice crying out: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Come quickly; follow me to meet Him, for He is passing by. Yes, He is journeying deeper into the desert, but He speaks of Living Water...



The Liturgical Season



Ash Wednesday (March 1st)

An excerpt from Magnificat February 2017:

There is indeed a deep psychological truth. If a person has not found absolute love in Christ, anything that impedes his search for other values is regarded negatively. He may frame this search in terms of a moral necessity of being true to himself. Naturally, in a society riddled with hypocrisy, decadence and mediocrity, his own inner voice seems to him to be the purest guide.

It is only when he hears the voice of God himself as love, whispering to his soul out of the depths of the Church, that he may find that fidelity to the Church will bring about the greatest fulfillment of all that his deepest self has always sought. Given a profound conversion to Christ in the Church, his attitude toward Church law will correspondingly change. Once he achieves a genuine love of the Eucharist, his greatest desire will be to avoid temptations and sins which would obstruct his approach to this mystery. He will look to the laws of the Church as rules of love teaching him in the concrete what those things are which would destroy the bond of love. He sees the laws of Christ as a necessary means of rooting out the weeds of his self-love; and he is grateful for the knowledge that a certain sin will estrange him from Christ, because this will act as a deterrent to those destructive forces within himself which he wants to conquer.

This desire to approach the Eucharist in a spirit of love rather than one of guilty betrayal makes him understand the law of the Church which excludes the unrepentant from Communion. Now he sees it, not as an arbitrary pharisaical restriction but as the embodiment of a basic law of love: *Repentance and forgiveness must precede union*. He understands from the Gospels and from the institution of penance as a sacrament that Christ's moral laws are not designed to exclude him as wicked, but rather to lead him to turn away from his sins and to accept the forgiving arms of Christ.

Ronda Chervin

Ronda Chervin is a convert from Judaism, professor of philosophy and theology, and author of over fifty books.

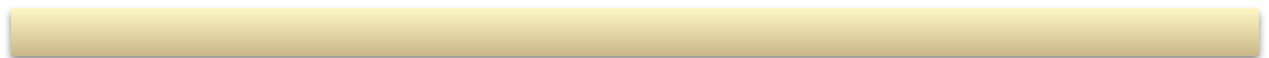


Saint Joseph (March 20)

An excerpt of Magnificat March 2011:

There is a general rule concerning all special graces granted to any human being. Whenever the divine favor chooses someone to receive a special grace, or to accept a lofty vocation, God adorns the person with all the gifts of the Spirit needed to fulfill the task at hand. This general rule is especially verified in the case of Saint Joseph, the foster-father of our Lord and the husband of the Queen of our world, enthroned above the angels. He was chosen by the eternal Father as the trustworthy guardian and protector of his greatest treasures, namely, his divine Son and Mary, Joseph's wife. He carried out this vocation with complete fidelity until at last God called him, saying: *Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.*

What then is Joseph's position in the whole Church of Christ? Is he not a man chosen and set apart? Through him and, yes, under him, Christ was fittingly and honorably introduced into the world. Holy Church in its entirety is indebted to the Virgin Mother because through her it was judged worthy to receive Christ. But after her undoubtedly owe special gratitude and reverence to Saint Joseph.





Obviously, Christ does not now deny to Joseph the intimacy, reverence and very high honor which he gave him on earth, as son to his father. Rather we must say that in heaven Christ completes and perfects all that he gave at Nazareth.

Now we can see how the last summoning words of the Lord appropriately apply to Saint Joseph: *Enter into the joy of your Lord*. In fact, although the joy of eternal happiness enters into the soul of a man, the Lord preferred to say to Joseph: *Enter into joy*. His intention was that the words should have a hidden spiritual meaning for us. They convey not only that this holy man possesses an inward joy, but also that it surrounds him and engulfs him like an infinite abyss.

Remember us Saint Joseph, and plead for us to your foster-child. Ask your most holy bride, the Virgin Mary, to look kindly upon us, since she is the mother of him who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns eternally. Amen

Saint Bernardine of Siena

Saint Bernardine of Siena († 1444) was an Italian Franciscan and great preacher who spread devotion to the Holy Name.



The Annunciation of the Lord (March 25)

An excerpt from Magnificat March 2014:

The "fullness of grace" indicate all the supernatural munificence from which Mary benefits by being chosen and destined to be the Mother of Christ. If this election is fundamental for the accomplishment of God's salvific designs for humanity, and if the eternal choice in Christ and the vocation to the dignity of adopted children is the destiny of everyone, then the election of Mary is wholly exceptional and unique. Hence also the singularity and uniqueness of her place in the mystery of Christ...

The Annunciation, therefore, is the revelation of the mystery of the Incarnation at the very beginning of its fulfillment on earth. God's salvific giving of himself and his life, in some way to all creation but directly to man, reaches one of its high points in the mystery of the Incarnation. This is indeed a high point among all the gifts of grace conferred in the history of man and of the universe: Mary is "full of grace," because it is precisely in her that the Incarnation of the Word... is accomplished and fulfilled...

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the order of grace, which is a participation in the divine nature, Mary receives life from him to whom she herself, in the order of earthly generation, gave life as a Mother. The liturgy does not hesitate to call her "Mother of her Creator" and to hail her with the words which Dante Alighieri places on the lips of Saint Bernard: "Daughter of your Son." And since Mary receives this "new life" with fullness corresponding to the dignity of the Divine Motherhood, the angel at the Annunciation calls her "full of grace."

Saint John Paul II



Palm Sunday (April 9)

An excerpt from Magnificat Holy Week 2014:

Every Palm Sunday we enter into the holiest week of the Church's liturgical year, the time when we are invited to contemplate and partake in what we believe to be the most hidden and awe-inspiring mysteries possible. And what is at the center of these fathomless mysteries? A passion, the Passion of the incarnate God. And even though we call that day "Palm Sunday" because of the traditional procession, its proper name is actually "Passion Sunday," just as Holy Week is another name for the Week of Passion.



We habitually say that we will "celebrate the Lord's Passion," or "read the Lord's Passion according to Matthew," or that "the Lord is now entering into his Passion." But do we ever reflect sufficiently on this apparent coincidence, that the climax of our redemption through Christ's suffering should bear the same name as that "passion of love" which is one of the ways in which we could translate the term *eros*? It is to be expected that many are puzzled as to why exactly it is that *suffering* should bring about *redemption*. Our understanding of this mysterious correspondence can be helped along, I think, if we expand the meaning of *suffering* from simply "undergoing pain" to include "the willing activation of all the passions of the souls," intended to put love in the place of the beloved's refusal to love. Christ redeems us because he passionately embraces our rejection of him with a love unto death, and he will not let go of us.

Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis

Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, now known as Father Simeon, is a Cistercian monk of Saint Joseph's Abbey, Spencer, MA. He is the author of Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word, a three-volume commentary on Matthew's Gospel.

Easter Triduum



What is The Triduum???

By Allen Faulk

The Easter Triduum is the proper name for the *liturgical season* that concludes Lent and introduces us to the joy of the Easter season. It is often referred to simply as *the Triduum* (with a capital T). However, a triduum is simply any three-

day period of prayer, recalling the three days that Christ spent in the tomb.

