

# 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  
**Winter 2016 - 2017**  
(December 2016 - February 2017)





## The Spiritual Light

The Spiritual Light

Save the Date

From the Deacon's Desk

Story of Conversion

Pilgrimage Trip

The Liturgical Season

Bible Studies / Prayer Groups

The Holy See

The Saints

### *Merry Christmas*

As the Year of Mercy comes to an end, it's our hope that you joyfully experienced Pope Francis' invitation to love, kindness, and unbounded generosity. And took this opportunity to encounter the incredible mercy of God in preparation for His coming this Advent season.

Save the date for the live presentation of "**MAXIMILIAN SAINT OF AUSCHWITZ**" from *Saint Luke Productions* on January 9, 2017, at Monsignor Leo Wleczyk's hall at 7:00 PM.

In this issue, you will find in *From the Deacon's Desk* a very informative answer to the question: *Why the Deacon distributes the Precious Blood at communion instead of the Precious Body?* In *Story of Conversion*, John Kyle shares his journey and how God has worked many miracles and setup circumstances leading to this conversion. In *Pilgrimage Trip*, Dorothy Babbington shares her experiences of visiting the land of her ancestors; Poland.

*The Liturgical Season* presents Solemnities and feasts of the season with articles from the inspiring hands of Pope Francis, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI and some renown priests. We also include news from the Vatican, the canonization of seven new saints, and the saints that we celebrate this season. May you find inspiration and have a fruitful and rewarding Advent.

We also include a list of the Bible studies and Prayer groups that you may want to get involved with,

We welcome your comments so please do not hesitate to contact the editors or any of the team members. May our Lord bless you with a very rewarding Advent.

Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year!

*Margarita Prinz*

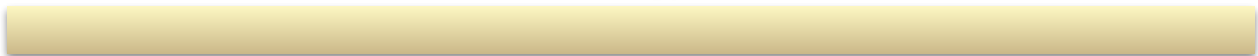
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*Happy Birthday Fr. Giovanni!*  
*January 25*

*Blessings on the 2nd Anniversary*  
*of Ordination Deacon Gary!*  
*January 31*





**THE LIGHT**

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

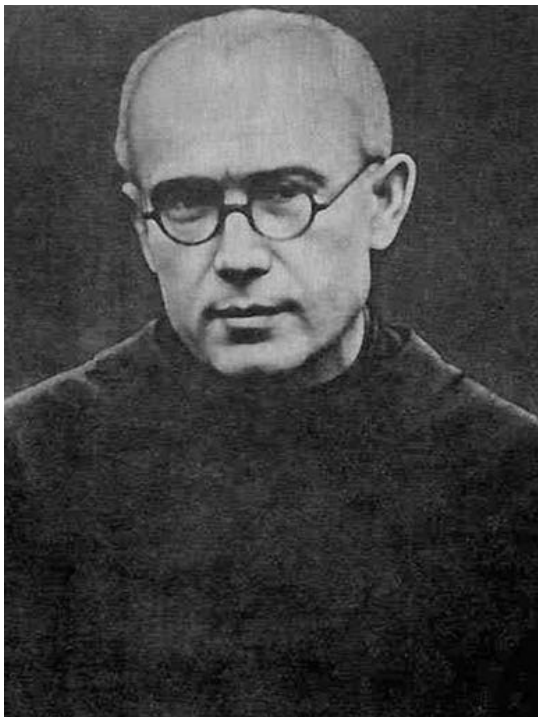
Page 3

# SAVE THE DATE

*Saint Luke*  
PRODUCTIONS



  
**MAXIMILIAN**  
SAINT OF AUSCHWITZ



*Maximilian: Saint of Auschwitz* is a powerful Catholic multimedia production about St. Maximilian Kolbe. Actor Leonardo Defilippis captures the darkness of this troubling time in a visceral and heartfelt performance. The show also incorporates chilling footage from Poland and Germany during World War II. With its message of standing firm in the face of persecution, *Maximilian* has special significance for our time.

**Monday, January 9, 2017 at 7:00 PM**

**Monsignor Leo Wleczyk's Hall**

**Admission:** Free-Will Offering

Check the bulletin for more information



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## From the Deacon's Desk

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*By Deacon Gary Forse,*

**M**any of you have noticed and asked, why I distribute the Precious Blood at Communion rather than standing by Father and distributing the Precious Body. There is a theology based on the role of the deacon. I would like to share with you the following article *The Ministry of the Blood of Christ* by Patricia J. Hughes, from the recent *Deacon Digest*:

The General Instruction on the Roman Missal clearly states that “if Communion is given under both kinds, the Deacon himself [emphasis added] administers the chalice to the communicants.” (GIRM n. 182) Why would a deacon disregard

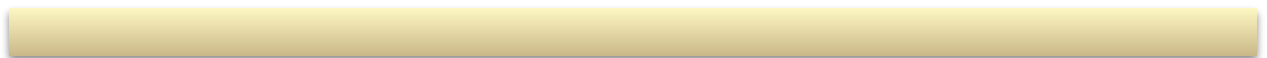
universal law? My experience of Sunday Mass in over 300 Catholic parishes adds credibility to the story above: the deacon picks up the paten and, without hesitation, moves to distribute the Body of Christ, typically standing next to the priest in the center aisle. Is this a new “theology of place” or perhaps a local interpretation of the deacon’s ministry “of the word, of the altar, and of charity” as the Roman Pontifical indicates? Does this happen because both deacon and priest are wearing vestments? Or is there a possibility that deacon formation lacks a significant piece of catechesis about the power of Christ’s blood, and its connection to the liturgical ministry of the deacon?

Let’s accentuate the positive: *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (“The Instruction on the Eucharist” by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, n. 35) says, “Let all Deacons, then, do their part so that the Sacred Liturgy will be celebrated according to the norms of the duly approved liturgical books.” A new mantra flows from this: let all deacons know and reverence their connection by vocation to the Precious Blood, and serve their brothers and sisters the life-giving source of redemption.

### **Empowered by the Blood of Christ**

One of the catechetical post-baptismal homilies of St. John Chrysostom eloquently explains that understanding Christ’s blood points us to the command of Moses, “Sacrifice a lamb without blemish and sprinkle its blood on your doors.” The wise archbishop tells the neophytes that the saving power lies not in the blood itself, but in the fact that it is a sign of the Lord’s blood. Figurative blood on the doors saved the Hebrews from the Angel of Death, and true “blood” on the lips of believers—the Precious Blood from the chalice—will save us all from the shackles of sin and the eternal bondage that death can bring. The sign of the Blood of Christ could not be stronger as when the deacon administers the chalice. As he says; “The Blood of Christ,” the charism of his ordination shines forth: to offer the Precious Blood is to offer the ultimate act of charity for which he is ordained.

“There flowed from his side water and blood.” A mystery unfolds that directly supports the ministry of the deacon: the water and the blood symbolize Baptism and the Eucharist, and Archbishop Chrysostom teaches “from these two sacraments the Church is born.” The Precious Blood reveals Christ’s sincerest gift of self, poured out as the gift of life. Drawn into the vocation of service in a living faith, the richness of the symbol of serving the Precious Blood brings fullness to the deacon’s ministry. Justice and mercy are courageously offered in the Precious Blood by the deacon.





### **Affirming the Deacon's Charism of Charity**

At the recent Pro Ecclesia ("for the Church") Mass of March 15, 2013, Pope Francis challenged all of us to have "precisely the courage to...build the Church upon the blood of the Lord, which was poured out on the cross, and to confess the only glory there is: Christ crucified. And in this way the Church will go forward." Resisting (to offer and to drink) the Blood of Christ has a sign-value that's unmistakable: it is resisting (to offer and to receive) the love that flows from the heart of Christ. The Precious Blood clearly has a heart-connection, since it is a living "synonym" for the source of our redemption—the blood that Jesus shed on the cross. Deacons take note: the Precious Blood reflects your ministry of charity, both in offering it as Holy Communion and in your devotion to it as the focus for theological reflection and adoration.

