

June 26, 2022

Hear to Serve

THE FORGOTTEN ONE

Ask any middle child in a family what it is like being the middle child, and I bet the first thing they will tell you is that they are the “Forgotten Child.” Well, if that’s the case then, when it comes to the Sacraments in the Catholic Church, the Sacrament of Reconciliation must be the middle child of Sacraments.

I have to wonder why that is? All of the Sacraments were given to us by Christ. Through His Church, we receive them, to help us on our journey to the Divine life. That sounds pretty good to me, so why do we, as a whole, ignore this one Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Part of the problem is our lack of understanding about the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It isn’t about just confessing a list of our sins, our wrong doings to Jesus through our priest and taking our lumps through the penance Father gives us. Confession is an important part of the sacrament, but the focus is on restoring a relationship with our Father in Heaven. At our Baptism, we became adopted sons and daughters of God. When we sin, we turn our hearts and minds away from the Father’s love. It’s not God who left us; it’s we who have left God. When we admit this, Christ pours out the grace of His love and heals us. Our relationship to the Father is restored.

Reconciliation can be a hard thing to initiate. None of us wants to admit to someone else things we have done that we do not even want to admit to ourselves. The thought of saying our sins out loud fills us with anxiety and fear. We worry that, “Father is going to recognize my voice,” or that “Father is going to be shocked at what I have done.” We think that there is something wrong with us when we have to confess the same sins again and again. We fear that God’s forgiveness has a limit.

Jesus understands our anxieties and fears and loves us despite them. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is given to us as a gift to calm our souls and give us peace. But the devil loves our anxiety and fear. He is a master at using our fears and anxieties to keep us from receiving the graces of God through the sacrament. The devil wants to keep us from having a relationship with God.

The number one thing that keeps us from Reconciliation is pride. We think that we do not need to go to a priest to confess our sins, that we can just tell Jesus directly. All I know is that I am not in a position to tell God how He is to dispense His mercy. Jesus has given us a beautiful gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He gave the Apostles the authority to forgive or not forgive sins. This authority has been passed down through the Church. We have to have faith in Jesus and what He tells us and what He has given us. We have to put Jesus number one in our lives and not someone or something else. Because it’s when we fail to do these things, then the problems will begin for us. Judas failed to do these things and we all know how that story ended.

I could go on about the Sacrament of Reconciliation for a lifetime of columns, but my room is running out. I know how some of you feel, I’ve been there with these same thoughts and feelings. I’ve fallen into the snares of the devil. I’ve been that twenty-year-man between Reconciliations. But, I promise you this, if you truly confess with a contrite heart, the mercy of Jesus Christ will come upon you. There is no better place to be.

Let us pray that we don't make ourselves the "Forgotten Child."

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary

June 19, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

"Lord, teach us to pray." Luke 11:1

We continue our series on learning to pray. Today the Catholic Church celebrates the Feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord, which is also called Corpus Christi Sunday. This feast celebrates the extraordinary gift of the Lord to us that he remains present among us since he is Truly and Really Present in the Eucharist. As Catholics we do not believe that the Eucharist is a symbol. As Catholics, we take the plain meaning of Jesus' words seriously, "This is my Body," and "This is my Blood." Taking his words seriously, we believe that the Eucharist really is the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

This is my favorite feast of the Church's year. I celebrated my first Mass as a priest on Corpus Christi Sunday.

I don't remember learning about the Eucharist when I was growing up as a Catholic. For how important the Eucharist is in the life of the Church, this should be a shocking statement. Unfortunately, my experience is not uncommon. The Second Vatican Council taught that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Catholic faith. This is not just a theological theory but is shown in real life experience. In the parishes and dioceses that have maintained an active devotion and placed an emphasis on the Eucharist, Catholic life is flourishing. In the parishes and dioceses that have lost their focus on the Eucharist, Catholic life has declined.

Seeing the difference, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) have declared a three-year Eucharistic Revival for Catholics in the United States. This revival begins today, and our parishes will be participating.

There are many Catholics that struggle with the teaching about the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. If you count yourself as one of these Catholics, I encourage you to take some time at the end of Mass and wait for the church to become quiet and still, and pray with these words from the Gospel of Mark, "I believe, help my unbelief."