The Easter Triduum, also called the Holy Triduum or Pascal Triduum, begins the evening of [Holy Thursday](#), and ends with evening prayer on [Easter Day](#). It commemorates the heart of the gospel message: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christians have been commemorating the death and resurrection of Jesus since Apostolic times, because his death and resurrection are at the heart of Christian salvation. At least by the second century, Christians began celebrating the Great Easter Vigil, an event which began the night of Holy Saturday, continuing until dawn on Easter morning. During this vigil, Christians commemorated salvation history, awaited the return of Jesus, and celebrated the resurrection of Jesus at dawn on Easter Sunday. It was at the vigil that catechumens, after a period of catechesis, were baptized and received first communion. The Easter Vigil was considered the most important day of the liturgical year, during that period in church history.

Later, Christians expanded this celebration to a three-day commemoration of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection, with the Easter Vigil being the *high point* of the three day commemoration.

Over time, as the liturgical year expanded, the Easter Vigil lost its preeminence, although the three days celebrating the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus still held an important place in the Church Year.

Since the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the Easter Vigil, and the Triduum, have regained their position of prominence in the Western Catholic liturgical calendar. [The General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar](#) re-established the Triduum as a season following Lent in the Catholic Church. It's interesting to note that many Protestant churches do not recognize the Triduum as a liturgical season, and observe Lent until the Easter Vigil begins.

Starting with the Mass of the Lord's Supper on the evening of Holy Thursday, continuing through the Good Friday service and Holy Saturday, and concluding with vespers (evening



prayer) on Easter Sunday, the Easter Triduum marks the most significant events of Holy Week (also known as Passiontide).

The Easter Triduum and all of Holy Week are a very integrated expression of and participation in the Paschal Mystery that we celebrate every Sunday. By immersing ourselves in the Church's liturgical life, we spiritually bind ourselves more fully to Christ, our Head. We can then better serve as joyful witnesses while we accompany tens of thousands of people — in the United States alone — who will enter into the sacramental life of the Catholic Church during Easter this year.



Easter Sunday (April 16)

An excerpt from the homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI at Saint Peter's Basilica on April 7, 2012,:

....**A**t Easter, on the morning of the first day of the week, God said once again: “Let there be light”. The night on the Mount of Olives, the solar eclipse of Jesus’ passion and death, the night of the grave had all passed. Now it is the first day once again — creation is beginning anew. “Let there be light,” says God, “and there was light”: Jesus rises from the grave. Life is stronger than death. Good is stronger than evil. Love is stronger than hate. Truth is stronger than lies. The darkness of the previous days is driven away the moment Jesus rises from the grave and himself becomes God’s pure light. But this applies not only to him, not only to the darkness of those days. With the resurrection of Jesus, light itself is created anew. He draws all of us after him into the new light of the resurrection and he conquers all darkness. He is God’s new day, new for all of us.

But how is this to come about? How does all this affect us so that instead of remaining word it becomes a reality that draws us in? Through the sacrament of baptism and the profession of faith, the Lord has built a bridge across to us, through which the new day reaches us. The Lord says to the newly baptized: *Fiat lux* — let there be light. God’s new day — the day of indestructible life, comes also to us. Christ takes you by the hand. From now on you are held by him and walk with him into the light, into real life. For this reason the early Church called baptism *photismos* — illumination.

Why was this? The darkness that poses a real threat to mankind, after all, is the fact that he can see and investigate tangible material things, but cannot see where the world is going or whence it comes, where our own life is going, what is good and what is evil. The darkness enshrouding God and obscuring values is the real threat to our existence and to the world in general. If God and moral values, the difference between good and evil, remain in darkness, then all other “lights,” that put such incredible technical feats within our reach, are not only progress but also dangers that put us and the world at risk. Today we can illuminate our cities so brightly that the stars of the sky are no longer visible. Is this not an image of the problems caused by our version of enlightenment? With regard to material things, our knowledge and our technical accomplishments are legion, but what reaches beyond, the things of God and the question of good, we can no longer identify. Faith, then, which reveals God’s light to us, is the true enlightenment, enabling God’s light to break into our world, opening our eyes to the true light.

Dear friends, as I conclude, I would like to add one more thought about light and illumination. On Easter night, the night of the new creation, the Church presents the mystery of light using a unique and very humble symbol: the Paschal candle. This is a light that lives from sacrifice. The candle shines inasmuch as it is burnt up. It gives light, inasmuch as it gives itself. Thus the Church presents most beautifully the paschal mystery of Christ, who gives himself and



so bestows the great light. Secondly, we should remember that the light of the candle is a fire. Fire is the power that shapes the world, the force of transformation. And fire gives warmth. Here too the mystery of Christ is made newly visible. Christ, the light, is fire, flame, burning up evil and so reshaping both the world and ourselves. "Whoever is close to me is close to the fire," as Jesus is reported by Origen to have said. And this fire is both heat and light: not a cold light, but one through which God's warmth and goodness reach down to us...

Let us pray to the Lord at this time that he may grant us to experience the joy of his light; let us pray that we ourselves may become bearers of his light, and that through the Church, Christ's radiant face may enter our world (cf. LG 1).

Saint Mark, Evangelist (April 25)

An excerpt of Magnificat April 2013:

The *Miracle of Saint Mark Freeing the Slave* was Tintoretto's first commission from the Scuola di San Marco, a pious confraternity dedicated to the patron saint of Venice.

In 1547, the twenty-eight-years-old Tintoretto ... needed something akin to a miracle to launch his career... A commission from the most important confraternity in Venice must have seemed like the hand of Divine Providence.

He was to recount the story of a Christian slave in Provence, who disobeyed his master by venerating the relics of Saint Mark. Discovered, he was given an exemplary sentence: to be first blinded, then crippled. As the cruel punishment was about to be carried out, Saint Mark appears from the heavens to save his devoted follower, destroying their instruments of torture.

Tintoretto narrates the story with extraordinary drama. Commanding composition, light and shadow, color and foreshortening....

The miracle of Saint Mark freeing the Slave stands at thirteen by seventeen feet, a work of startling size.



startling size.

Twenty-eight figures crowd around the slave, with still others looking on from a distance. Despite the mass of agitated bodies, the protagonist of the story are easily distinguishable: the slave on the ground; Saint Mark, swooping through the air; and the frustrated master, watching impotently from his throne...

The slave nude and pale, lies diagonally on the ground...The contrast of the soft delicate flesh against the hard red stone, then framed



by pointed wooden stakes and shiny metal blades, emphasizes his desperate circumstances.

The space of the slave opens toward the viewer, we are uncomfortably close to this imminent martyrdom. Our counterparts stand on the other side of the space. One looks in meditatively from the triumphal arch in the distance, another pair lean eagerly forward. Where do we stand when confronted with the terrible drama before us?...

The first group of figures functions like a barrier holding back fans at a sports match. The next group pushes, stares and points, focusing on the broken tools. They gaze fixedly downwards, fastened to the mechanics of this world. Many wear exotic turbans; this Turkish garb alluded to the plight of contemporary Christians in lands occupied by the Ottoman Empire. Not one of them thinks to look upwards for the source of their consternation; if it cannot be explained within the physical world, it cannot be understood.