If authentic catechesis offers a strong element of "encounter," then what could be more catechetical for the congregation than the sight of the liturgical deacon serving the Precious Blood of Life? The deacon's liturgical posture and gesture speaks volumes, wordlessly: he takes the Cup of Salvation and offers it graciously as food for our journey to wholeness. Interestingly, the deacon is privileged to "immediately and reverently consume all of the Blood of Christ that remains" (GIRM n. 182), which is another way that the Church connects the Cup of Salvation to the deacon's spirituality and ministry. No one can encounter the Living God and remain unchanged. No deacon can serve the Precious Blood and not be transformed by the powerful reality that the consecrated wine is Jesus Christ. We become what we receive.

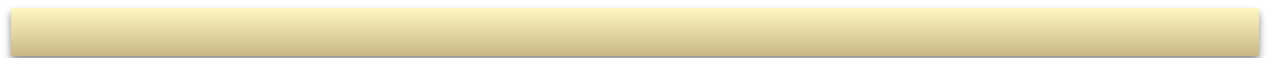
### **Claiming a Ministry and Connecting to the Precious Blood**

Many deacons lack a spiritual and liturgical "mentoring" into a deeper understanding that the Blood of Christ continues to transform all of humanity, in and through the celebration of the Eucharist. The recent Portrait of the Permanent Diaconate 2009-2010 (from CARA) reports that over half of the active U.S. deacons have earned college credits or possibly a bachelor's degree. What might directly benefit deacons are courses which focus on theological reflection as well as practical theology. This theological reflection on the liturgical ministry of the deacon clearly locates God in all of those acts: in the perceptible signs of eating and drinking, Jesus Christ is fully present and completely accessible to our senses, and then enters our hearts to give life: grace offered, grace received. The Blood of Christ is not a static accompaniment (like dessert after dinner) after receiving Communion in the form of the Body of Christ. When the deacon serves the Blood of Christ to his brothers and sisters, the deacon essentially serves grace.

In Rome, this past October (2014), Cardinal Donald Wuerl ordained 43 seminarians as transitional deacons—an ordination rite shared by every man ordained to the permanent diaconate. Cardinal Wuerl reminded them that "the continuation of the mission of Christ, which began with the Great Commission following his death and Resurrection, is what we are engaged in today." This reminder is rich food for reflection: cleansed and renewed by the Blood of Christ, in his dying and rising, we are "oxygenated" (like human blood) for life in the world. The work of dying and rising continues today, in the life of the deacon and through the life-blood of the Church, the Eucharist.

Another way to reflect on the ministry of the Precious Blood, and to reclaim the Ministry of the Cup, is to discover the beauty of the Litany of the Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Compiled by the Sacred Congregation for the Sacred Liturgy in 1960, it was promulgated by Pope St. John XXIII. Although little-known, the litany draws powerful images of the Precious Blood and lays salvation at the heart of ministry.

Deacons, reclaim the Cup and immerse your ministry in the Blood of Christ as you reverently serve the Precious Blood. Recall the Solemn Blessing that you received at ordination: "May he, who has appointed you stewards of his mysteries, make you imitators of his Son, Jesus Christ, and minister of unity and peace in the world" (Rite of Ordination of Deacons, Roman Missal, 3rd Edition).







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## Story of Conversion

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*By John Kyle,*

**R**ecently asked to share my conversion story I was honored that anyone would be interested and at the same time a bit overwhelmed at having to put it in writing. I will attempt to capture as many details of my journey as possible, but God has worked so many miracles and set up so many circumstances leading me to conversion that it will be

impossible to capture it all. God still has a lot of work to do with me on this side of heaven. I am a sinner and I fail each day. The more I come to understand God and the Church, the more I realize that I haven't even scratched the surface of the enormity of God's plan and creation.

I usually start by saying I was an unchurched pagan from Clute, Texas. Born in Dallas in 1963 and moved back to my Dad's home town of Clute when I was 5 years old. Neither of my parents attended church or were very religious. My only exposure was going to Sunday School with my Grandmother who attended Emanuel Baptist Church in Clute on Stratton Ridge Road. My grandfather would take her to church and pick her up every Sunday, but I don't ever remember him attending services. After a couple of years my sister and I could decide if we wanted to attend and that was the end of that.

From the time, I was 9 or 10 years old weekends were for hunting, trapping, fishing, or just playing in the woods or Oyster Creek. The rest of the time was for school, sports, or working. There wasn't time for church or God. I would say I always believed there was a God, but didn't know or care about a relationship with him. We had a good home and my parents were loving, but there was considerable drinking and plenty of second hand smoke.

In my teen years, I had plenty of opportunity to drink and took advantage of it. I am not proud of it, but know that divine intervention is the only thing that kept me from being killed or killing someone else. One night after leaving the Freeport Fishing Fiesta I was stupid and drove when I had no business anywhere near a car. I woke up driving in the ditch on the wrong side of the road and passed two oncoming cars before I got back on the road and in my lane. I pulled off and slept in the car. I went back later and looked where I had been and there is no other place that I could have left the road and kept from hitting a culvert. God had a better plan. This was a life changing event and I didn't have another drink for 2 years after that. Other than awkwardly thanking God at the time nothing changed regarding my lack of faith life.

During and after high school I worked as an air conditioning service technician. Hunting, fishing, playing poker, and the Armadillo Ballroom were the main activities in my life. Drinking resumed, but with more moderation. A couple of years after High school my mother talked me into going to Technical school for A/C refrigeration technology. While in Waco I did well in school, but managed to get arrested at a local dance hall for drunk and disorderly after we got into a fight with some other guys there. Half a night in jail and several hundred dollars later I was a little wiser. Still no place for God in my life. I graduated technical school in 1986 and returned home to work as an A/C service technician. With some friends and my dad I began cooking BBQ cookoffs around the county and did well.

In 1988 A/C work slowed down and I was hired into operations by Dow Chemical. Things were good, I was enjoying life and dated several young ladies, but had no concept of purity or chastity. In the spring of 1989 Some coworkers invited us to cook a benefit BBQ cookoff in Fredonia Texas. We pulled our pit to Fredonia west of Llano and won the cookoff. That Saturday night there was supposed to be a street dance, but they rolled the dirt street up before sunset so

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Lake Jackson, TX

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we packed up and headed to London about 40 miles south. There was a storm that came through that night that dropped several inches of rain and knocked out power. We were cautious when crossing the low water crossings because that much rain in such a short period out there can cause some serious flooding. When we reached London Hall the power was off and the band was warming up without electricity. We had a lantern and some flashlights so we settled in and had a drink. A few other people arrived and then three young ladies came in. They were wet from the rain and we loaned them a flashlight to be able to see in the bathroom and freshen up. One of those young ladies was Debra Stringer a catholic school teacher from Iowa living and working in San Antonio. We had a good time that night after the power came back on. We danced and spent time outside walking and talking. At the end of the night we agreed I would visit her in San Antonio the following Monday. When I arrived home Sunday afternoon there was a message for me not to come to San Antonio. Deb learned when she arrived at home that her dad had died of a heart attack that night. I have no doubt God intervened that night to bring us together. Too many things had to happen for us to meet somewhere neither had ever been and under the circumstances we did.

