

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 darkness,
but will have the light of
life."

John 8:12



Adult Faith Formation

Winter 2014 – 2015

(December 2014 – February 2015)



The Spiritual Light

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Advent, a season of waiting, is the perfect time to reflect on what defines our lives. My mother used to tell me: *"No me canso de darle gracias a Dios"* (I don't get tired of giving thanks to God). This phrase is always on my mind. I give thanks to God for this special place and for the wonderful people that He has put on my path.

It has been a joy to work on this issue and it's our hope that it will reach deep into your hearts and make your Advent a rich and rewarding experience. In *Clergy's Corner*, Fr. Leo talks about the faith of John the Baptist. In *A Vocation Story*, Blake Novosad writes about his journey in becoming a priest. In *Reflections of the Deacon-to-Be*, Gary Forse reflects on the joy and anticipation of his approaching ordination to the Permanent Diaconate. In *A Conversion Story*, Dean Price tells

us of the reasons he loves being a Catholic.

This *Liturgical Season* takes us in our spiritual journey from the waiting of the birth of Christ the Child to the beginning of Lent. The writings of Pope Francis, St. John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI are inspiring and encouraging. We also feature two contributor reflections- Margaret Kana on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Adele Baxter on the Feast of St. Stephen, the First Martyr.

In *Featured Ministries*, Tim Finley tells us about the adventures and challenges of today's society in THE MAKING OF A FEW GOOD MEN in the Cub Scouts and Boys Scouts, and Elizabeth Betczynski tells us about the *Vocation Committee and Vocation Chalice* that encourages us to foster and affirm all religious vocations through prayer, awareness, and encouragement.

In *The Saints* you will find three refreshing reflections written by young adults in our confirmation program - Zachary Pisarski, Stephen St. Pierre and Megan Schroll. We have also included news from the Vatican, a list of *Bible studies* and *Prayer groups* that you can consider joining. Richard Keistler's *"Did You Know?"* column is not in this issue because Richard is recuperating from surgery. Please keep him in your prayers.

Your comments are welcome. Please do not hesitate to contact the editors or any of the team members. On behalf of the entire Adult Faith Formation Team, we wish you a very **MERRY CHRISTMAS** and a blessed **NEW YEAR**. May the good Lord continue to shower this parish with abundant blessings.

Margarita Prinz

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About Us

The Adult Faith Formation ministry came into being as a result of the Envision program held in the parish in 2006. From the meetings of the Envision committee came a vision statement for the parish: "A Eucharistic community in continual transformation, surrendering ourselves to God to be His instruments for world change."

The objective of Adult Faith Formation ministry is to seek to foster life long learning, Catholic education and faith development of adult parishioners. It is the primary educational ministry for adults of our parish.

Adult Faith Formation ministry uses several different facets of learning in the presentation of programs. There have been well-known speakers who lectured in his/her specialty, small group discussions (Study of the Catechism for Catholic adults), movies, and a play.

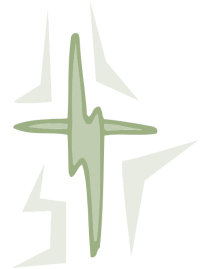
We look for topics in which our parishioners say they are interested. This knowledge came from a survey done in the infancy of this ministry and we search for speakers well known for the topics they present. Agreement on topics and speakers are reached by consensus rather than majority and our annual educational year started in 2007.

In order to continue with these programs we need to almost continually add new members to the ministry. Whether you are new to the parish or have been here for several years, you can bring in fresh and different ideas. Your presence and knowledge will generate fresh energy. While the ministry has made great progress, it still has a long way to go.

Our meetings are held once a month in the evening in the Educational Building. Please come and see the team in action. After a visit we are certain you will want to join us.

If you are interested in finding more about this rewarding ministry, please contact us. We will be happy to visit with you.

Adult
Faith
Formation



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Clergy's Corner



John the Baptist called out “Prepare ye the way of the Lord...make straight his paths.” John had spent time in the desert praying and fasting.

I’ve often wondered how he knew to go there? What was there about this world that led him? The counsel that Jesus gave us in the Gospel this past Sunday gives us an important insight. He said; Watch!

John had the ability to receive and process that reception. Then John let the events touch the very core of his life. He could no longer be passive ...he received and went out to proclaim even though things were not completely clear. Remember when Jesus sent word to John, “the blind see, lepers are cleansed... the deaf hear, the mute speaks...” He sent these word to clarify things to John.

All these happenings are gifts to us..it’s all been clarified. We can look back and be grateful and received from the faith as John. I hope his faith will be our faith so that we can also become faithful disciples. If that does happen, it will be because we followed the words of Jesus...“Watch”.

Merry Christmas to All.

Msgr. Leo Wleczyk

A Vocation Story



By Blake Novosad:

Anytime one writes about their life it is tempting to either think too much of it or too little. As I present the story of how I came to be a seminarian, please know that I do so for the glory of God whom I serve and for any good that may come to those who see the Lord’s hand at work in my life. For this is truly what my life is, a song of love for our great and merciful God.

I first felt called to be a priest when I was a junior in high school. There was a visiting priest speaking to our youth group about vocations to the priesthood and religious life and I remember experiencing a movement deep within me, a whisper if you will, as if the Lord were asking me to be a priest. After struggling with this possibility for the remainder of the talk, I eventually gave in to the Lord and decided I would accept His call. This mindset lasted about a week until I began to think, “Well, I’ve wanted to be in the Aggie Band since I was a kid, and seminary will throw a wrench in that plan. Also,

I have a pretty big crush on this girl at my high school, and although I may not marry her, it would be nice to marry a beautiful girl and raise a family.” Needless to say, surrendering my dreams to follow some mysterious plan of God did not sound too appealing. Thus began a near decade of me running from the Lord.

After graduating from Brazoswood High School in 2005 I entered Texas A&M University as finance major and member of the Aggie Band and Corps of Cadets. If I thought I had a crush on a girl in high school...wow! There were beautiful girls all over the place in college. I remember saying, “Lord, I don’t



A Vocation Story

want all of them, but please give me one of them.” I bring this up only to illustrate that at this point of my life the priesthood was the farthest thing from my mind. Sure, about once a semester God would give me a little nudge and make me think about the priesthood, but I would tell Him there were much more qualified guys for the priesthood, guys who actually *wanted* to be priests. And so went my life in college. I pursued my education, realized my dream of marching in the Aggie Band, and continued searching for my wife.

As graduation approached in 2009 and 2010 the “Great Recession” was in full swing. Many companies had stopped hiring and jobs at companies who were hiring were very competitive. As the probability of having a job lined up before graduation declined I began to have thoughts of the priesthood again. However, this was not true discernment because I was not open to the will of God. Whenever I thought of becoming a priest it seemed like some terrible thing God was going to make me do for His benefit instead of allowing me to have the life I wanted. The fact that following the will of God leads to true happiness never crossed my mind, and if it did, I thought it did not apply to my situation. Thankfully, through the goodness of God, I received the job offer I was hoping for from Amegy Bank in Houston and could *at last* put the priesthood out of my mind.

I began my career at Amegy in July 2010 and loved my job. I worked with a great group of people and was surrounded by peers who were hired around the time I was. On top of that, I moved into a great townhome with my cousin in central Houston and was making a lot of new friends. I had everything I was supposed to have, but after two years I began to feel an incredible emptiness. I attributed this emptiness to my lack of a girlfriend, but the harder I tried to find the right girl, the unhappier I became. I began to look very closely at my life and realized that I was filled with selfishness. I was trying so hard to build the life I had always wanted that my ego began to contaminate every relationship. Instead of giving myself to others, I was trying to use others to construct the life I wanted. This realization was a great grace from the Lord and was the catalyst to my discernment of the priesthood.

As I continued my self-reflection and looked back on my life I realized that my happiest times were when I had a close relationship with the Lord. I began seeking the Lord in a much deeper way by attending daily Mass before work. This seemingly simple alteration to my daily schedule was in fact life changing. After a few weeks of daily Mass I noticed I no longer felt like I *should* go to Mass; I *had to* go to Mass. I could not imagine spending my day without receiving Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. I also began excelling at work because I was no longer bound by the worldly concerns of corporate America but was more concerned with pleasing God. Amongst all these graces the gentle call of Jesus asking me to follow Him returned, but this time God had given me the courage and strength to answer “yes.”

I began attending several meetings for men discerning the priesthood as well as a few discernment retreats. I also began meeting with Father Dat, our Archdiocese’s former vocation director. I knew that if I was to be a true Christian I had to follow Christ unconditionally, but the decision was not easy. It meant leaving behind my job, my friends, and all my comforts. In fact, I had to change my whole outlook on life because up to that point I had only seen myself as a future husband and father. On top of these difficulties, when it came time to make a decision God seemed to be silent. Yet deep down I knew God had not abandoned me but was asking me to trust Him, to place my complete confidence in Him alone. Thankfully I did trust Him and entered seminary in August 2013.