Saint Mark makes an extraordinary entrance. At almost six feet in length, the ease with which his figure appears from the heaven is amazing. With a spiral of gold and rose, Tintoretto first captures our attention with color. Then, with the exceptional skill of the foreshortening, he makes the figure seem like a miracle of draughtsmanship. Tintoretto motto was "the color of Titian with the line of Michelangelo," and in this figure he indeed combines the power of movement and the emotional uplift of hue. Only the slave sees this remarkable apparition, the extension of his body on the ground mirroring that of Saint Mark....

The work caused immediate controversy. The novelty of the composition and the innovative style was off-putting to several of the fraternity members. Tintoretto's narrative was indeed provocative, not for the nudity or colors, but for its demands. In recreating the arena of persecutions and then gathering the viewer in, *The Miracle of Saint Mark Freeing the Slave* forces us to look upon the devotion of this slave, and then ask ourselves: Would we be able to play the same heroic role in our own lives?

Elizabeth Lev

Writer and professor of art history in Rome, Italy.



Saints Philip and James Apostles (May 3)

From <http://thecatholiccatalogue.com/feast-of-st-philip-and-st-james/>

Why do we celebrate the feasts of St. Philip and St. James the Lesser on the same day? Because they were both apostles? No, we celebrate them on the same day because their relics were brought to Rome together on the same day in early May. They rest there still, in the Basilica of the Holy Apostles.

You may be wondering why this apostle James is called "the Lesser." It is to distinguish him from the other apostle, *James, the son of Zebedee, the brother of John, and the one known as "James the Greater," whose feast day is July 25.* It's not meant to belittle or deride. James the lesser was, after all, chosen by *Jesus Christ* to be one of the twelve pillars of the Church. It's a bit like calling one James "Jamie" to distinguish him from another James in the household. We find him listed in the gospels as James the son of Alphaeus.

James was martyred in Jerusalem around *Passover* during the time Nero was Emperor of Rome. He was arrested and ordered to stand atop a wall in Jerusalem and preach against Christ. James climbed the wall as ordered and then preached the death and resurrection of Christ. Soldiers threw him off the wall. When the fall did not kill him, they began to stone him until he died, a faithful follower of the Christ who called him.

We know Philip best from the Gospel of John, chapter one. Jesus himself calls Philip, saying, "Follow me." And Philip did follow. He heard the call Jesus issues to each of us and



followed. Then Philip began to call others. He told Nathanael, "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus son of *Joseph* from Galilee." Nathanael is underwhelmed. He asks, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip doesn't argue or try to top his friend's flippant remark. He simply says, "Come and see," trusting that all who come and see will discover the Lord. Philip *was killed* in Greece under the reign of the Roman emperor, Domitian. Tradition says he was crucified upside down, like James, a faithful follower of the One who called him.

Saints Philip and James, pray for us.



The Ascension of the Lord (May 25)

An excerpt from Magnificat May 2013:

When the Lord ascends to heaven after these days we fast again, as the Savior says: *But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast in those days.* For when Christ ascends to heaven and is removed from our sight we suffer hunger not of body but of love, and we are burdened not so much by want of food as by desire. For our eyes suffer a kind of desire when they do not see the one whom they seek, as the prophet says: *My eyes have grown dim while I hope in my God.* The eyes of the prophet grew dim because he did not yet see the one whom he hoped that he would see. In the same way the eyes of the Apostles also grew dim when they were unable to see the Lord going to heaven as Luke says: *And in their sight he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their eyes.* The blessed Apostles stood, their bodies completely tense, and followed the Lord ascending to heaven with their eyes since they could not with their feet, and although human vision failed to catch the Savior, nonetheless faith's devotion did not fail. For their eyes follow Christ up to the cloud, but up to the heaven they are united with Christ by the eagerness of faith. Hence the Apostle says, knowing that our faith is in heaven with the Lord; *But our way of life is in heaven...*

It was not a cloud that received Christ, then, but God the Father who received his Son, and by a kind of loving embrace he grasped the ascending one to his tender bosom. The Father, therefore, is said to have received the Son in the shady place of the cloud so that by this refreshment, so to speak, he might be shown to care for the wounds of his suffering. For after the cross, after the violence, after the nether world there is no greater refreshment for Christ than to be overshadowed by the power of the Divinity, as is said to Mary at his conception: *And the power of the Most High will overshadow you.* The most high Father, then, who at Christ's conception overshadowed Mary in his power, received him in a cloud when he was ascending. For God always leads to rest those who have suffered violence, and protects them under the shadow of his cloud, as he protected the children of Israel, freed from Egypt, by the pillar of cloud.

Saint Maximus of Turin
Saint Maximus of Turin († 5th century) was the first bishop of Turin, Italy, and an outstanding biblical scholar and preacher.

The Visitation (May 31)

An excerpt from Magnificat May 2011:

The events of today's mystery bring before the faithful in a peculiar manner the fact that our God is a hidden God, and that his power works in the soul in a secret and impenetrable manner. Four people are concerned in the occurrence we are celebrating: Jesus and Mary; Saint John, and his mother Saint Elizabeth. Now, it is most remarkable that of all these sacred personages



the only one who seems to perform no particular action is the Son of God himself. Elizabeth, enlightened from on high, acknowledges the Blessed Virgin's dignity and humbles herself deeply before her: "Whence is this to me?" (Lk 1:43.) John, even within Elizabeth's womb, feels his Divine Master's presence, and shows his joy in a wonderful way: he "leaped for joy." Mary, marveling at the great effects of divine omnipotence in herself, exalts the holy name of God and declares his munificence in her behalf, with her whole heart. But all this time Jesus himself, hidden beneath his Mother's breast, gives no sensible sign on his presence. He, who is the cause of the whole mystery, takes no active part in it.

Strange as this may seem, it is not really surprising. Our Lord here hides his power intentionally, to show us how he is the invisible force that moves all things without moving himself, and directs all things without showing his hands.

Hence, we shall find that though he may seem to be passive on this occasion his influence is fully apparent in the actions of the rest, whose movements are really inspired by him alone. One of the greatest mysteries of Christianity is the holy union that the Son of God forms with us, and his secret way of visiting us... When God deigns to look upon us, we can but learn from Elizabeth how to reverence his supreme greatness by fully recognizing our own nothingness, and to acknowledge his benefits by confessing our unworthiness.

Bishop Jacques Benigne Bossuet

Bishop Jacques Benigne Bossuet († 1704) was a French bishop and theologian.

Attending Mass every Sunday

By Elizabeth Betczynski

Having observed fewer people attending Mass, it has weighed upon my heart as to WHY people don't come every week? So I have spoken with several people about attending Sunday Mass and they feel it is no longer necessary to come to Mass every week. How have we fallen away from the need to be with Jesus and receive Him in Eucharist? This is the core of our Catholic Faith! The sadness continues when people who do come occasionally to Mass, go to receive our Lord, not realizing that they are not in a state of grace to receive. Not attending Mass for a Catholic is a serious sin and must be confessed before a person can receive Communion.