Seven months later that December we were married at her parish church in Fort Dodge Iowa. I was still not religious and hadn't joined the church, but I saw Deb's faith and respected it. God was working on me through Deb's example and that of peer couples like Bruce and Linda Raiff hosting us for engagement meetings. Our two children were born in 1991 and 1993 and during this time I frequently attended Mass with Deb, and our children were baptized at St. Michael's. Deb taught at Our Lady Queen of Peace school and I helped with construction projects and their Fall Festival. I appreciated the education our children were receiving and the dedication the teachers and parents had to the school along with their examples of faith. I also had the opportunity to be around some faithful evangelical men who were strong in their faith and were good examples of what husbands and fathers should be.

A couple of months after our son was born in 1993 my dad died of a heart attack at the age of 55. It was very tough dealing with his sudden loss since I wasn't grounded in faith and didn't have a relationship with God. My first instinct was to go to nature and headed to the woods to process the loss and what had happened. This was good for me, but there were no answers. Next I turned to alcohol and went to a bar to think, but after one beer I knew that wasn't where I was going to find answers or peace. I then turned to God and prayed for guidance and understanding. It was tough, but I found peace and consolation talking to God. My dad wasn't coming back and I wasn't getting any do-over to tell him how I felt and that I loved him, but I was tasked with being the best father I could for our children.

I started attending Mass more regularly with the family and in 1995 decided to join the church and started RCIA. It was too close to the Easter vigil of 1995 so I resumed the RCIA classes that fall and came into full communion receiving the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and holy communion at the Easter Vigil April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1996. I was Christian and a member of the Roman Catholic Church, but I was a long way from truly understanding and living the faith I was called to.

Through work and other associations I was around influences and temptations that challenged my faith and led to less than Christian behavior. Old habits are hard to break. I was invited to attend a Christ Renews His Parish Retreat (CRHP) at St. Michael's and it was truly life changing. I heard the witness of Catholic men who were living their faith, but had their own struggles and failures to deal with. Through the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist they could overcome the temptations and experience the Grace of our loving God. Association with real men who loved God and had a relationship with Jesus inspired me to continued growth. After being on a CRHP retreat team and sharing my own journey I grew much closer to Jesus myself. Adoration became something I participated in occasionally and filled me with joy renewing me when I left the chapel.



**THE LIGHT**

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

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During the next fourteen years, we were very busy raising our children, youth sports, work and all the busyness of life. I attended Mass regularly and continued to help at the school, but in 2005 I was under a lot of stress at work that started causing an irregular heartbeat. I left Dow and started a job consulting which took me out of town and away from family for weeks at a time. This was not good for my family or my spiritual life. I was too caught up in my work and career and got away from those positive associations that helped keep me grounded in faith. It was a tough time and put a strain on our marriage. Through it all Deb was a beautiful example devoted to me and to God. I know her faithfulness and prayers kept me from falling away.

In 2011 I purchased a new truck and it came with a free Sirius Satellite Radio subscription. I had no intention of renewing the subscription after the free trial expired, but I stumbled on to the Catholic channel and started to listen to the different hosts during my commutes. At that time, I was averaging about 45,000 miles a year so I had a lot of time to listen. Tuning in a positive Catholic message and tuning out talk radio and secular music really started to influence my attitude and faith life. I started praying more and attending daily Mass on my lunch hour in Houston when I could. I renewed that subscription for the Catholic content and have had Sirius ever since.

In 2014 I was having some issues at work and was praying, trying to decide whether to leave for another job, stick it out, or start my own business. We submitted our names to a lottery for the chance to spend thousands of dollars traveling on pilgrimage to Italy with The Catholic Guy Lino Ruli and were selected. On this trip, we had the opportunity to have daily Mass at St. Peter's in Rome at the tomb of Blessed John Paul II and many other churches where the apostles were buried or Eucharistic miracles occurred. At every church and every Mass my prayer was for Jesus to show me his will for my life. To send his Holy Spirit to lead me and guide me to do his will, whatever that may be. I was submitting myself completely to him. At some point toward the end of that 9-day pilgrimage I came to feel at peace about quitting my job and starting my own business. Another vocation was placed on my heart, that I had not been praying about and was not any part of my plans, that vocation was the Diaconate. This idea was crazy because there was no way I was being called to be a Deacon in the Catholic Church! I am not worthy or qualified for such a thing.

In January 2015 I quit my job and started my own consulting company. This was a big step, but one I felt I had properly discerned. The thought of discerning and applying for the Diaconate was present, but surely God wasn't calling me to that. Then Joey White gave the vocation talk at St. Michael's later that year and his message was to "Ask God what he wants you to do. To pray for God to show you his will for your life and listen to what he has to tell you". That's what I had been doing, only I wasn't comfortable with the call so I was trying not to answer. After that talk I told Deb I thought I might be called to the Diaconate and asked if she was willing to join me on the journey. We submitted a letter of inquiry, attended an informational meeting in November, and received Father Leo's recommendation. Our application has been submitted and we are scheduled to start classes in January 2017. This is a 6-year journey of discernment and formation that may or may not lead to ordination, but whatever happens we have said yes to seeking his will.

For the past 18 months, I have been part of a group from St. Michael's ministering to youth ages 10-17 at the Brazoria County Juvenile Detention Center. This ministry along with youth ministry and confirmation at St. Michael's have nourished and fueled my faith and motivated me to greater involvement and action in the church community. Serving our community over the past 6 months as an Instituted Acolyte and EMHC has also been a blessing in my life and only brought me closer to Jesus through the Mass and His real presence in the Eucharist. God has poured out amazing graces in my life and I can't even begin to tell about all the miracles I have experienced over the past few years after turning over my life to Jesus, surrendering myself to his will and being open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.





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I am so far away from living out the life of faith he is calling each one of us to. I pray that I can be worthy to serve him in whatever way he calls and that I may always be ready to answer him. Every time God reveals something new to me the celebration is short lived because I soon realize what a small insignificant grain of sand I am in his magnificent creation and grand plan.

God Bless,  
John Kyle

## Pilgrimage Trip

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*By Dorothy Babbington,*

**W**hen I first saw the advertisement in the bulletin for "Poland & Eastern Europe Pilgrimage: A Spiritual Journey with Jesus: The Divine Mercy 2016," I knew that I was called to go. Being of Polish descent, I've always had a longing to visit Poland and learn more about the birthplace of my ancestors and the religious icon that I had grown up with, especially Our Lady of Czestochowa.

Our 13 day journey consisted of visits to Warsaw, Czestochowa, Wadowice, Krakow, Auschwitz, Zakopane, Budapest, Vienna, and Prague. The mornings saw us up early for a buffet breakfast before boarding the bus for a day of exploring the region or traveling to our next destination. We were fortunate to have at least 2 nights at most of our destinations which let us relax and reflect upon what we had seen and experienced that day. We typically had several hours in the afternoon to grab lunch, pastries or further explore the city's Old Town at our own pace.

Our group consisted of 48 pilgrims from St. Michaels, Our Lady of Lourdes in Houston, and Vietnamese Martyrs in Houston. We all wore red shawls (scarves for the men), so we were readily identifiable to our guides and one another. Father Giovanni was the spiritual director and Nawas Travel coordinated the trip logistics with one of their guides being with us throughout the trip to assure smooth passage. We had a local guide at each of the cities we visited who took us on a walking tour and provided us with a pulse for the region. On each day of the pilgrimage we celebrated mass along with morning and evening devotionals. Since we had people who spoke 3 languages traveling with us, parts of our morning and evening devotionals were said in each of the languages. The Vietnamese language is so very melodic that I especially loved to listen to the praying of the decade of the rosary in that tongue.

Our pilgrimage began in Warsaw. I was shocked to learn that 90% of Warsaw had been destroyed during World War II, but you'd never have known it since the Old Town had been reconstructed by the Poles to preserve their city's heritage which dated back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. I enjoyed seeing the monuments to Chopin and Copernicus to recognize the accomplishments of these great Poles. Also humbling was the monument to commemorate the bravery of the people of Warsaw in the face of German invasion during WWII. During the Warsaw uprising, 40,000 poles were killed in one day resisting the German occupation. One couldn't help but offer prayers of thanksgiving for all the brave people who sacrificed so much to retain their freedom and how blessed I felt that I never had to experience such tragedy.