I can honestly say that my time as a seminarian has been the happiest of my life. That is not to say that my life before seminary was unhappy, on the contrary, it was filled with wonderful moments and friendships. However, a life lived for God is far superior to a life lived for ourselves. The love of God is indescribable; it is worth leaving everything behind for. The beautiful thing is that if we leave everything to follow the Lord, He gives us back far greater treasures than we left behind in the first place. But to experience the love of God in its fullness is not cheap; it is not something we can receive at its highest level by going through the motions. For as Saint Paul says, you have been purchased at a price (1 Cor. 6:20). Yet we have all been made for this love and there is nothing the Lord wants more than to fill us with His love, until we overflow with His goodness. But again, in order to receive the love of God in its

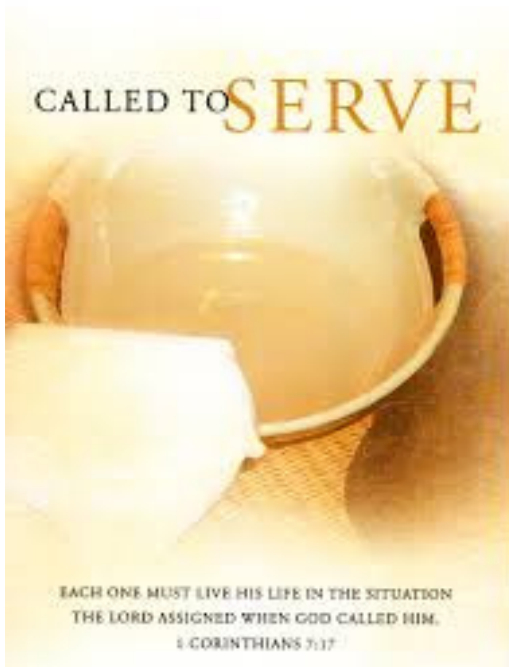


A Vocation Story

fullness we must make room in our hearts. We must empty ourselves of all desires foreign to God and His will for our lives. I know the difficulty of this; it took me nearly ten years to let go of my plans in order to follow the Lord, but I also know the joy waiting for those who place their trust completely in God. It is my prayer that we may all desire to know the Lord more fully and that we may be open to whatever He asks of us. And remember, "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart ... God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9).

Reflections of the Deacon-to-be:

By Gary Forse:



Advent takes on an additional bit of joy and anticipation for Camille and me this year. At your reading, I hopefully will have completed the academic portion of my formation to the Permanent Diaconate and will have received word of my graduation. Whew!

I know there have been many questions regarding Ordination and my assignment. The Ordination will take place on Saturday, January 31, 2015 at the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Houston. There are thirty men who will be ordained with me on that day beginning at 10:00 am. Unfortunately, seating is limited. Each of us who will be ordained have been given a limited number of tickets and only those with tickets will be admitted. The good news is the Archdiocese is planning to broadcast the celebration live over the internet. I pray you will be able to join me in spirit for this beautiful liturgy. Please watch the bulletin for further information regarding the details of the broadcast.

The Parish Council is hosting a reception and lunch following the 11:00 am Mass on February 1, in the Hall of the Family Life Center. Please watch the bulletin for details and make plans to join the St. Michael's Parish Family as we celebrate the completion of my formation and the beginning of this new vocation.

As I have mentioned before in previous articles, deacons serve at the discretion of the Bishop. Since I have been supported by St. Michael Catholic Church and we currently are without a Permanent Deacon, it is most likely I will be assigned to this parish. As soon as my assignment has been made official by the Cardinal and the Office of the Permanent Diaconate the announcement will be made. Typically, a Deacon serves in his home parish unless there is a greater need at another parish within twelve miles of the Deacon's home. My hope and prayer is to be assigned to St. Michael.

Permanent Deacons also have a Diocesan Ministry where they serve in addition to their parish assignment. Those of you who heard and responded to the call of Deacon Dan Gilbert from the Office of Special Youth Services will be working with me in the Brazoria County Juvenile Detention Center. I pray that many more will answer the call to minister to the young boys and girls in the Juvenile Probation Department. Feel free to contact me for more information.

Once again, Camille and I are very grateful for the love and support we have received from so many of you throughout this journey. We wish you a blessed Advent and a Happy and Holy Christmas!



A Conversion Story



By Dean Price:

I grew up Episcopalian. The town I was raised in was majority Catholic, and there was a fair amount of animosity toward non-Catholics. This was not everyone. Some few people accepted us, but many had what I would call a lot of pride in being Catholic, and many, if not most did not want to associate with us. The first lesson here is that we Catholics have a great faith; let's not lose souls because of an excess of pride in ourselves because of it.

Eventually, I grew up and moved out of the house to a different city. As it turns out, there was large Catholic community there, too. As it turned out, I fell captive to the charms of a local girl who turned out to be Catholic. Despite the difficulties in my upbringing, I married her anyway. However, I remained Episcopalian, while she remained Catholic. This brings up the second lesson – it is very difficult to raise a family when the parents have different faiths.

A few years later, I took a job in Texas, and so we moved away from the pressures of both our families. At that point several things happened at once. I read through the Bible, and began to read Church history. Also, I was chosen the president of Brazoria County Right to Life. I attended a peaceful demonstration at a Planned Parenthood rally for abortion, and found out that the invocation for the rally was given by a woman Episcopalian priest. We exchanged letters, but she refused to believe that she was mistaken in her beliefs. I then checked out the Episcopalian position on life, and found that it was as wishy-washy as most other positions that church believed.

During that time the local Catholic Church invited me to RCIA. My wife was sure I was not going to join the Catholic faith, but I went just to check it out. My reading of Church history led me to understand that although some people in the Church had acted improperly, the teaching of the Catholic Church never wavered, while the churches that separated themselves came up with new doctrines. I began to understand from reading Scripture that God gave authority to the Catholic Church, and I saw that in Pope John Paul II. I also began to understand veneration of the saints, and in particular the Blessed Virgin Mary. I had no choice but to convert.

My conversion was not without consequence. My family tried to dissuade me, pointing in particular to the people I grew up with. I was lucky in some ways, however, in that my family did not disown me, and I did not lose any friends over my conversion. Aside from some rather obstinate Protestants at work, God made the path to the Catholic Church fairly easy.

The final lesson, then, is that we have a marvelous gift in the Catholic Church. We have a Pope with authority given from God. We would not have the Sacred Scriptures if it were not for the Catholic Church. We have great friends in Mary and the saints. For these reasons, I love being Catholic, and I have never regretted my decision.



The Liturgical Season

The Immaculate Conception

Solemnity Dec. 8



What Mary's Immaculate Conception Means to Us?

An excerpt from The Catholic Answer Book of Mary by Very Reverend Peter M.J. Stravinskis, PH.D., S.T.D.

By Rev. Peter John Cameron, O.P.

A basic misunderstanding that commonly confronts those being introduced to the mysteries of the faith is one that pertains to the nature of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Does the Immaculate Conception refer to the conception of Mary in her own mother's womb, or to the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary?

On December 8 the Church answers that question. It honors the conception of Mary in her mother's womb. This Catholic belief has been defined in the following words: "The Most Holy Virgin Mary was, in the first moment of her conception, by a unique gift of grace and privilege of almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the redeemer of mankind, preserved free from all stain of original sin."

However, a sure connection remains between Mary's Immaculate Conception and the conception by the Holy Spirit of Jesus in the womb of Mary, for the Church teaches that the ultimate purpose of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is her motherhood of God...

The mystery of the Immaculate Conception is so fundamental that we gain particular insight into it by returning to the very beginning – to the Garden of Eden. The early Fathers of the Church recognized a number of parallels between Eve and Mary. They commented that the knot of sinfulness produced by Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience. The death that came through Eve was reversed in the life that comes through Mary, the Immaculate Conception...

In Mary's Immaculate Conception, God offers to us two things that were lost by the sin of Adam and Eve. First, the sacredness of human dignity is restored in an irrevocable way in Mary. Within that restoration is borne the definition of true human freedom, which is the fruit of childlike reliance on God...

Mary's Immaculate Conception is God's way of giving us a proper and sanctifying way to rely on the sacredness of human personal existence in order to be drawn more closely to Himself. When we rely on the goodness of God as it is miraculously revealed in the Immaculate Conception, we profess that we are unwilling to trust in our own conceptions of goodness and righteousness (a constant temptation). We rely on the sacraments, the Church, the human body and soul of Jesus, and participate in the very holiness of God by relying on the Mother of God...

The holy season of Advent, then, presents us with a challenge. We can live by our own self-made conceptions, which keep us trapped in our patterns of sin and lead us to death. Or we can live in Mary the Immaculate Conception, the principle of God's ultimate revelation of graciousness and love, by whom we know and share in the life Who is Jesus. As we come to live more deeply united in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, we can rejoice with an even greater joy as we see the life of Jesus born anew in us who are privileged to share in the very graciousness offered by God to Mary.

Father Peter John Cameron, O.P. is the Editor-in-Chief of Magnificat.



Our Lady Of Guadalupe

Feast Dec. 12



18th-century painting of God the Father fashioning the image.

By Margaret Kana,

I have been to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe when I was in high school....long before I was ever Catholic. As a Presbyterian I did not appreciate what I was seeing, I'm sorry to say. The image of the original hanging, I do remember.....had a lasting effect on me. I enjoyed doing this....have done lots of reading and lots of research. God wanted me to know more. It definitely helped me prepare myself for the upcoming ADVENT SEASON.