Let us get back to reverence for our God by preparing properly to receive Jesus at Mass each weekend. Let us take our Faith seriously and make our relationship with God a priority in our life and the lives of our families. Parents, your children follow your example. If attending Mass is not a priority for you, it will not be a priority for your children.

Our aim should be to have a personal encounter with God who is inviting us to a closer relationship with Him. We need to do our part and be present to God.

During the Mass, we acknowledge our presence before God, we ask forgiveness for our unfaithfulness, and we praise God for His forgiveness, mercy and presence with us. Jesus is truly present in the bread and wine as St. Paul says "faith assures you of this, though your senses suggest otherwise." Jesus longs to be united with us in Holy Communion! At the end of Mass, we are sent to bring God's love out into the world.



At the Last Supper Jesus gave us a special way to remember Him and to be with Him. Jesus offered Himself for our Salvation. Through the Eucharist, Jesus remains with us forever. The Mass is the celebration of the Eucharist. Jesus is truly present with us under the appearances of bread and wine. Our relationship with Christ and one another is strengthened. Christ unites all the faithful in one body, His Body, the Church. The Eucharist nourishes us to be faithful members of the Church, a community of believers.

Mass should be a positive experience. We are challenged to share with others our love, our faith, our presence, and our commitment to work for integrity and peace. St. Padre Pio, who had the stigmata, (the nail marks of Jesus), said that he suffered most from the wounds of Jesus from the Consecration to the Eucharist, remembering Jesus' suffering and offering up his suffering to save others.

In the reflections of a former RCIA family, they said when you attend Mass, you learn more and can be a teacher to your children. Easter and Christmas have a special meaning beyond the commercial celebrations. Your family draws closer to God when everyone prays together and reads the Bible more. God's peace descends upon you and your family, you all are calmer, there is more peace in the family and you make better decisions.

In summary, come experience Jesus at Mass, come closer to Jesus, and fill yourself with His love and be love to others. Be with your God, your brother, your friend.

A Conversion Story

By Margaret Kana:

I must first say that when asked to write down my conversion story for THE LIGHT, I was quite humbled because God has touched my life profoundly. He knew me in my mother's womb and continues to call my name to this day.

My story actually begins a month before I was born, when my biological father suddenly died. We moved in with my mom's father and he became my father figure. However when I was 3 or 4 I realized other children had fathers AND grandfathers. I wanted a DADDY in the worst kind of a way. My wise mom used this desire to paint a mental picture of a DADDY who would never die, one who would be by my side wherever I went, He would love me with an everlasting love. He became known as "Daddy Jesus" to this little girl. He called all the children to come to him. I can still "hear" my Mom saying, "Margaret you are not the child sitting at his feet, nor are you standing by his side, nor the one looking over his shoulder. No, My Dear, you are the one sitting on his lap with his arm wrapped around you and He is smiling down at you as you gaze into His eyes." This was quite comforting, but I still wanted a Daddy with skin on...soooooo we prayed for a good husband for her and a good Daddy for me. Thus began my faith and my prayer life as a very young child. I have carried that image of God throughout my entire life. I consider this as PART 1 of my conversion story because when I was 7 my mom married the most WONDERFUL man, whom I called DAD. He was better than I could have ever imagined... What a gift! God listened and answered the prayers of a very young little girl!

I was brought up in the Presbyterian Church, going to Sunday School and Church every Sunday. My faith grew and I continued to love Daddy Jesus. He lavishly showered me with His love, every day of my life.

When I was 20, I married Ed Kana, who was Catholic. It was important to us to worship together. We went to both churches each Sunday, for about 6 years until the boys came along.



St. Michael the Archangel Roman Catholic Church
Lake Jackson, TX

At that time, I went to the Presbyterian Church only occasionally, but I went with ED every Sunday. All the while, God was calling me to come to Him and to learn more of Him and His Love for me. Ed and I chose to look for similarities in our two faiths, rather than the differences. We definitely found them. The main similarities were The Lord's Prayer, The Apostles Creed, and the Nicene Creed. We both loved Jesus. We found we both believed basically the same ideals. God continued His work in and through us...and we grew spiritually.

Thus begins PART 2 of my conversion story. Ed and I attended Marriage Encounter in 1977 and our marriage was blessed beyond measure. A "spin off" of Marriage Encounter was the Retorno Weekend which the focus was "Return to God as a couple". For some reason I wanted to go and experience this weekend too. Ed asked "WHY?"....I stammered and stuttered not quite knowing how to answer. I eventually responded, "I think it is now time for me to consider becoming Catholic." Where did THAT come from? I had definitely not formed THAT thought in my head...Aaahhhh I get it....God was still at work, calling me to come to HIM and I was beginning to listen to that still small voice. So we went on that retreat. It was life changing. A true conversion of heart for both of us as we began to understand the depth of God's love for us.

When it came time for mass, I asked Fr. Jim Barnett what were his thoughts about allowing a non-Catholic to receive the Eucharist, all the while knowing it was against the church's teaching. He said pray about it and if it is right, get up and receive communion, if not, remain seated. He put the responsibility all on me! This is critical... I must make the right decision! Thank God I had begun to listen to that still small voice... so I prayed and prayed AND PRAYED... and when it was time for our row to go receive the Eucharist, I stood and went up to receive. God was leading each step of the way!

At the moment the host touched my tongue, I felt a rush of warmth from the tip of my head all the way to my toes. I felt so alive and so loved. It was difficult to contain my emotions. After mass, Fr. Jim said he knew when I asked him, that it was right for me, but that I needed to know it was right for myself and not just because he gave me permission. The rest of the weekend was one surprise after another, affirming my decision to become Catholic.

So we left the retreat changed people knowing God had personally touched our lives. The next day I went to talk to Fr. Emil Furlong and told him I was ready to become Catholic... how about in two weeks? He chuckled and said if it is God's Will for you to become Catholic in two weeks, it will still be right 5 or 6 months from now. (Then it would be Easter.) So I invited Fr. Jim Barnett to come to my First Communion, all the while knowing that he would be very busy on Easter Sunday. His reply was, "I was present when you received your First Communion. I was the one who put it on your tongue and I saw you change in front of me."

So I became Catholic on April 6, 1980, and Fr. Emil was present, along with Fr. Bill Robertson. Ed served as an EMHC for the first time; he gave Chris and me our first communion; and Carl held the patten for us. It was a real family affair...and not one photo. But the day is permanently etched in my memory bank. I was also confirmed the same day after mass. The rest is history as I continue on my faith journey, living it as a Catholic, knowing that Daddy Jesus still loves me, just like Mom said all those many years ago!

I continue to talk to Daddy Jesus, but now I call him Abba Father. I continue to grow in my understanding of the church but most importantly, I continue to grow in my knowledge of what it means to be a Christian and a disciple of Christ. I am constantly reminded of how deeply God loves me...AND YOU!



The Holy See

THE WORD IS A GIFT. OTHER PERSONS ARE A GIFT

The following is an excerpt of Pope Francis' message for Lent 2017 on the theme "The Word is a gift. Other persons are a gift".