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## THE LIGHT

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

I grew up with Polish food and had been curious to sample the cuisine in Poland. Lunch that first day in Poland was an adventure as I surveyed the menu which featured 2 full pages of pierogi( a type of filled dumpling) that one could order. There were 4 of us at our table and so with each of us ordering a different variety, this allowed us to sample: spinach and feta, Camembert and blue cheese, meat and champignons, and bacon and cheese. The frozen pierogi I buy now in the grocery store will never be the same.



On day 2 of our pilgrimage, we visited the Jasna Gora Monastery. The Duke of Poland founded the monastery in the 1300s. This monastery enshrines the miraculous portrait of Our Lady of Czestochowa. This portrait had been at the top of my list to see since in my house I have a cardboard representation our Lady of Czestochowa adorned with a fabric dress that had been among my mom's possessions when she passed away. I had never seen this picture before in my childhood home, and I had always been curious about it. So it was with great excitement that I entered the cathedral where the portrait was on display. Legend has it that the painting was made by St. Luke on a table that had been fashioned by Jesus himself. The portrait has a long history of the route it took to finally end up at Jasna Gora, but the devotion of the people to keep it safe through the centuries is truly inspiring. Two slashes are visible on the paintings that were made

by the weapons of Tartar and Hussite warriors. Legend has it that an artist had tried to touch up the painting and repair the portrait, but the slashes always reappear. Numerous miracles are associated with this spiritual place and it is now considered the spiritual capital of Poland. Mass at a side altar of the Cathedral was truly inspiring and I still treasure the time that I was able to spend praying in front of the portrait of the Second Black Madonna.

Day 3 took us to Auschwitz, the largest concentration camp where 4 million people were



murdered. I vowed to not go to Auschwitz as simply a tourist but rather to enter the place in prayer as the pilgrim I was. I immediately felt an eerie chill pass through me as I walked through the gate by which all prisoners would have entered emblazoned with the phrase, "Arbeit macht frei" ("Work sets you free"). While the Nazis had strived to destroy much of the evidence of their crimes, including the crematoriums and gas chambers, these have been reconstructed, so the world would never forget the evil that had been committed here. I still carry the haunting image with me of a room of hair that had been cut from the people to be used for industrial uses by the Germans;

This was the final violation of the person's dignity that the Germans could impose. To help me not get carried away in grief from this tragedy, I carried in my heart the words that Pope Francis had spoken about the place during his visit a month before, "recall the sacrifices and heroism of the people". St Maximilian Kolbe provides a shining example of just such stoicism that was demonstrated when he willingly sacrificed his life for another prisoner.

Of course no trip to Poland would be complete without visiting Wadowice, the birthplace of John Paul II. I still remember back in 1978 gathered with my family around the dining room table marveling at a picture of the newly elected pope and the close resemblance to my Uncle Ed(who was also my Godfather). While a search of our family ancestry has shown no direct ties to John Paul II, I have always felt a special kinship toward him because of my Polish ancestry. We viewed the site of the Pope's birth and then his residences during his time in Poland each festooned with either a statue or banner commemorating





this great man. His smile in each picture warmed the soul as I'm sure his presence did when he walked these streets while alive.



Poland is pretty flat except for the mountains in the South. It was a true joy seeing the beautiful mountainous region where Pope John Paul II liked to go skiing. It was fun to take a shuttle to the top of the mountain (though if time had permitted I honestly would have liked to hike up or at least down). At the top of the mountain I found it amusing how one could rent a beach chair and sit in the sand and watch the valley down below (as we sit at the beach here in Texas and watch the ocean). Our trip was in late September, so it was an extra bonus to see some of the trees begin to turn their fall colors.

This was a wonderful spiritual journey for me. I've already covered 2 pages with my reflections and I haven't even left Poland. The indomitable spirit of the Catholic faith was readily evident and inspiring. It certainly did my heart good to get better in touch with my Polish ancestry and strong religious roots.

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## The Liturgical Season

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### THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION



On December 8th, the Church solemnly celebrates the Immaculate Conception of Mary. As Bl. Pius IX declared in the Apostolic Letter *Ineffabilis Deus* of 1854, she “was preserved, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, free from all stain of original sin”. This truth of faith is contained in the words of greeting the Archangel Gabriel addressed to her: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” (Lk 1:28.) The expression “full of grace” indicates that marvelous work of the love of God, who through his Only-Begotten Son incarnate who died and rose again, wanted to restore to us the life and the freedom, lost by original sin. Because of this, since the 2nd century both in the East and the West, the Church invokes and celebrates the Virgin who with her “yes” brought Heaven closer to earth, becoming “Genetrix of God and nurturer of our life,” as St Romanus the Melodus expressed it in an old song (Canticum XXV in Nativitatem B. Mariae Virginis, in J.B. Pitra, *Analecta Sacra* t. I, Paris 1876, 198). In the 7th century St Sophronius of Jerusalem praised the greatness of Mary, for in her the Holy Spirit came to dwell, and said: “You surpass all the gifts that God’s magnificence ever bestowed on any human person. More than anyone you are made rich by God dwelling in you”.

And St Bede the Venerable explains: “Mary is blessed among women, for with the dignity of virginity she has enjoyed the grace to be parent to a son who is God” (Hom I, 3: CCL 122, 16). We are also given the “fullness of grace” which we must make shine in our life, for, as St Paul writes: the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... has blessed us ... with every spiritual blessing ... even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and







blameless ... to be his sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:3-5). We receive this sonship through the Church on the day of Baptism. In this regard St Hildegarde of Bingen wrote: “The Church is, therefore, the virgin mother of all Christians. In the secret power of the Holy Spirit she conceives them and brings them to the light, offering them to God in such a way that they too might be called sons of God”. And, finally, among the many who have sung of the spiritual beauty of the Mother of God, St Bernard of Clairvaux stands out. He declares that the invocation “Hail, Mary full of grace” is “pleasing to God, to angels and to men. To men, thanks to her motherhood, to the angels, thanks to her virginity, to God, thanks to her humility”.

*Pope Benedict XVI, St. Peter's Square, December 8, 2011.*

## OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

*An excerpt from Magnificat December 2016,*



**O**n December 12th, as million of people pray to Our Lady of Guadalupe, we should keep in mind that our Lady was herself a prayerful woman. We need to look at Saint Juan Diego's tilma to see how Mary's hands are joined together in a posture of prayer so familiar to us, and to the colonial Spaniards. However, our Lady is praying in a way recognized not only by the Spaniards, but also according to the Indians' posture of prayer: dance. For the indigenous people, prayer was expressed not only by the hands, but by the whole body. In their sacred festivals, even amid their elaborated sacrifices and rituals, such prayer was an important highlight. As one of the early missionaries to Mexico, Fray Geronimo de Medieta, wrote, the solemnities were elaborated occasions with "many roses and green and bright things, and with chants solemn in style, and with dances...of great

feeling and importance, without disagreeing in tone or step, since this was their main prayer."

Even the emperor would unite himself to his people in prayer, dancing and singing for their gods. In this, we can see a new meaning in the flowers, in the birdsong, and even in the bright colors that Juan Diego observed before his first meeting with Our Lady of Guadalupe.