Official Catholic accounts state that on the morning of December 9, 1531, Juan Diego saw an apparition of a young girl at the Hill of Tepeyac, near Mexico City. Speaking to him in Nahuatl, the girl asked that a church be built at that site in her honor; from her words, Juan Diego recognized the girl as the Virgin Mary. According to the account, Juan Diego told his story to the Spanish Archbishop of Mexico City, Fray Juan de Zumárraga, who instructed him to return to Tepeyac Hill, and ask the "lady" for a miraculous sign to prove her identity. The first sign was the Virgin healing Juan Diego's uncle. The Virgin told Juan Diego to gather flowers from the top of Tepeyac Hill. Although December was very late in the growing season for flowers to bloom,

Juan Diego found Castilian roses, not native to Mexico, on the normally barren hilltop. The Virgin arranged these in his peasant cloak or *tilma*. When Juan Diego opened his cloak before Bishop Zumárraga on December 12, the flowers fell to the floor, and on the fabric was the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Juan Diego was canonized in 2002, and his *tilma* (cloak) is displayed in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the most visited Marian shrine in the world.

Roman Catholic sources claim many miraculous and supernatural properties for the image such as that the *tilma* has maintained its structural integrity over nearly 500 years, while replicas normally last only about 15 years before suffering degradation, that it repaired itself with no external help after a 1791 ammonia spill that did considerable damage, and that on 14 November 1921 a bomb damaged the altar, but left the icon unharmed.

Then in 1929 and 1951 photographers found a figure reflected in the Virgin's eyes; upon inspection they said that the reflection was tripled in what is called the Purkinje effect, commonly found in human eyes. An ophthalmologist, Dr. Jose Aste Tonsmann, later enlarged an image of the Virgin's eyes by 2500x and claimed to have found not only the aforementioned single figure, but images of all the witnesses present when the *tilma* was first revealed before Zumárraga in 1531, plus a small family group of mother, father, and a group of children, in the center of the Virgin's eyes, fourteen people in all.

Numerous Catholic websites repeat an un-sourced claim that in 1936 biochemist Richard Kuhn analyzed a sample of the fabric and announced that the pigments used were from no known source, whether animal, mineral or vegetable. Dr. Philip Serna Callahan, who photographed the icon under infrared light, declared from his photographs that portions of the face, hands, robe, and mantle had been painted in one step, with no sketches or corrections and no visible brush strokes.

Join us to our Parish celebration on Friday December 12th, starting with the Rosary at 8:00 AM, Mass at 8:30 AM followed by a traditional Mexican breakfast in the Hall of the Family Life Center.



Christmas Prayer



Almighty God and Father of light,
a child is born for us and a son is given to us.
Your eternal Word leaped down from heaven
in the silent watches of the night,
and now your Church is filled with wonder
at the nearness of her God.

Open our hearts to receive his life
and increase our vision with the rising of dawn,
that our lives may be filled with his glory and his
peace,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

From the Liturgy of the Hours.

St. Stephen, The First Martyr

Feast Dec. 26

By Adele Baxter:

The Name of Stephen has always been a favorite of mine and I loved looking for information on Saint Stephen for the Adult Faith booklet, the LIGHT. My son is named for him and he is a wonderful son, husband, and father. I found a book about the Saints in the Chapel to help me with my research.

The Book of Saints
Published by Regina Press
Text Victor Hoagland, CP

From early in the fourth century, the deacon Stephen has been honored by the Catholic Church on December 26, the day after Christ's birth. He is the first martyr, dying for his faith in Jesus, born of Mary. The story of his persecution and death before the Sanhedrin is told vividly in the Acts of the Apostles.

"As a deacon appointed by the apostles after Pentecost, Stephen was a man filled with grace and power, who worked great wonders and signs among the people. Certain members of the so-called 'Synagogue of Roman Freedmen' (that is, the Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cicilia and Asia) would undertake to engage Stephen in debate, but they proved no match for the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke.

"Those who listened to his words were stung to the heart; they ground their teeth in anger at him. Stephen meanwhile, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked to the sky above and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand. 'Look!' he exclaimed, 'I see an opening in the sky and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand.' The on lookers were shouting aloud, holding their hands over their ears as they did so. Then they rushed at him as one man, dragged him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses meanwhile were piling their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. As Stephen was being stoned he could be heard praying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'"

"The love that brought Christ from heaven to earth raised Stephen from earth to heaven," says St. Fulgentius. Stephen's love gave him courage before an angry mob and prompted him to pray like Jesus for his persecutors.

St. Stephen, St. John the Apostle, and the Holy Innocents, whose feasts occur on the following days of December, are seen as special companions of Jesus. They are examples of the different ways of martyrdom for Christ. Stephen voluntarily accepted death and way executed for his faith. John willed to





St. Stephen, The First Martyr

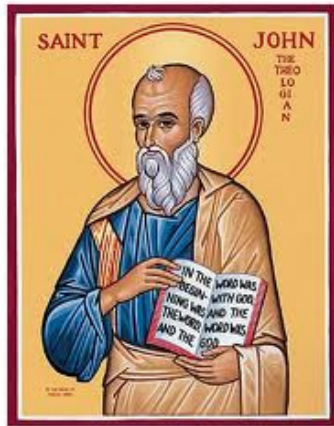
Feast Dec. 26

die for Christ, but was not martyred. The Holy Innocents died for Christ without understanding what was happening to them.

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

St. John, Apostle and Evangelist

Feast Dec. 27



St. John the Theologian was son of Zebedee and Salome from Besthaida of Galilee. A fisherman by trade, Jesus called upon both he and his elder brother James while fishing with their father to follow Him and become fishers of man. Leaving behind their father and all worldly possessions, they followed Christ wherever He went as His disciples.

As the “beloved apostle” of Christ, he was present at our Lord’s Transfiguration on Mount Tabor and sat next to our Lord at the Last Supper where he placed his head on our Lord’s bosom. At the Crucifixion, only he of all disciples remained along side the Theotokos (Mary, the Mother of Jesus) at the foot of the cross and it was here that Jesus presented him to His Mother as her son and in turn entrusted him with the care of His Mother.

St. John remained in Jerusalem in the service of our Lord’s Mother until her Dormition (Assumption). Shortly thereafter, St. John departed with his disciple St. Prochoros to the East where he preached throughout Asia Minor and especially in Ephesus.

During the second persecution of Christians, St. John was sent to Rome to stand trial before the Emperor Domitian. He was tortured and cast into a vat of boiling oil from which he came forth unscathed. The emperor, having failed in his futile attempts to bring any harm towards our great saint, banished him into exile on the island of Patmos. It is here that our Lord revealed to St. John all that is to come until the end of time and instructed him to write it down. Following our Lord’s instructions, St. John composed all the things which he had seen into the book known as the Apocalypse (the book of Revelation). Upon the death of the emperor, St. John returned to Ephesus where he then wrote his Gospel and his three Epistles.

The Roman Catholic Church celebrates the feast of St. John the Apostle on December 27.

Beloved Apostle of Christ our God,
hasten to deliver a people without defense.
He who permitted you to recline upon His bosom,
accepts you on bended knee before Him.
Beseech Him, O Theologian, to dispel the persistent cloud of nations,
asking for us peace and great mercy.

<http://saintjohnthetheologian.org/sjt.html>

The Holy Family

Feast Dec. 28

An excerpt from the book Full of Grace by Judith Dupré

Showing up: Joseph
...“Mary and Joseph bonded together through their mutual understanding that the seed she carried within her womb was divine...The birth of their extraordinary child required both of them to step outside the circle that defined, then as now, traditional social boundaries. What trust must have existed



The Holy Family

Feast Dec. 28



between these two newlyweds, nearly strangers, to accept a situation on faith that was impossible by every known standard and to walk hand in hand into the unknown future!...

Joseph... the pillar of the Holy Family and the earthly symbol of a benevolent father, he also stands in for every human being. We gain access to the Holy Family, a place at their table, as it were, through his all-too-human figure. Together Mary and Joseph saw to life's quotidian details. They shared in the daily joys of parenting Jesus, tenderly described in *Josephina*, an epic poem written about Joseph in 1418 by the mystic and theologian Jean Gerson: "He rushes into their embrace when called/Lifting his little arms he wants to hang on the necks of his parents/With tender embrace to give chaste kisses/He places his hands in yours, Mary and Joseph/And with his uneven step/He follows you all over the house." ...

Contemplating the nature of marriage, saints Augustine and Thomas Aquinas describe it as an "indivisible union of souls," hearts that bridged by the willing gift of freedom from and to each spouse."

Mary, the Mother of God

Solemnity Jan. 1st



An excerpt from Magnificat of January 2014

We believe that nobody else can bring us as Mary can into the divine and human dimension of [the mystery of the Redemption]. Nobody has been brought into it by God himself as Mary has. It is in this that the exceptional character of the grace of the divine Motherhood consists. Not only is the dignity of this Motherhood unique and unrepeatable in the history of the human race, but Mary's participation, due to this Maternity, in God's plan for man's salvation through the mystery of the Redemption is also unique in profundity and range of action.