Dear Brothers and Sisters, Lent is a new beginning, a path leading to the certain goal of Easter, Christ's victory over death. This season urgently calls us to conversion. Christians are asked to return to God "with all their hearts" (Joel 2:12), to refuse to settle for mediocrity and to grow in friendship with the Lord. Jesus is the faithful friend Who never abandons us. Even when we sin, He patiently awaits our return; by that patient

expectation, He shows us His readiness to forgive.

Lent is a favorable season for deepening our spiritual life through the means of sanctification offered us by the Church: fasting, prayer and almsgiving. At the basis of everything is the word of God, which during this season we are invited to hear and ponder more deeply. ...

The word of God is alive and powerful, capable of converting hearts and leading them back to God. When we close our heart to the gift of God's word, we end up closing our heart to the gift of our brothers and sisters. Dear friends, Lent is the favorable season for renewing our encounter with Christ, living in his word, in the sacraments and in our neighbor. The Lord, who overcame the deceptions of the Tempter during the forty days in the desert, shows us the path we must take. May the Holy Spirit lead us on a true journey of conversion, so that we can rediscover the gift of God's word, be purified of the sin that blinds us, and serve Christ present in our brothers and sisters in need. I encourage all the faithful to express this spiritual renewal also by sharing in the Lenten Campaigns promoted by many Church organizations in different parts of the world, and thus to favor the culture of encounter in our one human family. Let us pray for one another so that, by sharing in the victory of Christ, we may open our doors to the weak and poor. Then we will be able to experience and share to the full the joy of Easter.

From the Vatican, 18 October 2016, Feast of St. Luke the Evangelist

CHRISTIAN HOPE: POPE'S NEW CATECHESIS

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!



In today's catechesis I would like to contemplate with you a woman who speaks to us about hope lived in tears. Hope lived in tears. She is Rachel, the wife of Jacob and the mother of Joseph and Benjamin; she who, as the Book of Genesis narrates, dies in giving birth to her second son, Benjamin.

The prophet Jeremiah refers to Rachel, addressing the Israelites in exile to console them with words full of emotion and poetry; that is, they show us Rachel's tears but give hope: "Thus says the Lord a voice is heard in Ramah, lamentating and weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more".



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In these verses, Jeremiah presents this woman of her people, the great matriarch of her tribe, in a situation of pain and tears, but together with a prospect of unimagined life. Rachel, who in the Genesis account died in childbirth and had accepted that death so that her son could live, now instead, represented by the prophet as alive in Ramah, ... weeps for her children who in a certain sense died going into exile: children who, as she herself says, "are no more," have disappeared for ever.

And this is why Rachel will not be consoled. This refusal of hers expresses the depth of her pain and the bitterness of her tears. Faced with the tragedy of the loss of her children, a mother cannot accept words or gestures of consolation, which are always inadequate and never able to alleviate the pain of a wound that cannot and will not heal. A pain proportionate to love.

Every mother knows all this; and today too there are many mothers who weep, who do not resign themselves to the loss of a child, inconsolable in the face of a death that is impossible to accept. Rachel encompasses the pain of all the mothers in the world, of every time, and the tears of every human being who mourns irreparable losses.

This, Rachel's refusal to be consoled, teaches us also how much gentleness is asked of us when faced with the suffering of others. To speak about hope to the desperate, we must share their desperation; to dry a tear from the face of one who suffers, we must unite his tears with our own. Only in this way will our words be truly capable of giving a little hope. And if I cannot say words like this, with tears, with suffering, then silence is better; a caress, a gesture, and no words.

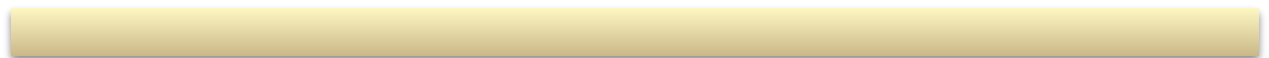
And God, with His gentleness and His love, responds to Rachel's tears with true words, not false ones; indeed, Jeremiah's text continues: "Thus says the Lord: 'Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the Lord, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future, declares the Lord, and your children shall come back to their own country'".

Precisely because of the tears of the mother, there is still hope for the children, who will return to life. This woman, who had accepted death, at the moment of childbirth, so that her son could live, is with her tears now the beginning of new life for the exiled children, prisoners, far from their homeland. The Lord responds to the pain and bitter tears of Rachel with a promise that can now be for her a cause for true consolation: her people will be able to return from exile and live in faith, free, their proper relationship with God. Her tears have given rise to hope. And this is not easy to understand, but it is true. Many times, in our life, tears sow hope: they are seeds of hope.

As we know, this text of Jeremiah is then reprised by the evangelist Matthew and applied to the massacre of the innocents (cf. 2, 16-18). A text that places before us the tragedy of the killing of helpless human beings, the horror of power that disregards and suppresses life. The children of Bethlehem die because of Jesus. And He, innocent Lamb, would then die too, in turn, for all of us. The Son of God entered into the pain of man. We must not forget this. When someone addresses me with difficult questions, for example, 'Tell me, Father, why do children suffer?', truly I do not know how to reply. I say only, 'Look at the Crucified: God gave us His Son, He suffered, and perhaps there you will find an answer'... Only by looking to the love of God Who gave His Son, Who offers His life for us, can we see a path of consolation. And for this reason we say that the Son of God entered into the pain of man, that He shared in it and accepted death. His Word is definitely the word of consolation, because it is born of tears.

And on the Cross He, the dying Son, will give new fruitfulness to this mother, entrusting to her the disciple John and making her mother of the believing people. Death is vanquished, and Jeremiah's prophesy is fulfilled. Mary's tears too, like those of Rachel, have generated hope and new life. Thank you.

Wed January 4, 2017.





CHRISTIAN HOPE AND FALSE IDOLS



In today's general audience, Pope Francis continued his cycle of catechesis dedicated to Christian hope, this time considering the issue of "false idols" that generate false hope. "In the month of December, and in the first part of January, we celebrate the time of Advent and then that of Christmas: a period in the liturgical year that reawakens hope in the people of God. Hope is a basic human need: hoping in the future, believing in life, so-called 'positive thinking'".

"But it is important that this hope is placed in what can truly help to live and give meaning to our existence," he warned. "This is why the Sacred Scripture puts us on guard against the false hopes that the world presents to us, unmasking their uselessness and demonstrating them as meaningless. And it does so in various ways, but most of all by denouncing the falseness of the idols in whom man is continually tempted to place his trust, making them the object of his hope".

The prophets and the wise in particular insist on this, touching a nerve center in the believer's journey of faith. "Because faith means trusting in God, but the moment comes when, encountering the difficulties of life, man experiences the fragility of that trust and feels the need for different forms of certainty, for tangible and concrete securities. Then we are tempted to seek consolations, also of a fleeting nature, that seem to fill the emptiness of solitude and to relieve the hardship of believing. And we think we can find them in the security that money can give, in alliances with the powerful, in worldliness, in false ideologies. At times we search for them in a god that can bend to our requests and magically intervene to change reality and make it as we want it to be; an idol, indeed, that in itself can do nothing, that is impotent and deceitful"...

The hope of a Lord of life Who with His Word created the world and guides our existence is opposed to the trust in mute simulacra. Ideologies, with their claim to the absolute, wealth, and this is a great idol, power and success, vanity, with their illusion of eternity and omnipotence, values such as physical beauty and health, when they become idols to which we sacrifice everything, are all realities that confuse the mind and the heart, and instead of promoting life, lead to death...