*Monsignor Eduardo Chávez Sánchez*

*Monsignor Chávez was the postulator for the cause for canonization of Saint Juan Diego.*

## CHRISTMAS GRACES

*The Vatican Basilica, December 24, 2015;*



**A** great light shines forth (Is 9:1); the light of Jesus' birth shines all about us....Our heart was already joyful in awaiting this moment; now that joy abounds and overflows, for the promise has been at last fulfilled. Joy and gladness are a sure sign that the message contained in the mystery of this night is truly from God. There is no room for doubt; let us leave that to the skeptics who, by looking to reason alone, never find the truth. There is no room for the indifference which rings in the hearts of those unable to love for fear of

losing something. All sadness has been banished, for the Child Jesus brings true comfort to every heart.





Today, the Son of God is born, and everything changes. The Savior of the world comes to partake of our human nature; no longer we are alone and forsaken. The Virgin offers us her Son as the beginning of a new life. The true light has come to illuminate our lives so often beset by the darkness of sin. Today we once more discover who we are! Tonight we have been shown the way to reach the journey's end. Now must we put away all fear and dread, for the light shows us the path to Bethlehem. We must not be laggards; we are not permitted to stand idle. We must set out to see our Savior lying in a manger. This is the reason for our joy and gladness: this Child has been *born to us*; he was *given to us*, as Isaiah proclaims (cf. 9:5)...

If we take him in our arms and let ourselves be embraced by him, he will bring us unending peace of heart...From now on, the way of authentic liberation and perennial redemption is open to every man and woman who is simple of heart...In a society so often intoxicated by consumerism and hedonism, wealth and extravagance, appearances and narcissism, this Child calls us to act soberly, in other words, in a way that is simple, balanced, consistent, capable of seeing and doing what is essential. In a world which all too often is merciless to the sinner and lenient to the sin, we need to cultivate a strong sense of justice, to discern and to do God's will. Amid a culture of indifference which not infrequently turns ruthless, our style of life should instead be devout, filled with empathy, compassion, and mercy, drawn daily from the wellspring of prayer.

Like the shepherds of Bethlehem, may we too, with eyes full of amazement and wonder, gaze upon the Child Jesus, the Son of God. And in his presence may our hearts burst forth in prayer: *Show us, Lord, your mercy, and grant us your salvation* (Ps 85:8).

*Pope Francis*

## MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD



**W**e 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 in 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 ever 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 his 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 the Lord, and that she is living the mystery of the Redemption in all its life-giving profundity and fullness.

*Saint John Paul II*

## THE EPIPHANY



**T**he Wise Men from the East...embody...the men and women who in every age set out on the way which leads to the Child of Bethlehem, to offer him homage as the Son of God and bow down before him....These men who set out towards the unknown were...men with a restless heart. Men driven by a restless quest for God and the salvation of the world. They were filled with expectation not satisfied with their secure income and their respectable place in society. They

were looking for something greater. They were no doubt, learned men, quite knowledgeable about the heavens and probably possessed of a fine philosophical formation. But they desired more than simply knowledge about things. They wanted above all else to know what is essential. They wanted to know how we succeed in being human. And therefore, they wanted to know if God exists, and where and how he exists and whether he is concerned about us and how we can encounter him. Nor did they want just to know. They wanted to understand the truth about ourselves and about God and the world. Their outward pilgrimage was an expression of their inward journey, the inner pilgrimage of their hearts. They were men who sought God and were ultimately the way towards him. They were seekers after God...

Human beings have an innate restlessness for God, but this restlessness is a participation in God's own restlessness for us...Faith is nothing less than being interiorly seized by God, something which guides us along the pathways of life. Faith draws us into a state of being seized by the restlessness of God and it makes us pilgrims who are on an inner journey towards the true King of the world and his promise of justice, truth, and love...

The Wise Men from the East... were also, and above all, men of courage, the courage and humility born of faith. Courage was needed to grasp the meaning of the star as a sign to set out, to go forth towards the unknown, the uncertain, on paths filled with hidden dangers. We can imagine that their decision was met with derision: the scorn of those realists who could only mock the reveries of such men. Anyone who took off on the basis of such uncertain promises, risking everything, could only appear ridiculous. But for these men, inwardly seized by God, the way which he pointed out was more important than what other people thought. For them, seeking the truth meant more than the tarts of the world, so apparently clever...The Wise Men followed the star, and thus came to Jesus, to the great Light which enlightens everyone coming into this world. As pilgrims of faith, the Wise Men themselves became stars shining in the firmament of history, and they show us the way.

*Pope Benedict XVI*



## THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD



**J**ohn the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance, which means that those who came to him were sinners. This is why the Baptist himself experienced rather severe cognitive dissonance when the sinless Jesus presented himself for the penitential bath. We can hear his confusion in the Gospel: "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me? (Mt. 3:14) Why did all four of the Gospel writers include a version of this scene? One would think that, out of embarrassment, they might have conveniently set it aside. They must have sensed that despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the strangeness of it, this encounter was worth remembering and celebrating.

Jesus stood shoulder to shoulder with sinners in the muddy waters of the Jordan, not because he was a sinner in need of salvation, but because he wanted to bring the divine love even to the darkest and most painful corners of human experience. Saint Paul expressed this truth as dramatically as possible when he said, "Christ became sin on the cross."

Again the great Apostle didn't mean that Jesus was a sinner, but rather that he identified himself radically with the condition of those who are alienated from God.

Practically every religion speaks of divine judgement, of God's passing sentence on those who do not follow the divine law. John Henry Newman expressed this truth as follows: "natural religion wears its dark side outward." Only Christianity balances this with the breathtaking claim that the God of judgement so loves sinners that he stands with them, in all humility, as their brother.

*Reverend Bishop Robert Barron*

## PRESENTATION OF THE LORD



**B**ecause Simeon was able to carry in his weak arms the very majesty that created things cannot endure, he knew that his weakness was strengthened by the power he carried. At the same time Simeon, with all creatures, was invisibly being lifted up by the all-prevailing power of the Son himself. This is amazing, that while weak man was visibly carrying the power that gave strength, that power was visibly carrying the one who carried it. Majesty made itself small so that those who held it could endure it. As majesty bent itself down to our smallness, so should our love lift itself above every desire in order to meet majesty.

And the boat that carried our Lord, it was (our Lord) who carried it when he stopped the wind that threatened to sink it (when he said): *Be silent, be still*. Although he was on the sea, his arm was able to reach the source of the wind and stop it. The boat carried his humanity, but the power of his divinity carried the boat and everyone in it. To show that not even his humanity



required a boat, in place of the boards that the carpenter assembled and nailed, the Architect of Creation made the waters firm, assembling and subduing them under his feet. Our Lord strengthened the hand of Simeon the priest in the Temple so that he could carry the power that carries all, just as it was he who strengthened the feet of Simon the Apostle so that they could support themselves on the water. And so, the name that carries the Firstborn in the Temple, the Firstborn later carried on the sea to show that, if he could carry him over a threatening sea, he did not need to be carried by him on dry land. Our Lord visibly carried him on the sea to teach us that he was also invisibly carrying him on dry land.

*Saint Ephrem the Syrian*

*An excerpt from Magnificat, February 2015*

## THE CHAIR OF PETER



**T**reat the Catholic Church as divine only and you will stumble over her scandals, her failures, and her shortcomings. Treat her as human only and you will be silenced by her miracles, her sanctity, and her eternal resurrection.

Of course the Catholic church is human. She consists of fallible men, and her humanity is not even safeguarded as was that of Christ against the incursions of sin. Always, therefore, there have been scandals, and always will be. Popes may betray their trust, in all human matters; priests their flocks; layman their faith. No man is secure. And, again, since she is human it is perfectly true that she has profited by human circumstances for the increase of her power. Undoubtedly it was the existence of the Roman Empire, with its roads, its rapid means of transit, and its organization, that made possible to swift propagation of the Gospel in the first centuries. Undoubtedly it was the empty throne of Caesar and the prestige of Rome that developed the world's acceptance of the

authority of Peter's Chair. Undoubtedly it was the divisions of Europe that cemented the Church's unity and led men to look to a Supreme Authority that might compose their differences. There is scarcely an opening in human affairs into which she has not plunged; hardly an opportunity she has missed. Human affairs, human sins, and weaknesses as well as human virtues, have all contributed to her power. So grows a tree, even in uncongenial soil. The rocks that impede the roots later become their support; the rich soil, waiting for an occupant, has been drawn up into the life of the leaves; the very winds that imperiled the young sapling have developed too its power of resistance. Yet these things do not make the tree.