We can say that the mystery of the Redemption took shape beneath the heart of the Virgin of Nazareth when she pronounced her *fiat*. From then on, under the special influence of the Holy Spirit, this heart, the heart of both a Virgin and a Mother, has always followed the work of her Son and has gone out to all those whom Christ has embraced and continues to embrace with inexhaustible love. For that reason her heart must also have the inexhaustibility of a Mother. The special characteristic of the motherly love that the Mother of God inserts in the mystery of the Redemption and the life of the Church finds expression on its exceptional closeness to man and all that happens to him. It is in this that the mystery of the Mother consists. The Church, which looks to her with altogether special love and hope, wishes to make this mystery her own in an even deeper manner. For in this the Church also recognizes the way for her daily life, which is each person.

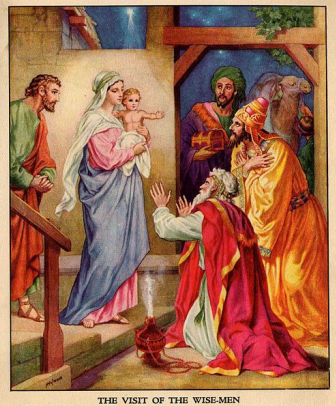
The Father's eternal love, which has been manifested in the history of mankind through the Son whom the Father gave, "that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life," comes close to each of us through this Mother and thus takes on tokens that are of more easy understanding and access by each person. Consequently, Mary must be on all the ways for the Church's daily life. Through her maternal presence the Church acquires certainty that she is truly living the life of her Master and Lord, and that she is living the mystery of the Redemption in all its life-giving profundity and fullness.

Saint John Paul II



Epiphany of the Lord

Solemnity Jan. 4



An excerpt from the Eucharistic Celebration on the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord Homily of his Holiness Benedict XVI at the Vatican Basilica on January 6, 2011:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
On the Solemnity of the Epiphany, the Church continues to contemplate and to celebrate the mystery of the birth of Jesus the Savior. In particular, this day stresses the universal destination and significance of this birth.

By becoming man in Mary's womb, the Son of God did not only come for the People of Israel, represented by the Shepherds of Bethlehem, but also for the whole of humanity, represented by the Magi. ...The Magi were men "in search" ...of the true light that could point out the path to take in life. They were people certain that something we might describe as the "signature" of God exists in creation, a signature that man can and must endeavor to discover and decipher...

First of all they met King Herod. He was certainly interested in the Child of which the Magi spoke; not in order to worship him, as he wished to make them believe by lying, but rather to kill him....Herod listened to the interpretations of the Prophet Micah's words, made by his experts in Sacred Scripture, but his only thought was of the throne. So God himself had to be clouded over and people had to be reduced to mere pawns to move on the great chessboard of power. Herod is a figure we dislike, whom we instinctively judge negatively because of his brutality.

Yet we should ask ourselves: is there perhaps something of Herod also in us? Might we too sometimes see God as a sort of rival? Might we too be blind to his signs and deaf to his words because we think he is setting limits on our life and does not allow us to dispose of our existence as we please? Dear Brothers and Sisters, when we see God in this way we end by feeling dissatisfied and discontent because we are not letting ourselves be guided by the One who is the foundation of all things.

The Magi then meet the scholars, the theologians, the experts who know everything about the Sacred Scriptures, who are familiar with the possible interpretations, who can quote every passage of it since they know it by heart and are therefore of valuable assistance to those who choose to walk on God's path. However, St Augustine says, they like being guides to others, they point out the way; but they themselves do not travel, they stand stock-still. For them the Scriptures become a sort of atlas to be perused with curiosity, a collection of words and concepts for study and for learned discussion. However, once again we can ask ourselves: is not there a temptation within us to consider the Sacred Scriptures, this very rich and vital treasure for the faith of the Church, as an object of study and of specialists' discussions rather than as the Book that shows us the way to attain life?

And so we come to the star. What kind of star was the star the Magi saw and followed? This question has been the subject of discussion among astronomers down the centuries...We must return to the fact that those men were seeking traces of God; they were seeking to read his "signature" in creation; they knew that "the heavens are telling of the glory of God" (Psalm 19 [18]:2); they were certain, that is, that God can be perceived in creation....If we acquire this perception we shall see that the One who created the world and the One who was born in a grotto in Bethlehem and who continues to dwell among us in the Eucharist, are the same living God who calls us, who loves us and who wants to lead us to eternal life. Thus, a final important element of the event of the Magi appears to us very clearly: the language of creation enables us to make good headway on the path towards God but does not give us the definitive light. In the end, it was indispensable for the Magi to listen to the voice of the Sacred Scriptures: they alone could show them the way. The true star is the word of God which, amidst of the uncertainty of human discourses, gives us the immense splendor of the Divine Truth.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us allow ourselves to be guided by the star that is the word of God, let us follow it in our lives, walking with the Church in which the Word has pitched his tent. Our road will always be illumined by a light that no other sign can give us. And we too shall become stars for others, a reflection of that light which Christ caused to shine upon us. Amen.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20110106_epifania_en.html



Baptism of the Lord

Feast Jan. 11



An excerpt from the Angelus on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord by his Holiness Pope Francis at St. Peter's Square on January 12, 2014:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Today is the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord... The Gospel emphasizes that, when Jesus had received baptism from John in the River Jordan, "the heavens were opened" to him (Mt 3:16). This fulfills the prophecies. In fact, there is an invocation which the liturgy has us repeat during the Season of Advent: "O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down" (Is 64:1). If the heavens remain closed, our horizon in this earthly life is dark and without hope. Instead, in celebrating Christmas, once again faith has given us the certainty that the heavens have been rent with the coming of Christ. And on the day of the baptism of Christ we continue to contemplate the heavens opened. The manifestation of the Son of God on earth marks the beginning of the great time of mercy, after sin had closed

the heavens, raising itself as a barrier between the human being and his Creator. With the birth of Jesus the heavens open! God gives us in Christ the guarantee of an indestructible love. From the moment the Word became flesh it is therefore possible to see the open heavens.

It was possible for the shepherds of Bethlehem, for the Magi of the East, for the Baptist, for Jesus' Apostles, and for St Stephen, the first martyr, who exclaimed: "Behold, I see the heavens opened!" (Acts 7:56). And it is possible for each one of us, if we allow ourselves to be suffused with God's love, which is given to us for the first time in Baptism by means of the Holy Spirit. Let us allow ourselves to be invaded by God's love! This is the great time of mercy! Do not forget it: this is the great time of Mercy!

When Jesus received the baptism of repentance from John the Baptism, showing solidarity with the repentant people - He without sin and with no need for conversion - God the Father made his voice heard from heaven: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (v. 17). Jesus receives approval from the heavenly Father, who sent him precisely that he might accept to share our condition, our poverty. Sharing is the true way to love. Jesus does not dissociate himself from us, he considers us brothers and sisters and he shares with us. And so he makes us sons and daughters, together with him, of God the Father. This is the revelation and source of true love. And this is the great time of mercy!

Does it not seem to you that in our own time extra fraternal sharing and love is needed? Does it not seem to you that we all need extra charity? Not the sort that is content with extemporaneous help which does not involve or stake anything, but that charity that shares, that takes on the hardship and suffering of a brother. What flavor life acquires when we allow ourselves to be inundated by God's love!

Let us ask the Holy Virgin to support us by her intercession in our commitment to follow Christ on the way of faith and charity, the path traced out by our Baptism.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2014/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20140112.html

Presentation of the Lord

Feast Feb. 2

An excerpt from the Eucharistic Celebration on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord Homily of St. John Paul II on February 2, 2001, Day of Consecrated Life:

The Presentation is an evocative liturgical feast, fixed since ancient times on the 40th day after Christmas, following what Jewish law had prescribed for the birth of all first-born males (cf. Ex 13: 2). Mary and Joseph observed it faithfully, as the Gospel account tells us.

Christian traditions of the East and West have been interwoven, enriching the liturgy of this feast with a special procession in which the light of candles both large and small is a symbol of Christ, the true Light who came to illumine his people and all peoples. Today's feast is thus connected with the Nativity and Epiphany of the Lord. However, it also serves as a bridge to Easter by recalling the prophecy of the elderly Simeon, who on that occasion foretold the dramatic destiny of the Messiah and his Mother.



Presentation of The Lord



The Evangelist has even recorded the details of this event: Simeon and Anna, two elderly persons filled with faith and the Holy Spirit received Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem. They personify the "remnant of Israel", watchful in expectation and ready to meet the Lord, as the shepherds did on the night of his birth in Bethlehem...

If every Christian is a believer who *contemplates the face of God in Jesus Christ*, you are so in a special way. You must never tire, then, of pausing to meditate on *Sacred Scripture* and on the holy *Gospels* in particular, so that the features of the Incarnate Word are impressed upon you...

Setting out anew from Christ, the centre of every personal and community project: this is your task! Meet him, dear friends, and contemplate him in a most special way in the *Eucharist*, celebrated and adored each day as the source and summit of life and apostolic action.

And *walk with Christ*: this is the way of Gospel perfection, the *holiness* to which every baptized person is called. *Holiness* is precisely one of the essential points - indeed, the first ...

We heard the elderly Simeon's words: Christ "*is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against ... that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed*" (Lk 2: 34). Like him, and to the extent that they are conformed to him, consecrated persons also become a "*sign of contradiction*"; that is, they become for others a salutary encouragement to take a position regarding Jesus, who - thanks to the engaging mediation of the "witness" - does not remain just a historical figure or abstract ideal, but presents himself as a living person to follow without compromise. Does this not seem to you an indispensable service that the Church expects of you in this era, marked by profound social and cultural changes? Only if you persevere in faithfully following Christ will you be *credible witnesses to his love*...