The message of Psalm 115 is very clear: if we place our hope in idols, we will become like them — empty images with hands that do not touch, feet that do not walk, mouths that are unable to speak. "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust them" (Psalm 115:4-8)...

Psalm 115 goes on to reaffirm the need to trust and hope in God, and that God will give His blessing: "Israel, trust in the Lord...House of Aaron, trust in the Lord...You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord...The Lord has remembered us, He will bless us". "The Lord always remembers. Even in bad moments, He remembers us. And this is our hope. And hope does not disappoint. Never! Idols always disappoint; they are fantasies, they are not reality".

"This is the wonderful reality of hope: trusting in the Lord, one becomes like Him, His blessing transforms us into His children, who share His life. Hope in God enables us to enter, so to speak, in the range of influence of His memory that blesses and saves us. And so there emerges the praise of God, living and true, Who was born of Mary for us, Who died on the cross and rose again in glory. And in this God we have hope, and this God — Who is not an idol — never lets us down".

Wednesday, January 11, 2017



Hope and Prayer



Pope Francis, continuing his cycle of catechesis dedicated to Christian hope, spoke during this Wednesday's general audience, on the relationship between this cardinal virtue and prayer, based on the biblical account of Jonah, a somewhat anomalous figure among the prophets of Israel, who tries to escape the call of the Lord by refusing to put himself in the service of the divine plan of salvation. His story is narrated in a little book of just four chapters, "A sort of parable that bears an important teaching, that of the mercy of God Who forgives".

"Jonah is an 'outgoing' prophet," Francis explains, "and also a prophet on the run! He is an outgoing prophet whom God sends 'to the periphery,' to Nineveh, to convert the inhabitants of the city. But Nineveh, for an Israelite like Jonah, is a threatening place, the enemy

that puts Jerusalem itself in danger, and is therefore to be destroyed, certainly not to save. Therefore, when God sends Jonah to preach in that city, the prophet, who knows the goodness of the Lord and His desire for forgive, tries to get out of his task and flees. During his flight, the prophet enters into contact with the pagans, the sailors of the ship on which he embarked in order to get away from God and from His mission. And it is precisely the behavior of these men, like that he will see in the inhabitants of Nineveh, that will enable him to reflect a little on the hope that, before the threat of death, is expressed in prayer".

"Indeed, during the sea crossing, a terrible storm erupts and Jonah descends into the hold of the ship and abandons himself to sleep. Instead, the sailors see that all is lost, and each cried out to his God. The captain of the ship awakens Jonah, saying to him: 'What do you mean, you are sleeping? Arise, call out to your God! Perhaps the God will give a thought to us, that we may not perish'. The reaction of these 'pagans' is the right reaction when faced with death, because it is then that man has a complete experience of his own fragility and his own need for salvation. The instinctive horror of dying unveils the need to hope in the God of life. 'Perhaps the God will give a thought for us, that we may not perish': they are the words of hope that becomes prayer, that plea full of anguish that rises to the lips of man when faced with the imminent danger of death".

"Too easily we disdain to turn to God when we are in need, as if it were only a self-interested prayer and therefore imperfect," the Pope observed. "But God knows our weakness; He knows that we remember Him to ask for help, and with the indulgent smile of a father He responds benevolently".

When Jonah, acknowledging his responsibilities, lets himself be thrown into the sea to save his traveling companions, the storm calms. "Incumbent death had led these pagan men to prayer, and ensured that the prophet, despite everything, lived his vocation in the service of others accepting to sacrifice himself for them, and now leads the survivors to the acknowledgement of the true Lord and praise. The sailors, who had prayed in fear to their gods, now with sincere fear of the Lord, acknowledge the true God and offer sacrifices and vows. Hope, which had led them to pray so as not to die, shows itself to be even more powerful and to bring a situation that goes far beyond what they had hoped for: not only do they not perish in the storm, but they are opened up to recognition of the true and sole Lord of heaven and earth".

"Subsequently also the inhabitants of Nineveh, faced with the prospect of being destroyed, will pray, driven by hope in God's forgiveness. They will repent, they will invoke the Lord and they will convert to Him, starting with the King who, like the captain of the ship, will give voice to hope, saying, 'Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish'. For them too, as for the crew in the storm, having faced death and coming out alive led them to the truth. In this way, under divine mercy, and even more so in the light of the



Pascal mystery, death can become, as it was for St. Francis of Assisi, 'our sister death,' and represent, for every man and for every one of us, the surprising opportunity to know hope and encounter the Lord. May the Lord enable us to understand this bond between prayer and hope. Prayer carries you ahead in hope, and when things become dark, then more prayer is needed! And there will be more hope. Thank you".

Wednesday, January 18, 2017

Hope Never Disappoints



In the catechesis of this Wednesday's general audience, Pope Francis returned to the theme of hope, this time in the light of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, in which he urges them to be proud. But what does this refer to? As the Holy Father remarked, "Since childhood we are taught that it is not good to boast. And it is right, because boasting of what one is or what one has betrayed, aside from a certain arrogance, also a lack of respect for others, especially those who are less fortunate than ourselves". What, then, is it right to be proud of? And how is it possible to do this,

without offending, without excluding anyone?

In the first case, we are invited to be proud of "the abundance of grace with which we are pervaded in Jesus Christ, through faith. Paul wants to make us understand that, if we learn to interpret everything with the light of the Holy Spirit, we realize that everything is grace, everything is a gift! Indeed, if we pay attention, we see that — in history, as in our life — we are not alone in acting; there is, above all, God ... Who creates every thing as a gift of love, Who weaves the fabric of His plan for salvation and Who fulfills it for us, through His Son Jesus. We are requested to recognize all this, to welcome it with gratitude and to make it become a reason for praise, blessing and great joy. If we do this, we are at peace with God and we experience freedom. And this peace then extends to all environments and all the relationships of our life: we are at peace with ourselves, we are at peace in the family, in our community, at work and with the people we meet every day on our journey".

But Paul also encourages us to be proud even in our troubles, which is more difficult for us and can seem to have nothing to do with the condition of peace I have just described. "Instead it constitutes the most authentic and truest presupposition," Francis emphasized. "Indeed, the peace that the Lord offers and guarantees to us must not be understood as a lack of worries, disappointments, scarcity, or reasons for suffering. If it were thus, if we succeeded in staying at peace, that moment would soon come to an end and we would inevitably return to dejection. The peace that springs from faith is instead a gift: it is the grace of experiencing that God loves us and that He is always by our side, and that He never leaves us alone even for a moment of our life. And this, as the Apostle affirms, gives rise to patience, because we know that even in the hardest and most troubling moments, the Lord's mercy and goodness are greater than any other thing and nothing can tear us from His hands and from communion with Him."

This, then, is why "Christian hope is solid, and this is why it does not disappoint. It is not based on what we can do or be, or even on what we can believe in. Its foundation, that is the basis of Christian hope, is the most faithful and secure possible; that is, the love that God Himself has for each one of us..."