For her humanity, though it is the body in which her divinity dwells, does not create that divinity. Certainly human circumstances have developed her, yet what but divine Providence ordered and developed those human circumstances? What but that same power, which indwells in the Church, dwelt without her too and caused her to take root at that time and in that place which most favored her growth?

*Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson*

*An excerpt from Magnificat, February 2011.*

Photo of the Chair of St. Peter at the apse of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. To the Learn more go to: [http://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san\\_pietro/index\\_it.htm](http://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san_pietro/index_it.htm)



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## Weekly Bible Studies

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*“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ” St. 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

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## Weekly Prayer Groups

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*“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







## The Holy See

### UNDER HER MANTLE

*Pope Francis morning meditation in the Chapel of the Church of Saint Martha,*



L'Osservatore Romano, September 15, 2016.- In a world of orphans, Mary is the mother who fully understands us and defends us, because she too has personally experienced the same humiliation suffered, for example, by the mothers of prisoners today... Pope Francis recommended that in difficult moments we always seek refuge “under the mantle” of the Mother of God.

Speaking about the “mystery of Mary’s motherhood,” the Pope drew inspiration from the scene of the Last Supper: “Jesus, at the table, bids farewell to his disciples: there is an air of sadness, everyone knew that there was something that would end badly and they asked questions, they were sad”. In Jesus’ farewell, however, “in order to give them a bit of courage and also to prepare them in hope, Jesus said to them: ‘Do not be sad, let not your hearts be sad, I will not leave you alone! I will ask the Father to send another Paraclete, who will accompany you. And he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said’”. The Lord, therefore, “Promises to send the Holy Spirit in order to accompany the disciples, the Church, on the path of history”.

Jesus, however, “also speaks of the Father”. Indeed, Pope Francis recalled, “in that long, long conversation with the disciples, he speaks of the Father”, assuring them “that the Father loves them and that anything that they ask of the Father, the Father will give to them”, that they “ought to trust in the Father”. In this way, the Pope explained, Jesus goes “a step further: not only does he say ‘I will not leave you alone’, but also ‘I will not leave you as orphans, I give you the Father, the Father is with you, my Father is your Father’”. Francis continued: “we know everything that happened after that dinner: the humiliation, the prison, the disciples’ betrayal; Peter denies Jesus, and the others flee”.

Referring to the passage in the liturgy of the day, taken from the Gospel of John (19:25-27), the Pope said that under the cross there was “only one disciple with Jesus’ mother, with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, a relative”. There, at the cross, “is Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and everyone is looking at her”, perhaps whispering: “She is the mother of this criminal! She is the mother of this traitor”. And Mary, the Pope added, “heard these things, she suffered terrible humiliation and even heard some of the great priests, whom she respected because they were priests”, say to Jesus: “But you who are so great, come down, come down!”. Francis said that as Mary stood beside “her Son, naked there” on the cross. She experienced “such intense suffering, but did not leave, she did not deny her Son, He was her flesh”.

Sharing a personal anecdote, the Pope recalled: “When I was in the diocese of Buenos Aires, it would often happen that when I went to prisons to visit the inmates, I would see a queue, a line of women waiting to enter: they were the mothers, but they were not ashamed, their own flesh was there inside” the prison. Those “women suffered not only the shame of being there, hearing people say: ‘Look at her, what did her son do?’”. Those mothers “also suffered the worst humiliation of the inspections required before they could enter. But they were mothers, and they were going there to see their own flesh”. And so it was for Mary, who “was there, with her Son, with that great suffering”.





Precisely “at that time”, the Pope noted, “Jesus — who had said he would never leave us as orphans, who spoke of the Father — looked at his Mother and gave her to us as a Mother: ‘Behold, your Mother!’”. The Lord “does not leave us as orphans: we Christians have a Mother”, the same Mother that Jesus had; “we have a Father, the same as Jesus. We are not orphans”. And Mary “gives birth in that moment, with so much pain. It is truly a martyrdom: with her pierced heart, she agrees in that painful moment to give birth to all of us. And from that moment on she became our Mother, since that moment she is our Mother, the one who takes care of us and is not ashamed of us: she defends us”.

“The Russian mystics of the early centuries of the Church”, Pope Francis noted, in this regard, “counseled their disciples, the young monks to take refuge under the mantle of the Holy Mother of God during times of spiritual turmoil. The devil cannot enter there because she is Mother, and as a Mother she defends”. Thus “the West took this counsel and created the first Marian antiphon, *Sub tuum praesidium: under your mantle, placed under your care, O Mother, we are safe there*”.

“Today is the Feast of the moment that Mary gave birth to us”, the Pope continued, “and she has been faithful to this offspring to this very day, and will continue to be faithful”. In a world “which we might call an ‘orphan’, this world that suffers the crisis of a great orphanhood, perhaps we can offer our help by saying: ‘Look to your mother!’”. Because we have a mother “who defends us, teaches us, accompanies us, and is not ashamed of our sins”. Indeed, “she is not ashamed, because she is Mother”.

In conclusion, the Holy Father prayed that “the Holy Spirit — this friend, this companion on the journey, this Paraclete and advocate that the Lord sent to us — will help us to understand this truly great mystery of Mary’s motherhood”.

## **NOW IS A TIME OF MERCY: POPE'S NEW APOSTOLIC LETTER**



(Vatican Radio) November 21, 2016.- Although the Extraordinary Jubilee Year has concluded, we are still living in a “time of mercy.” That was the message of Pope Francis in a lengthy Apostolic Letter, entitled *Misericordia et misera*, (“Mercy and Misery”), issued on Monday following the close of the Year of Mercy.

The title refers to the encounter between Jesus and the woman caught in adultery, from the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John. In his commentary on the Gospel, St Augustine said of that encounter, “The two of them” – Jesus and the woman – “remained alone: mercy with misery.” The teaching of this Gospel, the

Pope said, “serves not only to throw light on the conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, but also to point out the path that we are called to follow in the future.”

In light of the “great graces of mercy” we have received during the Jubilee, our first response is to give thanks to the Lord for His gifts. But in going forward, we must also continue to celebrate mercy, especially in the liturgical celebrations of the Church, including in the Sacrifice of the Mass, and in the other Sacraments, especially in Reconciliation and in Anointing of the Sick, the two “sacraments of healing.”

Pope Francis proposed a number of ideas to continue the celebration of mercy, including an annual day dedicated to making the Scriptures better known and more widely diffused. He also





called on the faithful to restore the Sacrament of Reconciliation to a "central place in Christian life."

The Holy Father also extended a number of initiatives already begun in the Holy Year, asking the Missionaries of Mercy to continue their ministry, and extending indefinitely the faculties of priests of the Society of St Pius X to hear confessions and grant absolution. Pope Francis also extended the faculties of all priests to absolve the sin of procured abortion. "I want to insist as firmly as I can that abortion is a grave sin," the Pope said, "because it puts an end to an innocent life." But, he continued, "I can and I must state that there is no sin that God's mercy cannot reach and wipe away when it finds a repentant heart seeking to be reconciled with the Father."