Like Simeon and Anna, take Jesus from the arms of his most holy Mother and, filled with joy for the gift of your vocation, bring him to everyone. Christ is salvation and hope for every person! ...

Be light and comfort to everyone you meet. *Like lighted candles*, burn with the love of Christ. Spend yourselves for him, spreading the Gospel of his love everywhere. Through your witness the eyes of many men and women of our time will also be able to see the salvation prepared by God "in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel".

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20010202_presentation-lord_en.html

What is Lenten Longings?

February 18



Lenten Longings is a process offered by RENEW International, a not-for-profit organization. RENEW International brought the program called Renew to St. Michael's in the mid-1980's. Renew was deemed to be very successful by those who participated. They emerged from that experience with a new fire for God and their Catholic faith, taking on very active roles in the parish.

Lenten Longings invites us to embrace this six-week program by exploring the Sunday readings of Lent. These Lenten reflections are intended to empower Christian communities "to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Simple language and everyday metaphors steep participants in the season's promptings to surrender self, work for justice, and deepen prayer life. Lenten Longings is designed to be implemented in small faith-sharing groups (small Christian Communities) which meet weekly, either in homes or at the parish.

The faith-sharing groups meet seeking to grow in faith and their relationship with God and one another. These meetings include: Prayer, Scripture Reading, Reflections, Sharing Our Experiences, and Committing to Action.

Lenten Longings will start the week of Ash Wednesday (February 18, 2015). As the date approaches, more information will be available and communicated from the pulpit, website and the weekly bulletin.



Bible Studies

"Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ" St. Jerome

The Lectionary

<i>Day</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
Time	9:30 am
Location	Room 149
Leader	Joe Lesnau
Tel.	979-265-6221



Adult Faith Sharing

<i>Day</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
Time	10:45 am
Location	Room 149
Leader	Gary Forse
Tel.	979-299-3145

Men's Faith Sharing

<i>Day</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>
Time	6:00 am
Location	Angelina Room
Leader	Duane Williams
Tel.	979-297-5564



The Letter to the Philippians

<i>Day</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>
Time	9:30 am
Location	Room 149
Leader	Bettie Carmody
Tel.	979-265-6509

<i>Day</i>	<i>Thursday</i>
Time	9:15 am
Location	"F" Wing
Leader	Jeanne Schroll
Tel.	979-297-5860



<i>Day</i>	<i>Friday</i>
Time	9:15 am
Location	Room 149
Leader	Pam Walker
Tel.	979-297-9746



Recess

<i>Day</i>	<i>Friday</i>
Time	9:30 am
Location	Library
Leader	Doris Hickner
Tel.	979-297-7726





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
1 st Monday	7:00 pm	Patriotic Rosary	Church
2 nd Monday	7:00 pm	Lay Apostle Meeting Luminous Mysteries	Church
Tuesday	5:00 pm 6:00 pm	Rosary Divine Mercy Chaplet	Church
Wednesday	8:00 am 9:00 am	Rosary Divine Mercy Chaplet	Church
Thursday	5:00 pm 6:00 pm	Rosary Divine Mercy Chaplet	Church
Friday	8:00 am 9:00 am	Rosary Divine Mercy Chaplet	Church
Saturday	6:30 am	Men’s Prayer Group	“F” Wing
Saturday	8:00 am	Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet	Chapel
1 st Saturday	8:00 am	Pro-Life Rosary	Chapel

Living by God’s Math

An excerpt from the Prayer of Jabez by Dr. Bruce H. Wilkinson



Whatever our gifts, education, or vocation might be, our calling is to do God’s work on earth. If you want, you can call it living out your faith for others. You can call it ministry. You can call it every Christian’s day job. But whatever you call it, God is looking for people who want to do more of it, because sadly, most believers seem to shrink from living at this level of blessing and influence.

For most of us, our reluctance comes from getting our numbers right, but our arithmetic completely wrong. For example, when we’re deciding what size territory God has in mind for us, we keep an equation in our heart that adds up something like this:

My ability + experience + training + my personality and appearance + my past + the expectations of others = my assigned territory.

No matter how many sermons we’ve heard about God’s power to work through us, we simply gloss over the meaning of that one little word *through*. Sure, we say we want God to work *through* us, but what we really mean is *by* or *in association with*. Yet God’s reminder to us is the same one He gave the Jews when they returned from captivity to a decimated homeland: “Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).

Our God specializes in working through normal people who believe in supernatural God who will do His work through them. What he’s waiting for is the invitation. That means God’s math would look more like this:

My willingness and weakness + God’s will and supernatural power = my expanding territory.



The Holidays



Pearl Harbor Day—December 7th

American casualties and damages

Ninety minutes after it began, the attack was over, as 2,008 sailors were killed and 710 others were wounded; 218 soldiers and airmen (who were part of the Army) were killed and 364 others were wounded; 109 marines were killed and 69 others were wounded; and 68 civilians were killed and 35 others were wounded. In total, 2,403 Americans died and 1,178 others were wounded during the attack. Eighteen ships were sunk or run aground, including five battleships. All of the

Americans killed or wounded during the attack were non-combatants, given the fact there was no state of war when the attack occurred. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attack_on_Pearl_Harbor

Happy New Year!

Martin Luther King Day—January 18 King Day of Service

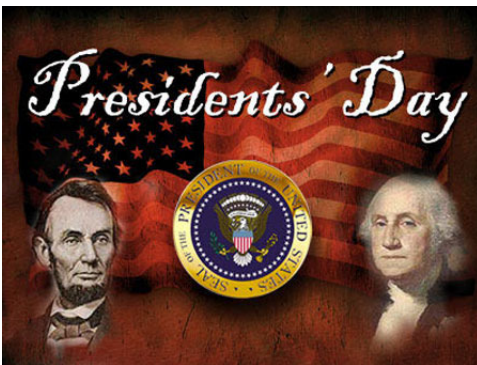
The national Martin Luther King Day of Service was started by former Pennsylvania U.S. Senator Harris Wofford and Atlanta Congressman John Lewis, who co-authored the King Holiday and Service Act. The federal legislation challenges Americans to transform the King Holiday into a day of citizen action volunteer service in honor of Dr. King. The federal legislation was signed into law by President Bill Clinton on August 23, 1994. Since 1996, Wofford's former state office director, Todd Bernstein, has been directing the annual Greater Philadelphia King Day of Service, the largest event in the nation honoring Dr. King.



Several other universities and organizations around the U.S., such as Arizona State University, Greater DC Cares and City Year, participate in the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. In honor of MLK, hundreds of Volunteer Centers, and volunteers across the country donate their time to make a difference on this day. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_King,_Jr._Day



Happy Valentine's Day!



President's Day

Presidents' Day is an American holiday celebrated on the third Monday in February. Originally established in 1885 in recognition of President George Washington, it is still officially called "Washington's Birthday" by the federal government. Traditionally celebrated on February 22—Washington's actual day of birth—the holiday became popularly known as Presidents' Day after it was moved as part of 1971's Uniform Monday Holiday Act, an attempt to create more three-day weekends for the nation's workers. While several states still have individual holidays honoring the birthdays of Washington, Abraham Lincoln and other figures, Presidents'

Day is now popularly viewed as a day to celebrate all U.S. presidents past and present. <http://www.history.com/topics/holidays/presidents-day>



Featured Ministries

Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts



The Making of a Few Good Men

By Tim Finley

If you understand Boys you will understand what I mean when I say that Boys are born with a deep rooted desire to be “Wild at Heart”. They want to explore, they want adventure and they want to prove themselves strong and worthy. Often their ability to be able to fully give of themselves and serve others as they grow older is first predicated by this deep rooted need to meet challenges head on and develop confidence in their own abilities.

For a boy to fully appreciate God’s plan in his life and to understand how to lead and serve

others he must first grow to understand that God has made him strong in his image. Not just strong physically but more important mentally, strong so that he can be, like Joseph, a protector and a provider to those around him. A boy therefore, with little or no self awareness, seeks opportunity to test and develop his knowledge and skills through doing. And, these tests, sought out in the name of adventure, enable him to gain the strength and confidence.

Boys of today are exactly like their fathers and grandfathers before them in seeking adventure and challenge. They want to test the limits. They need to experience. They need to be allowed to attempt, fail, learn, persevere and overcome. Unfortunately today, unlike for prior generations, boys are all too often constrained from seeking the real adventure they desire and resolve to seeking adventure in the form of electronic games. Urbanization, concerns for safety, parental fears of allowing them to fail, the business of modern life and limited access to the great outdoors make it easier for them to find challenges and explore electronically. This is not entirely without merits but it often entertains more than it grows valuable life skills. Therefore to help boys grow, it is necessary to balance electronics with experiences and challenges which require doing, social interaction and group problem solving.

Cub Scout and Boy Scouts, and in particular the Cub Scout and Boy Scout programs at St Michaels Church in Lake Jackson, offers boys a unique opportunity to grow and develop in ways that are difficult to find elsewhere in our current age of electronics, entertainment, communication and suburban life.