The Apostle Paul urges us always to be proud of God's love: 'I glory in God's love, because He loves me'. The hope that is given to us does not separate us from others, nor does it lead us to discredit them or marginalize them, the Holy Father explained. "It is instead an extraordinary gift for which we are called to be channels, with humility and simplicity, for everyone. And therefore our greatest pride will be having as a Father a God Who does not have preferences,



Who excludes no-one, but Who opens His house to all human beings, starting from the last and the most distance, so that as His children we learn to console and support each other. And do not forget: hope never disappoints."

February 15, 2017

World Day of Social Communication, May 28, 2017



The Holy Father's message for the 51st World Day of Social Communications, to be held on Sunday, May 28 this year on the theme "*Fear not, for I am with you (Isaiah, 43:5): Communicating Hope and Trust in our Time,*" was published today.

For the occasion, Msgr. Dario Edoardo Viganò, prefect of the Secretariat for Communication, was present in the Holy See Press Office to speak with journalists. The following is the full text of the message:

Access to the media — thanks to technological progress — makes it possible for countless people to share news instantly and spread it widely. That news may be good or bad, true or false. The early Christians compared the human mind to a constantly grinding millstone; it is up to the miller to determine what it will grind: good wheat or worthless weeds. Our minds are always "grinding," but it is up to us to choose what to feed them (cf. St. John Cassian, Epistle to Leontius).

I wish to address this message to all those who, whether in their professional work or personal relationships, are like that mill, daily "grinding out" information with the aim of providing rich fare for those with whom they communicate. I would like to encourage everyone to engage in constructive forms of communication that reject prejudice towards others and foster a culture of encounter, helping all of us to view the world around us with realism and trust.

I am convinced that we have to break the vicious circle of anxiety and stem the spiral of fear resulting from a constant focus on "bad news"... This has nothing to do with spreading misinformation that would ignore the tragedy of human suffering, nor is it about a naive optimism blind to the scandal of evil. Rather, I propose that all of us work at overcoming that feeling of growing discontent and resignation that can at times generate apathy, fear or the idea that evil has no limits. Moreover, in a communications industry which thinks that good news does not sell, and where the tragedy of human suffering and the mystery of evil easily turn into entertainment, there is always the temptation that our consciences can be dulled or slip into pessimism. I would like, then, to contribute to the search for an open and creative style of communication that never seeks to glamorize evil but instead to concentrate on solutions and to inspire a positive and responsible approach on the part of its recipients. I ask everyone to offer the people of our time storylines that are at heart "good news".

Good news: Life is not simply a bare succession of events, but a history, a story waiting to be told through the choice of an interpretative lens that can select and gather the most relevant data. In and of itself, reality has no one clear meaning. Everything depends on the way we look at things, on the lens we use to view them. If we change that lens, reality itself appears different. So how can we begin to "read" reality through the right lens?

For us Christians, that lens can only be the good news, beginning with the Good News par excellence : "the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God" (Mk 1:1). With these words, St. Mark opens his Gospel not by relating "good news" about Jesus, but rather the good news that is Jesus Himself. Indeed, reading the pages of his Gospel, we learn that its title corresponds to its content and, above all else, this content is the very person of Jesus.

This good news – Jesus Himself – is not good because it has nothing to do with suffering, but rather because suffering itself becomes part of a bigger picture. It is seen as an integral part of Jesus' love for the Father and for all mankind. In Christ, God has shown His solidarity with

**St. Michael the Archangel Roman Catholic Church
Lake Jackson, TX**

every human situation. He has told us that we are not alone, for we have a Father who is constantly mindful of His children. “Fear not, for I am with you” (Is 43:5): these are the comforting words of a God who is immersed in the history of His people. In His beloved Son, this divine promise — “I am with you” — embraces all our weakness, even to dying our death. In Christ, even darkness and death become a point of encounter with Light and Life. Hope is born, a hope accessible to everyone, at the very crossroads where life meets the bitterness of failure. That hope does not disappoint, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5) and makes new life blossom, like a shoot that springs up from the fallen seed. Seen in this light, every new tragedy that occurs in the world’s history can also become a setting for good news, inasmuch as love can find a way to draw near and to raise up sympathetic hearts, resolute faces and hands ready to build anew.

Confidence in the seed of the Kingdom: To introduce his disciples and the crowds to this Gospel mindset and to give them the right “lens” needed to see and embrace the love that dies and rises, Jesus uses parables. He frequently compares the Kingdom of God to a seed that releases its potential for life precisely when it falls to the earth and dies (cf. Mk 4:1-34). This use of images and metaphors to convey the quiet power of the Kingdom does not detract from its importance and urgency; rather, it is a merciful way of making space for the listener to freely accept and appropriate that power. It is also a most effective way to express the immense dignity of the Paschal mystery, leaving it to images, rather than concepts, to communicate the paradoxical beauty of new life in Christ. In that life, hardship and the cross do not obstruct, but bring about God’s salvation; weakness proves stronger than any human power; and failure can be the prelude to the fulfillment of all things in love. This is how hope in the Kingdom of God matures and deepens: it is “as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow” (Mk 4:26-27).

The Kingdom of God is already present in our midst, like a seed that is easily overlooked, yet silently takes root. Those to whom the Holy Spirit grants keen vision can see it blossoming. They do not let themselves be robbed of the joy of the Kingdom by the weeds that spring up all about.

The horizons of the Spirit: Our hope based on the good news which is Jesus Himself makes us lift up our eyes to contemplate the Lord in the liturgical celebration of the Ascension. Even though the Lord may now appear more distant, the horizons of hope expand all the more. In Christ, Who brings our human nature to heaven, every man and woman can now freely “enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh” (Heb 10:19-20). By “the power of the Holy Spirit” we can be witnesses and “communicators” of a new and redeemed humanity “even to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8).

Confidence in the seed of God’s Kingdom and in the mystery of Easter should also shape the way we communicate. This confidence enables us to carry out our work — in all the different ways that communication takes place nowadays — with the conviction that it is possible to recognize and highlight the good news present in every story and in the face of each person.

Those who, in faith, entrust themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit come to realize how God is present and at work in every moment of our lives and history, patiently bringing to pass a history of salvation. Hope is the thread with which this sacred history is woven, and its weaver is none other than the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Hope is the humblest of virtues, for it remains hidden in the recesses of life; yet it is like the yeast that leavens all the dough. We nurture it by reading ever anew the Gospel, “Reprinted” in so many editions in the lives of the saints who became icons of God’s love in this world. Today too, the Spirit continues to sow in us a desire for the Kingdom, thanks to all those who, drawing inspiration from the Good News amid the dramatic events of our time, shine like beacons in the darkness of this world, shedding light along the way and opening ever new paths of confidence and hope.

From the Vatican, 24 January 2017



Saints

*O. Jesus, Son of the Virgin Mary, infuse into me grace,
wisdom, charity, chastity and humility.*

Saint Patrick's Day

An excerpt from Magnificat March 2015 by Jennifer Hubbard:

Feast: March 17



She drew them everywhere, especially for Saint Patrick's Day, but rarely did we see one. Since her death, rainbows have graced the sky more than I ever remember. The darker the storm, the more vibrant the colors. With each rainbow he reminds me of his real and living Presence. *This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come, of the covenant between me and you and every living creature with you* (Gn 9:12).