After I am finished receiving Communion, the prayer I most often recite is the "Anima Christi." This beautiful prayer, which dates back centuries, is a series of petitions that the Eucharist will change me. Just as the prayer of the church changes the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, I pray that now that Body and Blood of Christ will change me into being a saint. I encourage you to pray this prayer after you receive Communion, and invite Jesus, now present in you by virtue of His Eucharistic Presence to change you.

Blessings,

Father Bill

June 12, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“Lord, teach us to pray.” Luke 11:1

We continue our series on learning to pray. Today is also Trinity Sunday. The first prayer that many of us learned is a Trinitarian prayer, The Sign of the Cross.

This simple prayer consists of two parts, the first being the words, “In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” The second part is marking the Cross over our body, by moving our right hand from our forehead (Father), sternum (Son), and moving from the left to the right across the chest (Holy Spirit). This prayer is both the words and the gesture.

While this prayer is simple, it does not mean that it is not powerful or that it is not theologically deep.

The first words, “In the Name of...” This recalls the words that Saint Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, “For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:7-8, ESV). Every time we make The Sign of the Cross, we are both declaring, and reminding ourselves that what we are about to begin, we are doing not in our own name but in the Name of God. We are doing not for ourselves, but doing it for God. So while The Sign of the Cross is simple, it is also challenging. To do anything in the Name of God, we need to ask ourselves, “Am I doing this with an attitude of reverence? Will my words and actions reflect God’s love and wisdom? Are my actions and way of life consistent or inconsistent with what God rightly expects from one of his servants?”

“...Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” The words of The Sign of the Cross continue with the Trinitarian name of God. This is one of the names of God that Jesus himself shares with us, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19, ESV). Reflecting on these words, the great Pope, St. John Paul II observes that God reveals himself as a family, and that the relationship among members of a family is characterized by sacrificial love that is agape, the highest form of love. And just as families expand by the exercise of love, so The Sign of the Cross reminds us that God’s goal for us is that through his love and our loving response that we are drawn into His Divine Family. This is why Jesus instructs us to call God, Our Father (see Matthew 6:9 and Luke 11:2), and St. Paul reminds us that we are brothers and sisters of Christ (see Romans 8:29).

This seems like a good place to pause in our reflection on The Sign of the Cross, but we will continue it in three weeks.

Blessings,

Father Bill

June 5, 2022

Hear to Serve

Gifts Freely Given

The power of the Holy Spirit is an amazing thing. Our reading from the Acts of the Apostles gives the dramatic account of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. The Holy Spirit came in a great rushing of wind and settled above each of the Apostles in the visible form of a tongue of fire. Now, the Apostles had already received the Holy Spirit. Our Gospel reading today from St. John tells us that Jesus had breathed upon them and had given them the Holy Spirit. This gift of the Holy Spirit gives them the graces of peace and the power to forgive sins, but it wasn't until Pentecost that the Holy Spirit unleashed power upon the leaders of the new Church and energized their mission. He bestowed upon them great gifts, among them the courage to speak and share the good news of Jesus Christ.

We have also been given the Holy Spirit at our baptism. Baptism is a powerful spiritual gift which makes it possible to continue to receive God's grace through all of the sacraments. It is in the Sacrament of Confirmation that the Holy Spirit seals His great gifts within us. The sacrament itself is the outward sign of a very powerful and very real spiritual event. Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Piety, Good Counsel, Fortitude, and Fear of the Lord are given to us. These gifts are the very same gifts given to the Apostles. The Apostles did not earn them, just as we do not earn them, because they are given freely to us by our God who longs to give us all good things. While these gifts are not earned, they must be opened and used.

Can you imagine if after Pentecost the Apostles had continued to stay in the upper room, or had decided to go back to their old lives? They had the choice to accept the gifts or not. Thankfully, the Apostles accepted the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and cooperated with them. They went out and built the Church through their powerful witness of the love of God through Jesus Christ. What about us? How many of us are cooperating with the Holy Spirit in our lives? Have we opened the gifts given to us at Confirmation and used them to grow the Church? Today, as we celebrate Pentecost, it is a good time for us to pray and ask for the Holy Spirit to reenergize us with His great and powerful love. It is a good time to see what mission we are being called to.

If you have not received the Sacrament of Confirmation, now is the time to do something about that. Confirmation is one of the three Sacraments of Initiation. It is through Baptism, the Eucharist, and Confirmation that we are able to become the spiritually mature Catholic Christians God wants us to be. Confirmation is not just making a public profession of our faith, it is about receiving all of the graces that God wants to give us. It is about being able to live a fully Catholic life and helping others to do the same.