Scouting gives boys the chance to explore and seek adventure in the world around them. They learn how to make and build things. They learn to interact and appreciate the natural world around them. They learn how to plan, pack, cook and take care of their own needs. Scouting teaches boys: how to build a fire; how to climb a mountain; how to cross a river; how to pace themselves; how to be persistent; how to provide first aide; how to be a good citizen; how to work with others. It teaches them how to satisfy their desire to explore and find the adventure in healthy and productive ways. Scouting teaches boys how to be strong both physically and mentally no matter what their God given talents. I say with great pride that scouting teaches them how to fail gracefully and get up and try again, and thus equips them to succeed as men of service and faith.

It is not just the boy’s that benefit from Scouting program and activities. The adults that lead and support the boys learn and grow as well. Running the local scouting program requires a spirit of service and it builds fellowship and community among the adults. For many adults, the activities lead them to places they have never been and to do things they have never done.

For both the both the boys and the adult that support our Parish scouting program, I see the program as the best available for developing “**A Few Good Men**”. It is an important supplement to Catholic Faith Formation in our parish.



Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts

To all the adults that are current involve or have previous been involved in St Michael's Parish Scouting programs, I offer sincere thanks for establishing and sustaining a great program for our young men.

For parents with boys that are or will soon be at an age where they could be involved in scouting, I encourage you to check it out. Scouting is a program: that provides boys the adventure they seek, that will create great memories for you and your son and that grows boys into the leaders of tomorrow.

And finally to Father Leo and the parishioners, thank you for your continued support, it means a great deal to the boys and young men of our parish.

The Vocation Committee and The Vocation Chalice

By Elizabeth Betczynski



The purpose of the Vocation Committee, comprised mostly of the Youth Ministry, but open to any person in the Parish, is to foster and affirm vocations to the priesthood, sisterhood, permanent diaconate, and brotherhood through prayer, awareness, and encouragement. Through this group we try to build a "culture of vocations" to provide the support for each person to hear and respond to the call of God in their life. Studies have confirmed that people have a greater chance of seriously considering a vocation to the priesthood or religious life if they have been encouraged by someone.

When we consider that only a priest can say Mass, consecrate the Body and Blood of Jesus, hear confession, anoint the sick, and bishops who 'ordain' men into the priesthood, it is essential that we pray for more of them, which is indispensable for the Church's growth and sanctification as Pope St. John Paul has said. Also, considering that so few women consider being a Sister, women need prayers too. Sisters serve us through teaching, health care, and their prayer lives.

The Vocation Chalice Program is part of this Vocation Committee. Twice a year we hold "signup weekend" giving individuals and families an opportunity to sign up and take a chalice home for a month to pray for an increase in vocations and to pray for those considering a religious vocation.

We encourage saying the prayer with the entire congregation on the first weekend of each month when the chalices are distributed. Through the prayers of the families and individuals of the parish, these 'traveling' chalices visit many homes. Currently we have 2 young men, Joey White and Blake Novosad, in the seminary, and Gary Forse who will be ordained a Deacon in January, 2015.

There is a cabinet in the hallway of the Family Life Center with the pictures of the religious from our parish and a picture gallery near the Youth Office with Joey's and Blake's pictures.

We encourage the current Prayer for Vocations be said daily:

O Jesus, Good and Gentle Shepherd, grant that the men and women from our community may have the grace and the courage to hear and answer Your call to priesthood and religious life.

Give them the wisdom to realize that life is a gift. Let them realize their life is part of Your plan. Call forth those You have chosen to spread the gospel message, and help them to freely respond to a life of service in the church.

May the parents and families of our parish support and encourage our young men and women to search for, follow and answer the call of God in their lives. Amen

Mary, Mother of Vocations, pray for us!

For those who have taken the chalice faithfully each year, your comments on your experience are most welcome!



L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO

GIORNALE QUOTIDIANO  POLITICO RELIGIOSO
Unicuique suum Non proferalebunt



POPE FRANCIS
MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE
Don't be lazy
Tuesday, 11 November 2014

How should our faith be? This is the Apostles' question and ours as well. The answer is: "a faith that is set within the framework of service" to God and to our neighbor. A humble, freely given and generous service which is always "complete". Only in this way is it possible to truly open oneself to the hope of the final encounter with

Jesus. This was the Holy Father's reflection during Tuesday morning's Mass at Santa Marta.

Discussing the day's reading from the Gospel according to Luke (17:7-10), the Pope referred back to a passage from the previous day, in which the disciples request: "Lord increase our faith", to which Jesus responds: "If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea', and it would obey you". Pope Francis explained that the Lord speaks of "a powerful faith", one strong enough "to work great wonders", but on one condition: that this be set "within the framework of service". It calls for complete service, such as that of the "servant who worked all day" and when he gets home "he must serve the Lord", prepare dinner for him, "and then relax".

It seems, the Pontiff remarked, "somewhat demanding, a bit hard": one might advise "this servant to go to the union to seek some counsel" on how to deal "with a master like this". But what's asked for is "complete" service because it is the same that Jesus practiced: "He led the way with this conduct of service; He is the servant; He presents himself as the servant, the one who came to serve and not to be served".

When set on the "path of service", faith "will work miracles". On the contrary, however, "a Christian who receives the gift of faith in Baptism, but then does not take it forth on the path of service, becomes a Christian without strength, unfruitful, a Christian for himself, to serve himself, to benefit himself. Although this Christian may go to heaven, the Pope said, "what a sad life!"

It happens, then, that "so many of the Lord's great things" are "wasted" because, as "the Lord clearly stated: service is exclusive", and one cannot serve two masters: God and wealth. In this regard the Pontiff recalled "at the time of the Prophet Elijah, the Israelites", who wanted to follow both Yahweh and Baal. Elijah said to them: "you are limping on both legs! Things cannot go on like this!" Because, Pope Francis emphasized, "we need one Lord".

Pope Francis then went into the details of everyday life and the difficulties that a Christian has in putting the word of the Gospel into practice. "We can distance ourselves from this conduct of service", he said, mostly out of "laziness": we become "comfortable, as did those five inattentive maidens who were waiting for their bridegroom but without having enough oil in their lamps". Laziness renders "the heart lukewarm". Thus, out of convenience we are led to seek justifications: "If this one comes, or if that one knocks at the door, tell them I'm not home, because they're coming to ask a favor, and no, I don't want..." In other words, laziness "distances us from service and leads to convenience, to selfishness". And, the Pope commented, "so many Christians" are like this: "they are good, they go to Mass", but go "only so far" with regard to service. Yet, he underscored, "when I say service, I mean everything: service to God in adoration, in prayer, in praise", service "to our neighbor" and "service to the end". Jesus "is strong" about this and advises: "So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants'". It is important that service be "freely given, without asking anything" in return.



Pope Francis— Don't Be Lazy

The Pope continued to speak about another manner of moving away “from the conduct of service”, which is that of “taking control of situations”. This is what happened to the Apostles too, who moved the people away “so as not to disturb Jesus”, but in reality it was also for their own comfort: that is, “they took control of the Lord’s time, they took control of the Lord’s power: they wanted it for their little group”. Actually, “they took control of this conduct of service, turning it into a framework of power”. This is explained, said Pope Francis, “when among themselves, they discussed who was the greatest”; and “it is understood when the mother of James and John went to ask the Lord that one of her sons be prime minister and the other the minister of the economy, with all the power in hand”. The same thing happens to Christians who “rather than servants” become “masters: masters of the faith, masters of the kingdom, masters of salvation. This happens; it is a temptation for all Christians”.

The Lord, however, speaks to us of serving “in humility”, as did “He who, being God, humbled himself, lowered himself, debased himself: to serve. It is service in hope, and this is the joy of Christian service”, which lives, as St Paul writes to Titus: *awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*. The Lord will “knock at the door” and “will come to find us” in that moment, the Pope said, hoping: “Please, let Him find us in this conduct of service”.

Certainly, in life, we must really struggle against the temptations that seek to distance us from this disposition, such as that of laziness, which leads to convenience and drives us to provide incomplete service; and the temptation to take control of the situation, which leads to arrogance, to pride, to mistreating people, to feeling important because I’m a Christian, I have salvation. The Lord, the Pontiff concluded, gives us these two great graces: humility in service, in order that we’re able to say: we are unworthy servants, and the hope in awaiting the appearing of the Lord who will come to find us.



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Pope Francis: a Strong and Widespread Desire to Walk Together



Vatican City, 21 November 2014 (VIS) – “This anniversary invites us to give thanks to God for the many fruits harvested in this last half-century. In particular, there has occurred what the Council recommended: the appreciation of how much there is that is good and true in the life of Christians in every community”. Thus Pope Francis greeted the participants in the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the theme of which is “The aim of ecumenism: principles, opportunities and challenges, fifty years after *Unitatis Redintegratio*”.

The Pontiff remarked that fifty years ago on 21 November, the dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, and the Decree on the Oriental Catholic Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, were also published alongside *Unitatis Redintegratio*. These three profoundly connected texts offer the ecclesiological vision of Vatican Council II.

“Firstly, we can rejoice in the fact that the teaching of the Council has been widely received”, affirmed Francis. “In these years, on the basis of theological reasons rooted in the Scripture and in the tradition of the Church, the attitude of us as Catholics has changed in relation to Christians of other Churches and ecclesial communities. Hostility and



Pope Francis: a Strong and Widespread Desire to Walk Together

indifference, which had dug trenches that it seemed impossible to fill and had inflicted deep wounds, now belong to the past, and a healing process has begun that enables us to accept others as brothers or sisters, in the profound unity born of Baptism”.