Though the Jubilee is closed, Pope Francis said, "the door of mercy of our heart continues to remain wide open." He called on the faithful to continue to practice new works of mercy, and to find new ways to give expression to the traditional works. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy, he said, "continue in our own day to be proof of mercy's immense positive influence as a social value." In this vein, the Pope said the Church must continue to be vigilant and offer solidarity in the face of attacks on human dignity.

"This is the time of mercy," the Pope concluded. "It is the time of mercy because no sinner can ever tire of asking forgiveness, and all can feel the welcoming embrace of the Father.

As a final initiative for the future, Pope Francis asked the whole Church to celebrate, on the second to last Sunday of the liturgical year, the World Day of the Poor. This Day, he said, "will also represent a genuine form of new evangelization (cf. Mt 11:5) which can renew the face of the Church as she perseveres in her perennial activity of pastoral conversion and witness to mercy."

Read the full text of Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera*.

## VATICAN COMMISSION ON FEMALE DIACONATE



(Vatican Radio) November 25, 2016.- The Vatican announced on Friday that the newly established commission for the study of the female diaconate was holding its first meeting at the offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The two day meeting brings together the 12 members of the commission, under the presidency of Jesuit Archbishop Luis Francisco Ladaria Ferrer, who also serves as Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

During the morning and afternoon sessions, members will study the situation of women deacons in the early centuries of Church history.

Pope Francis announced the setting up of the new commission on August 2nd this year, following a May 12th meeting with participants at a plenary assembly of female religious superiors, who asked him about the possibility of restoring the permanent diaconate for women.

The commission includes six men and six women from eight different countries, with a wide variety of theological perspectives. Five of the members teach at pontifical universities in Rome, while four are members of the International Theological Commission.

The full list of commission members includes:

Sr. Nuria Calduch-Benages, M.H.S.F.N., Member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission;

Prof. Francesca Cocchini, Professor at the University "La Sapienza" and at the Patristic Institute "Augustinianum," Rome;

Rev. Msgr. Piero Coda, Dean of the University Institute "Sophia," Loppiano, and Member of the International Theological Commission;



Rev. P. Robert Dodaro, O.S.A., Dean Patristic Institute "Augustinianum," Rome  
Rev. P. Santiago Madrigal Terrazas, S.J., professor of ecclesiology at the Pontifical University "Comillas," Madrid;  
Sr. Mary Melone, S.F.A., rector of the Pontifical University "Antonianum," Rome;  
Rev. Karl-Heinz Menke, Emeritus Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Bonn and member of the International Theological Commission;  
Rev. Aimable Musoni, S.D.B., professor of ecclesiology at the Pontifical Salesian University, Rome;  
Rev. P. Bernard Pottier, S.J., Professor at the "Institut d'Etudes théologiques," Brussels, and member of the International Theological Commission;  
Prof. Marianne Schlosser, Professor of Spiritual Theology at the University of Vienna and a member of the International Theological Commission;  
Prof. Michelina Tenace, Professor of Fundamental Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome.  
Prof. Phyllis Zagano, Professor at Hofstra University, New York.

## **Pope Francis Advent Call**



(Vatican Radio) November 27, 2016.- Pope Francis marked the beginning of the new liturgical year at the Angelus for the First Sunday of Advent.

On this Sunday, he said, the Gospel introduces us to one of the most “evocative” themes of the Advent season: the visit of the Lord to humanity. Pope Francis pointed out three visits of the Lord: the first, in the past, with the Incarnation, and Birth of Jesus at Christmas; the second, in the present, as Jesus visits us continually, every day; and the final visit, in the future, when Jesus “will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.”

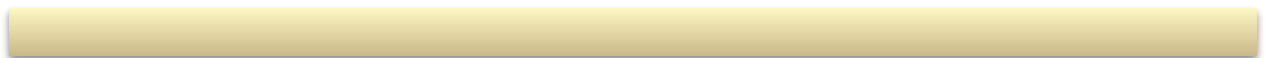
Advent encourages us to reflect on the contrast between our daily routine and the unexpected coming of the Lord. The Gospel, the Pope said, is not trying to frighten us, but “to open our horizons” to further dimensions, giving meaning even to everyday occurrences.

This perspective, he continued, is also an invitation to “sobriety, to not be dominated by the things of this world” but rather to keep them in their proper place. If, on the other hand, we allow ourselves to be overpowered by a concern for material things, we will not be able to perceive what is much more important: our final encounter with the Lord. And so, the Pope said, Advent is “an invitation to vigilance, because, not knowing when He will come, we must always be ready to depart.”

During Advent, Pope Francis concluded, “we are called to enlarge the horizons of our hearts, to be surprised by the life that is presented each day with its newness. In order to do this we need to learn to not depend on our own securities, our own established plans, because the Lord comes in the hour which we don’t imagine.”

## **World Day of Peace, January 1, 2017**

VATICAN CITY August 26, 2016, — Pope Francis focused the theme for the 2017 World Day of Peace on nonviolence as a political solution to what he has frequently termed a “piecemeal World War III” being waged throughout the globe.





“Violence and Peace are at the origin of two opposite ways to building society,” an Aug. 26 communique from the Vatican’s Council for Justice and Peace announcing the theme read.

Titled “Non-Violence: A Style of Politics for Peace,” the theme for 2017’s World Day of Peace marks the 50th anniversary of the celebration, and the fourth of Pope Francis’ pontificate. Instituted by Blessed Pope Paul VI in 1968, the World Day of Peace is celebrated each year on Jan. 1, which is also the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God.

In the communique introducing the 2017 theme, it was stressed that nonviolence as a political strategy is “based on the primacy of law.” If the equal rights and dignity of each individual are respected without discrimination, “Then non-violence, understood as a political method, can constitute a realistic way to overcome arm conflicts.”

Pope Francis’ aim in choosing this theme, the statement read, is to show “a path of hope” that’s proportionate to the context of today’s global circumstances. “In this way, the settlement of disputes may be reached through negotiation without then degenerating into armed conflict.” With this perspective in mind, the cultural identity of different peoples will be respected, and the idea that some are “morally superior” to others will be overcome. The statement cautioned that nonviolence isn’t the same as remaining indifferent to tragedies, but rather implies a recognition “of the primacy of diplomacy over the noise of arms.”

## Pope Francis Proclaimed Seven New Saints

(Vatican Radio) - On the morning of Sunday, October 15, Pope Francis presides over Holy Mass for the canonization of seven new Saints.

Two of the new Saints are martyrs:



**José Sánchez del Río**, a 14-year-old boy who was killed in 1928 in Mexico during the “Cristero” struggle which opposed the government’s anti-Catholic and anticlerical policies. Under torture José refused to disown his faith; a handwritten note addressed to his mother and found on his dead body read: “I promise that in heaven I will prepare a place for all of you. Your José dies defending the Catholic faith for the love of Christ the King and Our Lady of Guadalupe”. The phrase *“it was never so easy to earn heaven”* was used by Jose to persuade his mother to let him participate in the *Cristero* struggle. And he concluded by saying, *“I do not want to miss the opportunity”*. His words are undoubtedly memorable and inspiring for the youth of today. His last words were *“Long live Christ the King! Long live the Virgin of*

*Guadalupe!”*

The first martyr belonging to the La Salle Order, killed on September 2, 1792, during the French Revolution. His name is **Salomone Leclercq**; he too chose to die in the defense of his faith. He was the first Brother of the Christian Schools to be martyred, and the first to be beatified. Soon after his death, three more Brothers were martyred; they are recognized as the Blessed Martyrs of Rochefort. September 2 marks the feast day of both these Brothers and Blessed Brother Solomon.



Then there is **“Cura Brochero”** (José Gabriel del Rosario Brochero), an Argentinean priest “who smelt of sheep’ and travelled enormous distances on the back of a mule during the 19th century to bring consolation and Jesus’ message of salvation to the poorest of the poor. He was the fourth of ten brothers. He was ordained at





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

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age 26. He died in 1914. His feast day is January 26.