It is never too late to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. If you would like to become confirmed, if you would like a sacramental marriage, or if you would like to become Catholic, call the Holy Trinity or St. Gregory parish office.

Let the Holy Spirit light our lives on fire this Pentecost. Let Him renew our hearts and through us, the world.

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary

May 29, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“Lord, teach us to pray.” Luke 11:1

How do we begin to pray? In some ways it is the easiest thing in the world. We watch children pray. They easily make the “Sign of the Cross,” fold their hands, and begin speaking to God as if they are having a regular conversation. And this is a beautiful way to pray. If we as adults can pray this way, it is a beautiful way to pray!

However, as we mature from childhood into adulthood, for many people this simple prayer begins to fade away. Something about prayer becomes a little more difficult. I have noticed this with my own prayer. As much as it is real prayer to simply lift one’s mind and heart to God and begin talking, there are doubts that creep in. There is also an expectation, “God, when will you speak?”

So I will share with you how I begin my prayers. There are many distractions and worries that can draw one’s heart and mind away from prayer. Praying requires us to shift gears from focusing our attention on the thousands of things buzzing around us to focusing on our Father in heaven who is above us. What happens when we shift gears too quickly? Is a quick, gear shift good for a transmission? It does not take much mechanical experience to know the answer. It is the same for one’s mind and heart. We cannot just turn off the worries of the world, and the distractions of our life, and expect to be able to focus on the conversation with the Lord. We need time to shift gears.

One of the Church’s great teachers on prayer, St. Ignatius of Loyola, taught about this in his manual on prayer, which is called The Spiritual Exercises. Each time he instructs the reader to meditate, he begins the prayer with this simple instruction: “Acknowledge the presence of God.”

Take a moment and do that right now. Imagine that the Lord is right next to you. What does he look like? How does his presence feel? And even before you make the “Sign of the Cross” spend a few moments simply resting in the Lord’s presence. In those few moments, let the worries of the world and the distractions of life settle down. During this little preparation, pay attention to your breathing, and intentionally take a few slow and deep breaths. Often, I will repeat a simple phrase as I am breathing to help my mind and heart shift gears. This phrase could be as simple as, “Lord, I know you are near.” It only takes a few moments, but it settles the heart, and prepares the mind for prayer.

So this week, I don’t encourage you to change anything about your prayer, except to add this simple preparation. Acknowledge the Lord’s presence. Invite him into your time for prayer. Then begin praying as you usually do. It makes a big difference in the experience of prayer.

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

May 22, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Many of us remember the great Pope, Saint John Paul II. Perhaps it's a sign that I am getting older that there are also many people that no longer remember him. He was the Pope that led the church into the third millennium. To prepare to enter into this new era he issued a document called "Novo millennio ineunte - At the beginning of the new millennium" (NMI). In that document, John Paul II expressed the desire that parishes truly become schools of contemplative prayer.

In that document, he made two observations as he reflected on the state of the world as it entered into the third millennium. The first was that there was a deep desire of many people, both Christian and non-Christian, for a sense of meaning and purpose, for a sense of God's presence, and for a deeper spirituality. The second observation was that by leading people to open their hearts to the love of God will also open their hearts to love their neighbors, and in fact allows Christians to begin to form history according to God's plan (NMI para-graph 33).

I do believe that John Paul II was correct that parishes must become schools of prayer, and I believe that this movement towards prayer is also the key to reviving parish life. I also believe that most people desire something deeper from their life of faith, and that prayer is the key to achieving that deeper and richer faith. My hope is that your hearts desire that deeper faith, and that deeper relationship with Christ. If your heart wants a deeper faith, you share the same desire that the disciples had when they approached Jesus and said, "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1, ESV).

These bulletin columns will focus on this line from the Gospel of Luke, "Lord, teach us to pray," and will be a little catechism on prayer. I hope that it deepens your own prayer and draws you into a deeper relationship with Christ.

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

May 15, 2022

Hear to Serve

This Is How I Will Know

When the news was leaked that the Supreme Court had voted to overturn Roe vs Wade, I heard several Catholics say, "We finally won." I hated to have to break it to them that this is just a very small victory because the war wages on. In fact, there will be a very powerful backlash from those who support abortion. We are not policy makers, billionaires, or online influencers. What can we do?