This change in mentality has made it possible to “deepen our contact with many Churches and ecclesial Communities, and to develop new forms of collaboration. In this respect, the ecumenical traditions of the Sacred Scripture have been very important. Christians of different Churches and ecclesial Communities work together in the service of suffering and needy humanity, for the defense of human life and its inalienable dignity, for the protection of creation and against the injustice that afflict many people and populations”.

He continued, “while we give thanks, we must acknowledge that Christians remain divided, and that divergence in relation to new anthropological and ethical themes complicates our path towards unity. However, we cannot give in to discouragement and resignation, but must continue to trust in God who plants seeds of love and unity in the hearts of Christians, so they can face today’s ecumenical challenges with renewed zeal; to cultivate spiritual ecumenism, to recognize the value of ecumenism of blood, and to walk the path of the Gospel together”.

Spiritual ecumenism culminates in the Week of Prayer for Christian unity, “a worldwide network of moments of prayer that, from parochial to international level, infuse the body of the Church with the oxygen of genuine ecumenical spirit; a network of gestures, that unite us in working together charitably; and it is also the sharing of prayer, thoughts and other texts that circulate on the web and may contribute to increasing mutual knowledge, respect and esteem”.

With regard to ecumenism of blood, Unitatis Redintegratio invites us to recognise, “in the brothers and sisters of other Churches and Christian Communities, the capacity, given by God, to bear witness to Christ unto the sacrifice of their lives. These testimonies have not been lacking in these fifty years, and continue to this day. ... Those who persecute Christ in his faithful do not differentiate in terms of confession: they persecute them simply because they are Christians”.

The Pope went on to remark that, in recent months, encountering many non-Catholic Christians, and reading their letters, he has noted the existence of a “widespread and strong desire to walk together, to pray, to know and love the Lord, to collaborate in service and in solidarity with the weak and suffering. I am convinced of this: on a common path, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and learning from each other, we can grow in the communion that already unites us”.

“Fifty years on from Unitatis Redintegratio, the quest for full Christian unity remains a priority for the Catholic Church, and it is therefore one of my main daily concerns. Unity is, first and foremost, a gift from God and it is the work of the Holy Spirit, but we are all called to collaborate, always and in every circumstance”.

Pope Francis' Prayer Intentions



December

Universal: “That the birth of the Redeemer may bring peace and hope to all people of good will”.

Evangelization: “That parents may be true evangelizers, passing on to their children the precious gift of faith”.

January

Universal: That those from diverse religious traditions and all people of good will may work together for peace.

Evangelization: That in this year dedicated to consecrated life, religious men and women may rediscover the joy of following Christ and strive to serve the poor with zeal.

February

Universal: That prisoners, especially the young, may be able to rebuild lives of dignity.

Evangelization: That married people who are separated may find welcome and support in the Christian community.



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Pope's Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees



Church Without Frontiers, Mother to All

The 101st Day of Migrants and Refugees will be celebrated on January 18, 2015.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Jesus is "the evangelizer par excellence and the Gospel in person" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 209). His solicitude, particularly for the most vulnerable and marginalized, invites all of us to care for the frailest and to recognize his suffering countenance, especially in the victims of new

forms of poverty and slavery. The Lord says: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (*Mt 25:35-36*). The mission of the Church, herself a pilgrim in the world and the Mother of all, is thus to love Jesus Christ, to adore and love him, particularly in the poorest and most abandoned; among these are certainly migrants and refugees, who are trying to escape difficult living conditions and dangers of every kind. For this reason, the theme for this year's World Day of Migrants and Refugees is: *Church without frontiers, Mother to all*.

The Church opens her arms to welcome all people, without distinction or limits, in order to proclaim that "God is love" (1 *Jn 4:8,16*). After his death and resurrection, Jesus entrusted to the disciples the mission of being his witnesses and proclaiming the Gospel of joy and mercy. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples left the Upper Room with courage and enthusiasm; the strength of the Holy Spirit overcame their doubts and uncertainties and enabled all to understand the disciples' preaching in their own language. From the beginning, the Church has been a mother with a heart open to the whole world, and has been without borders. This mission has continued for two thousand years. But even in the first centuries, the missionary proclamation spoke of the universal motherhood of the Church, which was then developed in the writings of the Fathers and taken up by the Second Vatican Council. The Council Fathers spoke of *Ecclesia Mater* to explain the Church's nature. She begets sons and daughters and "takes them in and embraces them with her love and in her heart" (*Lumen Gentium*, 14).

The Church without frontiers, Mother to all, spreads throughout the world a culture of acceptance and solidarity, in which no one is seen as useless, out of place or disposable. When living out this motherhood effectively, the Christian community nourishes guides and indicates the way, accompanying all with patience, and drawing close to them through prayer and works of mercy.

Today this takes on a particular significance. In fact, in an age of such vast movements of migration, large numbers of people are leaving their homelands, with a suitcase full of fears and desires, to undertake a hopeful and dangerous trip in search of more humane living conditions. Often, however, such migration gives rise to suspicion and hostility, even in ecclesial communities, prior to any knowledge of the migrants' lives or their stories of persecution and destitution. In such cases, suspicion and prejudice conflict with the biblical commandment of welcoming with respect and solidarity the stranger in need.

On the other hand, we sense in our conscience the call to touch human misery, and to put into practice the commandment of love that Jesus left us when he identified himself with the stranger, with the one who suffers, with all the innocent victims of violence and exploitation. Because of the weakness of our nature, however, "we are tempted to be that kind of Christian who keeps the Lord's wounds at arm's length" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 270).

The courage born of faith, hope and love enables us to reduce the distances that separate us from



Church Without Frontiers, Mother to All

human misery. Jesus Christ is always waiting to be recognized in migrants and refugees, in displaced persons and in exiles, and through them he calls us to share our resources, and occasionally to give up something of our acquired riches. Pope Paul VI spoke of this when he said that “the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others” (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 23).

The multicultural character of society today, for that matter, encourages the Church to take on new commitments of solidarity, communion and evangelization. Migration movements, in fact, call us to deepen and strengthen the values needed to guarantee peaceful coexistence between persons and cultures. Achieving mere tolerance that respects diversity and ways of sharing between different backgrounds and cultures is not sufficient. This is precisely where the Church contributes to overcoming frontiers and encouraging the “moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization ... towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world” (*Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2014*).

Migration movements, however, are on such a scale that only a systematic and active cooperation between States and international organizations can be capable of regulating and managing such movements effectively. For migration affects everyone, not only because of the extent of the phenomenon, but also because of “the social, economic, political, cultural and religious problems it raises, and the dramatic challenges it poses to nations and the international community” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 62).

At the international level, frequent debates take place regarding the appropriateness, methods and required norms to deal with the phenomenon of migration. There are agencies and organizations on the international, national and local level which work strenuously to serve those seeking a better life through migration. Notwithstanding their generous and laudable efforts, a more decisive and constructive action is required, one which relies on a universal network of cooperation, based on safeguarding the dignity and centrality of every human person. This will lead to greater effectiveness in the fight against the shameful and criminal trafficking of human beings, the violation of fundamental rights, and all forms of violence, oppression and enslavement. Working together, however, requires reciprocity, joint-action, openness and trust, in the knowledge that “no country can singlehandedly face the difficulties associated with this phenomenon, which is now so widespread that it affects every continent in the twofold movement of immigration and emigration” (*Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2014*).

It is necessary to respond to the globalization of migration with the globalization of charity and cooperation, in such a way as to make the conditions of migrants more humane. At the same time, greater efforts are needed to guarantee the easing of conditions, often brought about by war or famine, which compel whole peoples to leave their native countries.

Solidarity with migrants and refugees must be accompanied by the courage and creativity necessary to develop, on a world-wide level, a more just and equitable financial and economic order, as well as an increasing commitment to peace, the indispensable condition for all authentic progress.

Dear migrants and refugees! You have a special place in the heart of the Church, and you help her to enlarge her heart and to manifest her motherhood towards the entire human family. Do not lose your faith and hope! Let us think of the Holy Family during the flight in Egypt: Just as the maternal heart of the Blessed Virgin and the kind heart of Saint Joseph kept alive the confidence that God would never abandon them, so in you may the same hope in the Lord never be wanting. I entrust you to their protection and I cordially impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 3 September 2014

FRANCISCUS



The Saints

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

St. Ignatius of Loyola

Feast: July 31

By Zachary Pisarski



PETER PAUL RUBENS (c.1620-1622)
SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Ignacio Lopez de Loyola was the youngest of thirteen children from the Basque family in northern Spain. As a young man, Ignatius lived as a soldier and grew accustomed to the adventure of battle and the pleasures of court. However, in a battle against the Spanish and French, a cannon ball struck Ignatius in the leg, causing him to lie in bed for months to recover. Presented with the lives of Jesus and the saints as a form of entertainment, he learned about the joy and the awesomeness of life with Christ and came to a conversion of heart. Ignatius, with the help of his friends, would go on to found the Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits. The Order of Jesuits also created schools and universities in Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, and India. Ignatius died on July 31, 1556 in Paris.