Before she died my instinct was to run far and fast from the storm. I never understood why one Irish blessing wished "not a path devoid of clouds, nor a life on a bed of roses, nor that you should never feel pain." Instead it sought "braveness in times of trials, hope the there is little, and in every hour of joy and pain you feel God close." Despise my lack of understanding then, this blessing is now my prayer.

I pray that when I want to run I stand firm. For, *blessed is the man who preserves in temptation, for when he has been proved he will receive the crown of life that he promised to those who love him* (Jas 1:12). When a storm approaches, I pray I march straight through it into his open arms. I pray I remember that the miracle comes after the storm.

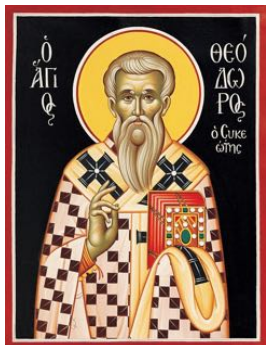
I watch the children sprint across the field, drawing everyone's eyes up to the sky. Vibrant colors have again replaced the storm clouds. I stand in awe and bow my head in thanksgiving for answered prayers.

Jennifer Hubbard resides in Newton, CT. The younger of her two children, Catherine Violet, was a victim of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting.

Saint Theodore of Sykeon Bishop († 613)

An excerpt from Magnificat April 2015:

Feast: April 22



Theodore's mother was Mary, a prostitute, who ran a brothel and inn with her sister in Sykeon, Galatia (modern Turkey). Theodore never met his father. When Theodore was very young, a man named Stephen came to the inn to work as a cook. Stephen's cooking was so wonderful that the women were able to make enough money running the inn to give up working as prostitutes. Stephen took little Theodore under his wing. He taught him to pray and to fast and to love the sacraments.

At the age of eighteen, Theodore was ordained. He took the monastic habit and devoted himself to extreme penances, living for a time in an iron cage suspended on the wall of a cave. Many sought his help against demons. When some of the visitors wanted to stay, Theodore built a monastery.

In time, Theodore was elected bishop of Anastasiopolis. His tenure was marked by many miracles of healing. But once Theodore himself fell sick, the victim of poisoning. For three days he lay in his room close to death. In his agony, the Mother of God

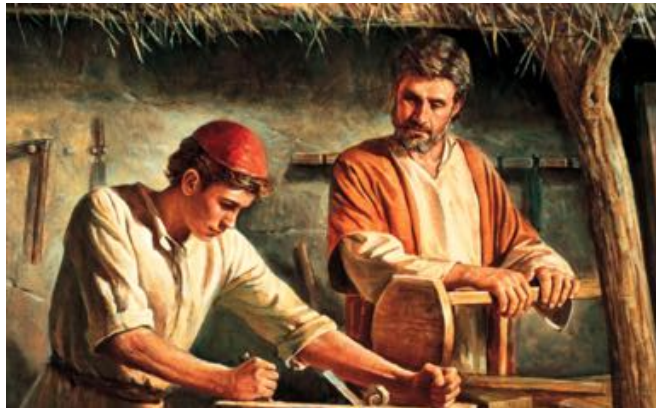


appeared to him and gave him three pills to take. After Theodore took the medicine, he was immediately well. He arose to give thanks to God and his Immaculate Mother. After ten years, Theodore resigned in order to return to his monastery. He served there with devotion to the end of his days.

Saint Joseph the Worker

An excerpt from Magnificat May 2015 by Anthony Esolen:

Feast: May 1



We do not live to work, but there is a nobility to work nonetheless, and the Christian cannot forget that our Lord himself worked with his hands at the plane and the lathe. The man who lay in the remarkable Shroud of Turin was a broad-shouldered, imposing fellow.

In *Paradise Lost*, when the fallen Adam reconsiders the word of the Lord, that he should earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, he says, "Idleness had been worse." Nor was there idleness before the Fall, as Milton rightly shows. Adam and Eve tend the garden, using their choice and intelligence to make it more beautiful, more

comfortable, more human a place.

If we could arrange it so that men would drink and eat and sleep, without work, if we could give them the income to allow for it, that must at best be a stopgap, a bridge from work to work. It need not be so, if human beings were only animals, but... we are not savages but men. We need to give of ourselves; even the poor need to give of themselves, and deserve to have their gifts received and honored.

Anthony Esolen is professor of English at Providence College, a senior editor of Touchstone Magazine and a regular contributor to Magnificat.

Farmer's Prayer to Saint Joseph

O glorious St. Joseph, foster father of Jesus, you did provide for the Holy Family. We commit to your protection all our crops and farm industries. Deign, we beseech you, to intercede in our behalf with Almighty God, Who rules the seasons, so that our fields being safe from pests and favored by the weather may yield abundant crops that will allow us to supply the wants of life. Thus freed from earthly worries may we after your example apply all our thoughts to eternal life. We beseech you to instill a love of the land into the hearts of our youth for their own salvation and that of Christian unity so that we may all share hereafter in the same blissful life you enjoy in heaven.

Amen.



Our Lady of Fatima

100th Anniversary of her Apparition

Feast: May 13



Pope Francis said Our Lady of Fatima “invites us once again to turn to prayer, penance, and conversion.” The Holy Father noted the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima is commemorated this year on Saturday, May 13 at his General Audience.

“She asks us to never offend God again. She forewarns all humanity about the necessity of abandoning oneself to God, the source of love and mercy,” Pope Francis said.

“Following the example of Saint John Paul II, a great devotee of Our Lady of Fatima, let us listen attentively to the Mother of God and ask for peace for the world,” he continued, “praised be Jesus Christ!”

Thirty-five years ago, Pope Saint John Paul II was shot by Mehmet Ali Ağca during the General Audience, which took place on the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima in 1981. The saint attributed his survival to Our Lady, and gave one of the bullets used in the attack to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal. The bullet was placed in the crown of the statue of the Virgin Mary which is housed at the shrine



Weekly Bible Studies

“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” Saint Jerome

Day	Time	Leader	Phone	Location
Sunday	9:30 am	Joe Lesnau	265-6221	Room 149
Sunday	10:45 am	Gary Forse	299-3145	Room 149
Wednesday	6:00 am	Duane Williams	297-5564	Angelina Room
Wednesday	9:30 am	Shirley A Fromen	481-9797	Room 149
Thursday	9:15 am	Jeanne Schroll	297-5860	F Wing
Friday	9:15 am	Pam Walker	297-9746	Room 149

Weekly Prayer Groups

“Hear my prayer, O God. Give ear to the words of my mouth” Psalm 54:2

Day	Time	Focus	Location
Monday	7:00 pm	Rosary	Church
1st Monday	7:00 pm	Patriotic Rosary	Church
Tuesday	5:00 pm 6:00 pm	Rosary Divine Mercy Chaplet	Church
Wednesday	8:00 am 9:15 am	Rosary Divine Mercy Chaplet	Church
Thursday	5:00 pm 6:00 pm	Rosary Divine Mercy Chaplet	Church
Friday	8:00 am 9:15 am	Rosary Divine Mercy Chaplet	Church