As followers of Christ, we must always begin with the Gospel. In our reading from the Gospel of John this Sunday, Jesus says, "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). The kind of love Jesus means is the kind He has for us. This is a radical love that wills the good of the other before our own. So, how does this apply to the abortion issue? The United States Council of Catholic Bishops has a plan that has four main areas where we can all help. (You can read all about it on their website: usccb.org.)

The first thing we can do is to educate ourselves on the issue. We have to learn what the Church's teachings are and why. We must then educate our fellow Catholics because over half of the Catholics in the United States believe that legalized abortion should remain available. Whenever we share the truth with others, we must do it out of love. We should share the dignity of all human life and the love that God has for every human person at all stages of life.

The second part of the plan is to provide help for women who are experiencing problems due to their pregnancies. Too often, those who call themselves pro-choice say that those of us who are pro-life are anti-woman and that we only care about the unborn. The Church defends the dignity of women and upholds the role of motherhood. The love of Jesus demands that we help to get rid of the social, economic, physical, and emotional barriers to bringing a child into the world and that we care about the welfare of every child. We have to meet people where they are at, and many people are in very dark places. Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Green Bay has several organizations and ways for each one of us to will the good of the other.

The third thing we can do is to support those people who are working to change our laws and policies. This is a long, hard fight, and even dangerous. Like Paul and Barnabas, in our second reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we must strengthen the disciples and remind them that the work of sharing the Gospel is filled with many hardships. Write letters to our pro-life lawmakers letting them know that you support their work. Also write letters to those politicians who are working to keep abortion laws in place. Tell them that you support protection of the unborn and policies that are morally acceptable alternatives to abortion.

Finally, we must pray. We pray because we have hope. John tells us in Revelation that the "old order has passed away." On His throne Jesus says, "Behold, I make all things new." It is with this confidence that we should pray, knowing that the Lord hears the cries of the poor and vulnerable and answers them.

Now is the time to take a stand. Speak up for Christ and for life in your home, at work, and everywhere you go. Now is the time to love one another as Christ has loved us.

Viva Christo Rey, Deacon Gary

May 8, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This Sunday of the Church's year is often known as "Good Shepherd Sunday" since each year the Gospel reading is taken from John 10, the "Good Shepherd Discourse." As a result, it is often observed as a day of prayer for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, since priests, and religious brothers and sisters, are visible manifestations of Christ in his role as the Good Shepherd. Bishop Ricken has asked all the parishes in the diocese to focus on praying for more vocations this Sunday.

Praying for more vocations is powerful. There was one little village in Italy that produced over 152 priestly vocations and 171 religious sisters. This little village in northern Italy called Lu, with only a few thousand inhabitants, is in a rural area 50 miles east of Turin. It would still be unknown to this day if, in the year 1881, the family mothers of Lu had not made a decision that had "serious consequences."

The deepest desire of many of these mothers was for one of their sons to become a priest or for a daughter to place her life completely in God's service. Under the direction of their parish priest, Msgr. Alessandro Canora, they gathered for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, asking the Lord for vocations. They received Holy Communion on the first Sunday of every month with the intention that one of their children would receive a call to serve God as a priest or a religious sister. After Mass, all the mothers prayed a particular prayer together imploring for vocations to the priesthood.

Through the trusting prayer of these mothers and the openness of the other parents, an atmosphere of deep joy and Christian piety developed in the families, making it much easier for the children to recognize their vocations. Did the Lord not say, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Mt 22:14)? In other words, many are called, but only a few respond to that call. No one expected that God would hear the prayers of these mothers in such an astounding way.

The prayer that the Mothers of Lu prayed was short, simple, and deep:

O God, grant that one of my sons may become a priest!
I myself want to live as a good Christian
and want to guide my children always to do what is right,
so that I may receive the grace, O God,
to be allowed to give you a holy priest or religious sister! Amen.

I believe that there are vocations to both the priesthood and to life as a religious brother or sister in our parishes. So beginning this Sunday until Corpus Christi (Sunday, June 19 this year), as a parish we will be praying the "prayer of the Mothers of Lu" after every Mass. I would also like seven volunteers to commit to coming to the church weekly (one for each day of the week) to pray for both an increase in vocations from our parishes and also that our pews will be filled. Prayer is powerful! Let us be committed to prayer for these holy goals. Lastly, I encourage every parent in our parishes to ask their sons if they would consider a call to the priesthood or as a religious brother, and to ask their daughters if they would consider a call to be a religious sister.

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

May 1, 2022

Blessed Easter Brothers and Sisters!