The Spanish Bishop of Palencia **Manuel González García**, founder of the Congregation of the Eucharistic Missionaries of Nazareth, the Disciples of Saint John, and the Children of Reparation. He was known for his strong devotion to the Eucharist and became known as the "Bishop of the Tabernacle". He died in 1940. He was ordained a priest on September 21, 1901, and was named Bishop of Málaga, Spain on April 22, 1920, and the Bishop of Palencia, Spain on August 5, 1935. His feast day is January 4.

Father **Lodovico Pavoni** of the Italian city of Brescia, founder of the religious congregation 'Sons of Mary Immaculate' or 'Pavonians'. During the industrial revolution of the 19th century he set up an Oratory for Christian education and together with his 'labourer brothers' he taught the poor and the marginalized trades and religious education in the belief that improving social conditions would improve the spiritual life, and improving the spiritual life would improve social conditions.



**Alfonso Maria Fusco**, a priest from the southern Italian City of Salerno, founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. John the Baptist, commonly known as Baptistine Sisters. Their mission was to evangelize, educate and promote youth, especially those who were most poor, abandoned and at risk. He was particularly close to the impoverished and neglected farmers of the south of Italy after the unification of Italy in 1861. His feast day is February 6.

Finally the French Discalced Carmelite mystic and writer **Elizabeth of the Trinity** who died aged just 26 in 1906 from Addison's disease, which in the early 20th century had no treatment with which to cure or alleviate the suffering of its victims. Even though her death was painful, Elizabeth gratefully accepted her suffering as a gift from God. Her last words were: "*I am going to Light, to Love, to Life!*"



*An excerpt from Magnificat November 2016:*

*"To become saints means to fulfill completely what we already are, raised to the dignity of God's adopted children in Christ Jesus.... The saints bring to light in a creative fashion quite new human potentialities.... The saints are themselves the living spaces into which one can turn... There is no isolation in heaven. It is the open society of the saints and, consequently, also the fulfillment of all human togetherness... One might say that the saints are, so to speak, new Christian constellations, in which the richness of God's goodness is reflected. Their light, coming from God, enables us to know better the interior richness of God's great light... Nothing can bring us into close contact with the beauty of Christ himself other than the world of beauty created by faith and light that shines out from the faces of the saints, through whom his own light becomes visible"*

*Pope Benedict XVI*







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## Saints

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

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### St. John, Apostle

*An excerpt from Magnificat December 2016:  
Feast: December 27*



**T**ogether with Peter, [John] is sent to the Church of Jerusalem to strengthen the people of Samaria who had accepted the Gospel, praying for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 8:14-15). In particular, we should remember what he affirmed with Peter to the Sanhedrin members who were accusing them: *We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.* (Acts 4:20).

It is precisely this frankness in confessing his faith that lives on as an example and a warning for all of us always to be ready to declare firmly our steadfast attachment to Christ, putting faith before any human calculation or concern.

According to tradition, John is the *disciple whom Jesus loved*, who in the fourth Gospel laid his head against the Teacher's breast at the Last Supper (cf. Jn 13:23), stood at the foot of the cross together with the Mother of Jesus (cf. Jn 19:25), and lastly witnessed both the empty tomb and the presence of the Risen One himself (cf. Jn 20:2; 21:7)...

Let us be content here with learning an important lesson for our lives: the Lord wishes to make each one of us a disciple who lives in personal friendship with him.

To achieve this, it is not enough to follow him and to listen to him outwardly: it is also necessary to live with him and like him. This is only possible in the context of a relationship of deep familiarity, imbued with the warmth of total trust. This is what happens between friends; for this reason Jesus said one day: *Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends... No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you* (Jn 15:13, 15).

In the apocryphal Acts of John, the Apostle is not presented as the founder of Churches nor as the guide of already established communities, but as a perpetual wayfarer, a communicator of the faith in the encounter with "souls capable of hoping and of being saved" (18:10; 23:8).

All is motivated by the paradoxical intention to make visible the invisible...

May the Lord help us to study at John's school and learn the great lesson of love, so as to feel we are loved by Christ to the end (Jn 13:1), and spend our lives for him.

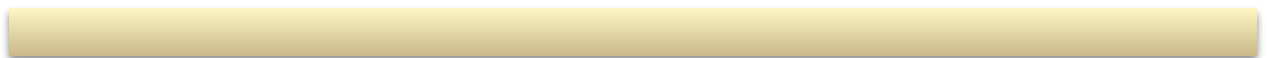
*Pope Benedict XVI*

### The Holy Innocents

*An excerpt from Magnificat December 2015:*

Feast: December 28

**T**oday Herod's inhuman cruelty has exposed how far jealousy tends to go, and spite leaps, and envy makes its way. While this cruelty was jealously seeking the narrow limits of temporal reign, it strove to block the rise of the eternal King...





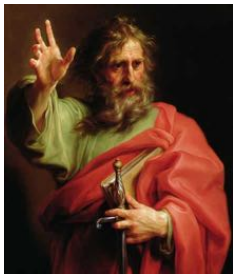
Impiety grieves that it has been tricked. Cruelty is in a rage because it has been warded off. Deceitfulness roars because it has been deceived. Trickery has turned against itself and has dashed to naught. Herod hisses in rage while falling himself into the net he has spread. Consequently, he unsheathes the iniquity he has hidden...

O ambition, how blind you always are! Oh presumption, how dastardly you always are! Oh, how he who grasps what is not granted loses what is!...

He had heard that the King was born. He had asked where, when, from whom, and for what purpose. But he did not seek as he should have, because he had a

love of sinning, and his love of innocence had gone. Impelled to crime, prone to sins which cry for expiation, ready for atrocity, he disregarded the proofs of innocence, abrogated right, confused the lawful with the abominable. Wickedness was his companion, and he hated equity. Iniquity was always dear to him who lived through murders, strengthened his own position through bloodshed, and practiced cruelty. Everything he possessed stood through fear, nothing through love.

*Saint Peter Chrysologus*



## **The Conversion of Saint Paul**

*An excerpt from Magnificat January 2014:  
Feast: January 25*

**A** heathen poet has said,..."I am a man; nothing human is without interest to me": and the sentiment has been widely and deservedly praised. Now this is, in a fullness of meaning which heathen could not understand, is, I conceive, the characteristic of this great Apostle. He is ever speaking, to use his own words, "human things," and "as man," and "according to man," and "foolishly": - that is, human nature, the common nature of the whole race of Adam, spoke in him, acted in him, with an energetically presence, with a sort of bodily fullness, always under the sovereign command of divine grace, but losing none of its real freedom and power because of its subordination. And the consequence is, that, having the nature of man so strong within him, he is able to enter into human nature, and to sympathize with it, with a gift peculiarly his own.

Now the most startling instance of this is this - that, though his life prior to his conversion seems to have been so conscientious and so pure, nevertheless he does not hesitate to associate himself with the outcast heathen, and to speak as if he were one of them. Saint Philip Neri, before he communicated, used to say, "Lord, I protest before thee that I am good for nothing but to do evil." At confession he used to say, "I have never done one good action." He often said, "I am past hope." To a penitent he said, "Be sure of this, I am a man like my neighbors, and nothing more." Well, I mean, that somewhat in this way, Saint Paul felt all his neighbors, all the whole race of Adam, to be existing in himself. He knew himself to be possessed of a nature, he was conscious of possessing a nature, which was capable of running into all the multiplicity of emotions, of devices, of purposes, and of sins, into which it had actually run in the wide world and in the multitude of men; and in that sense he bore the sins of all men, and associated himself with them, and spoke of them and himself as one.

*Blessed John Henry Newman*