St. Ignatius spread the love of Christ in various ways throughout his life especially with the work of the Jesuits. While bedridden from his injury, Ignatius assembled his writings known as *Spiritual Exercises*. In them, he emphasizes a simple and practical way to live with God and others and proposes a spirituality of quiet and centered peace to discern one's life. The Jesuit order, along with this "Ignatian" spiritual, has spread

throughout the world. The Holy Father is a Jesuit priest, and one can see a sense of Ignatian spirituality in his teachings. Since their inception and onward to today, Jesuits have established many school and universities, focusing on the removal of ignorance and heresy both from laity and clergy. This struck vitally in the Catholic Reformation at a time when corruption and ignorance ran rampant throughout the Church.

St. Ignatius of Loyola is certainly a saint for our troubled times. Among all the distractions and decisions, we should eagerly accept a spiritual life prescribed by *Spiritual Exercises*: a life practical and simple that brings unity and meaning to all of our actions in the sight of God's Will. In a pivotal time for ecumenism, we must be active in education, both personal and for our children, to introduce and welcome the faith appropriately to other Christians. In all, St. Ignatius reminds us of our roles in our family, communities, countries, and world. Our lives shall work to serve God and to reach "*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*" to the greater glory of God.

<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/what-is-ignatian-spirituality/the-ignatian-way/the-ignatian-way-2-ignatian-spirituality-an-overview/>

<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-voices/st-ignatius-loyola/>

<http://norprov.org/spirituality/lifeofignatius.htm>

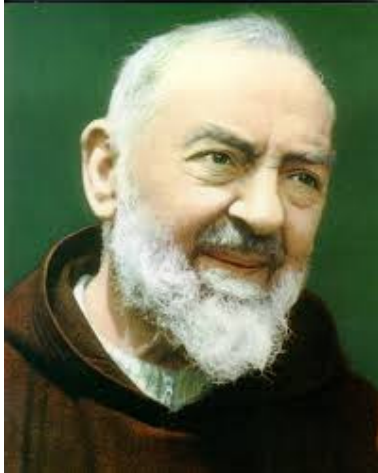
<http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/Saints/saint.aspx?id=1093&calendar=1>



The Saints

St. Padre Pio

Feast: September 23



By Megan Schroll,

When I was a little girl, I came to know Christ, Our Lord and Savior. But it wasn't until high school that I unmasked the power of saints. The faith, in so many ways, has transformed my life into one worth living and I wouldn't trade it for the world.

My confirmation was the most powerful and serene part of my journey with and through the Lord. It offered me a chance to accept the Catholic faith and to embrace it with open arms and an open heart. With the strength of the Lord and all the holy people he gave us to pray to, there is nothing we can't do.

As for my saint, I choose Francesco Forgione - better known as Padre Pio. He was known as "one of the greatest saints of all time" because of the gifts he shared with the world. He was a miracle worker, encompassing several charismas. He could levitate, "read"

minds, and cure people from sickness with one touch. Most importantly, he had wounds on his body corresponding to the crucifixion of Jesus. This is called stigmata and Padre Pio was the first person to receive such tremendous marks. And that was only the beginning. His nickname was the "flying monk" because he stopped a bombing of San Giovanni in MID AIR! He was canonized on June 16th, 2002 and his work continues to be honored by Catholics everywhere.

Striving for our faith goes a long way in our society today. People need and desire for us to show them the light of Christ and the tools we use to be one with The Lord. As Padre Pio once said, "Place all your trust in the heart of sweet Jesus... Never abandon your faith and renew it always. Faith has never abandoned any man, and far less so will it forsake a soul that yearns to love God."

Prayer for the Intercession of St. Pio of Pietrelcina

Dear God, You generously blessed Your servant,
St. Pio of Pietrelcina,
with the gifts of the Spirit.
You marked his body with the five wounds
of Christ Crucified, as a powerful witness
to the saving Passion and Death of Your Son.
Endowed with the gift of discernment,
St. Pio labored endlessly in the confessional
for the salvation of souls.
With reverence and intense devotion
in the celebration of Mass,
he invited countless men and women
to a greater union with Jesus Christ
in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.
Through the intercession of St. Pio of Pietrelcina,
I confidently beseech You to grant me
the grace of (here state your petition).
Glory be to the Father... (three times). Amen

<http://padrepiodevotions.org/prayers-of-padre-pio/>



The Saints

St. Jude

Feast: October 28



By Stephen St. Pierre,

St. Jude, the patron saint of hopeless cases, was born in the first century. He was very extrinsic with his faith, and he commissioned the Christian faith throughout the Middle East and Eastern Europe. He showed acts of love and selflessness in the way he cared for those that accepted the faith. In a more modern sense, the St. Jude's Children Hospital saves lives everyday. Personally, I believe that there is a correlation between saving lives with evangelization (St. Jude in the first century) and saving lives with health care (St. Jude's Children Hospital).

As a Confirmation student, I use St. Jude to bring me closer to God while preparing to be confirmed. I found St. Jude to be influential to my faith when I borrowed my dad's bible and found a St. Jude's prayer card. As I was reading over the St. Jude's prayer in the adoration chapel, I felt a feeling of relief rush over my body. I honestly thought before that point

that I was hopeless, but St. Jude told me otherwise. God told me otherwise. St. Jude brought me to the realization that everyone has something to deal with that will bring them down emotionally, physically, or spiritually. My personal weight was my stress over grades and wanting to be perfect. In the adoration chapel, I soon came to realize that St. Jude, although he did a lot of great things, was as human as I am. He helped me figure out that life is not meant to better oneself, life is meant to help others so that you can see the glory of God in those around you. St. Jude, with the help of the Holy Spirit, brought me out of the pit that I was in at the time and he continually helps push me forward like a good coach does to his players. If there is a Saint you need to talk to when your life is seeming to be at the lowest point, ask for St. Jude to pray for you.

Prayer to St. Jude,

Oh glorious apostle St. Jude, faithful servant and friend of Jesus, the name of the traitor who delivered thy beloved Master into the hands of His enemies has caused thee to be forgotten by many, but the Church honors and invokes thee universally as the patron of hopeless cases--of things despaired of. Pray for me who am so miserable; make use, I implore thee, of that particular privilege accorded thee of bringing visible and speedy help where help is almost despaired of. Come to my assistance in this great need, that I may receive the consolations and succor of heaven in all my necessities, tribulations and sufferings, particularly (mention your request), and that I may bless God with thee and all the elect throughout eternity. I promise thee, O blessed St. Jude, to be ever mindful of this great favor, and I will never cease to honor thee as my special and powerful patron, and to do all in my power to encourage devotion to thee. Amen

Ref: <http://www.ourcatholicprayers.com/prayer-to-st-jude.html>



For Your Information

Advent Reflections



Peace be with you!

This morning I launched an exciting new initiative, AdventReflections.com, where you can sign up to receive **FREE daily reflections throughout Advent.**

Each day, from November 30 until Christmas Eve (December 24), I will email you a short reflection on an Advent theme, in either English or Spanish (your choice!). In addition, you will receive exclusive videos not found anywhere else, special discount codes for new products, and several giveaways throughout Advent including DVDs, CDs, signed books, and more. The best part? It's totally FREE! Sign-up now at [AdventReflections.com!](http://AdventReflections.com)

Also, please help spread the word by forwarding this email to family and friends, sharing the news on social media, or posting this in your parish bulletin. Simply sharing the link or video below will do the trick:

Thanks so much for your help, and I look forward to journeying with you through Advent!

Peace

Fr. Robert Barron

Our Lady of Guadalupe Feast

Date: Friday December 12, 2014

- 8:00 A.M. - Rosary
- 8:30 A.M. – Mass
- Breakfast immediately after Mass



January 31st, 2015 Archdiocesan Ordination of Permanent Deacons

St. Jerome Catholic Church Lenten Retreat Seven Sacred Pauses: Living Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day

Presenters: Sr. Macrina Wiederkehr and Ms. Velma Frye

Where: The Lodge at Danbury

When: March 13 – 15, 2015

Cost: \$185.00

Contact: Ms. Denise Harris (979-824-5900)



Important Dates In This Trimester

Date	Celebration	Date	Celebration
Dec. 3	St. Francis Xavier	Jan. 11	Baptism of the Lord
Dec. 7	Pearl Harbor	Jan. 18	Martin Luther King's Day
Dec. 8	Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Jan. 24	St. Francis de Sales
Dec. 9	St. Juan Diego	Jan. 27	St. Angela Merici
Dec. 12	Our Lady of Guadalupe	Jan. 28	St. Thomas Aquinas
Dec. 13	St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr	Jan. 31	St. John Bosco
Dec. 25	The Nativity of the Lord	Feb. 2	Presentation of the Lord
Dec. 26	St. Stephen, the First Martyr	Feb. 3	St. Blase
Dec. 27	St. John, Apostle and Evangelist	Feb. 5	St. Agatha
Dec. 28	The Holy Family	Feb. 6	St. Paul Miki
Dec. 31	New Year's Eve	Feb. 11	Our Lady of Lourdes
Jan. 1	Solemnity of Mary Mother of God	Feb. 14	Valentine's Day
Jan. 4	Epiphany of the Lord	Feb. 16	President's Day
Jan. 7	St. Raymond of Penyarfort	Feb. 18	Ash Wednesday

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