“This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad!” Psalm 118

I would like to draw our attention to one detail from this Sunday’s Gospel. Towards the beginning of today’s Gospel, Peter declares, “I am going fishing.”

Have you ever wondered why the disciples found it so difficult to recognize Jesus after the Resurrection? After all, they shared a life together as a community for three years before the death of the Lord on the Cross and his Resurrection on the Third Day. And at this point, this would have been at least the third time that Peter and the other disciples would have seen the Lord after his resurrection. Yet, they have eyes, but they do not see. Why is this?

I think a lot of it has to do with Peter’s simple statement, “I am going fishing.” Peter was a fisherman before he met Jesus, and now that he has followed him for three years and witnessed the Resurrection, he is simply returning to his old life. It is almost as if the time that he spent with Jesus did not change him at all. But Jesus wanted to transform his disciples by his presence, the gift of his grace, the gift of new life, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. To be a follower of Jesus means that Jesus will change and transform your life. Peter had a hard time recognizing Jesus on the shore since Peter was resisting the work of grace that was supposed to transform his heart.

Many people in our own day have a very difficult time recognizing the Lord’s presence. But the Lord is present to us! After all, as he was ascending into heaven he made this solemn promise, “I will be with you always until the end of the ages.” The Lord is present to us in the most profound way in the Eucharist. But he is also present to us in and through the events of our everyday life. Do we have a sense of his close presence to us?

Many people refuse to let the Gospel change them. They are like Peter. They spend time with the Lord at times of prayer, at times to study God’s Word, and at times in Church to celebrate the sacraments. But in the end, they, like Peter “go fishing”. That is they return to their old lives. Like Peter, if we do not let the Lord change and transform us, we will not recognize the Lord’s closeness to us.

Do you want to see the Lord? I hope that answer is YES! And the Good News is that the Lord wants to see you too! Let his grace into your heart. Let it change you. And you will start to recognize the Lord and how you encounter him through the sacraments, and the events of your everyday life.

The Lord is Risen!

Fr. Bill

April 24, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Divine Mercy Sunday is a fairly recent addition to the Church's calendar. It was added to the calendar by Pope Saint John Paul II in the year 2000. Although it is a recent addition to the calendar, it has proven to be a very popular feast, with millions of people looking forward to it and being profoundly moved by it each year.

The devotion to Divine Mercy is based upon the visions of Jesus experienced by St. Faustina Kowalska beginning in the 1930s in Poland. Jesus communicated to St. Faustina that she was to be the "secretary of his mercy." There are a number of aspects to the devotion to Divine Mercy.

First is the veneration of the image of Divine Mercy, which Jesus revealed to St. Faustina. It depicts Jesus standing in a white robe, with two rays of light, one white and the other red, emitting from his heart. Jesus encouraged that the image be carried in procession, publicly displayed, and that the Catholic Faithful hang it in their homes.

Second is the recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. A chaplet is a repetitive prayer said with a set of beads to keep track of the prayers. The Rosary is the most famous chaplet, but there are other chaplets, including the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. I started reciting the chaplet on a daily basis by junior year of college. I still recite it to this day. It is through the chaplet that I started to experience, feel, and understand God's love for me. It is through the chaplet that my faith grew deeper, and I consider the chaplet to be a key part of my calling to the priesthood.

Third is observing the "Hour of Mercy." According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus died at 3:00pm on Good Friday. Since we are redeemed from our sins by the death of Jesus, 3:00pm is the "Hour of Mercy." Many people will make sure to recite the chaplet at 3:00pm (it can be recited at any point of the day of course). But it is also a time that St. Faustina encouraged all Catholics to pray and do voluntary acts of penance for the conversion of sinners.

Fourth is praying the Novena of Divine Mercy. Jesus requested that the nine days between Good Friday and Divine Mercy Sunday be offered as a novena of prayers for the world and the conversion of sinners.

The devotion to Divine Mercy is not a substitution for seeking forgiveness of sins through the sacrament of Reconciliation. Rather, the devotion to Divine Mercy is meant to move our hearts to seek God's Mercy through Confession and acts of penance. Devotion to Divine Mercy has also proven to be a strong spiritual help for Christians who are earnestly trying to eliminate vices and sins from their lives and embrace virtues and holiness.

The devotion to Divine Mercy can be summarized as (1) seeking and obtaining God's mercy through prayer, Confession, and penance, (2) trusting in Jesus' abundant mercy, and (3) showing mercy to others, especially those most in need of mercy, so that we can become conduits of God's Mercy.

I encourage all of you to foster a devotion to Divine Mercy. Its fruitfulness is firmly proven by experience.

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

April 17, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Christ is Risen! He is truly Risen! This simple phrase was actually a greeting among ancient Christians. Upon meeting, the first would say: "Christ is Risen!" and the other would respond with, "He is truly Risen!" For two Christians meeting each other, there is nothing more important than sharing the Good News of Christ's victory over sin and death.

During these celebrations of the Sacred Triduum – that is Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter, the Catholic Church makes use of many rich symbols: fire, light and darkness, water, the white garments of the newly baptized, the scent of the newly consecrated Chrism, and the various colors of the vestments and other decorations.

All of these communicate to our five senses the reality of what we are celebrating: the death and Resurrection of Christ. These symbols are so varied and rich in meaning that whole books have been written to explain their meaning.

I will limit myself to one symbol: water. Before Holy Thursday Mass, all the Holy Water in the parishes was removed and poured out in the cemetery. At the midway point of the Easter Vigil, the new water is blessed. We know that water is essential for life. One time when I was staying in the desert in southern California, there was a rare rain storm. Usually in that desert it only rains two or three times a year. Over the next day the once barren desert yielded an abundance of new plant life and flowers. It was one of the most beautiful things that I have ever seen. Just as quickly, as the water dried up, the plants returned to dormancy.

The desert appeared dead, but water brought it to new life. The blessing of the Easter water reminds us that what seems to be spiritually dead can be brought to new life. Part of the joy of Easter is this new life. And we should be rejoicing in the new life.

During the past two years, many of us have experienced a desert. Many of the things that we used to take for granted, both in the church and outside the church, dried up for us. This is a type of emotional death. Many of us also had to look inwardly, struggle with an inner spiritual desert, and start asking the questions about what truly mattered, and what truly had meaning. As life returns to normal, it is also time to sprinkle the water of grace upon these desert experiences and these moments of emotional and spiritual death. Take the time to ask yourself, "Where is Christ calling me to new life in my moment of struggle? Where does Christ want to pour the water of his grace upon my spiritual emptiness?"

Wherever we invite Christ to come and sprinkle the water of his grace, there will be new life. My prayer for you and my invitation for you is that this Easter is not just an event that we remember, but even more, a reality that we experience. This Easter Christ comes with the water of his grace. Bring him your desert, and together with him, rejoice in the new life that he wishes to bring you.

Happy and Blessed Easter,

Fr. Bill

April 10, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With the celebration of the Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, we enter into the most sacred time of the Catholic liturgical calendar: Holy Week. Through sacred symbols and actions, we liturgically participate in the Paschal Mystery of the Lord. That is the death and resurrection of the Lord.

The word paschal originally relates to the Jewish Passover or more specifically to the lamb that was sacrificed for the Passover. For Christians, since Jesus is the true Lamb of God, Paschal refers to Jesus himself, since he was sacrificed for our sins.

The word mystery is not used in the same way as it is used for an Agatha Christie novel or the TV show Unsolved Mysteries. It is not about what we do not know, rather for a Christian the word mystery refers to those things that exceed our ability and understanding. The mystery for a Christian is that during Holy Week we do not merely remember what Jesus did nearly two thousand years ago. We do much more than remember. The symbols and actions that we use during the liturgy makes us present to the Lord. Liturgical mystery makes the death of the Lord and the resurrection of the Lord present to us here and now.

We don't just remember the death and resurrection of the Lord, we participate in it!

One of my favorite practices of Holy Week highlights our participation. Have you ever noticed that during Holy Week you do something during Mass that you never do during any other time of the year? Normally at Mass the deacon (or priest) are the only ones that proclaim the Gospel, but on Palm Sunday and Good Friday the whole congregation proclaims the Gospel.

This highlights that the Lord did not offer him-self only for the people of his time, but we also take part in his sacrifice. When we together proclaim that Peter denied Jesus, we come to realize that we too often deny Jesus in our thoughts, words and actions. Together we say, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us." When do we make the same choice in our life today? It's no secret that the Gospel makes demands on us that often are unpopular in today's culture. Do we choose the Gospel or do we choose what is popular? Do we choose the Gospel or do we choose what is politically correct? Every time we do not choose the Gospel, we cast our vote for Barabbas.

Take time to reflect on the Passion narratives this week. Take them paragraph by paragraph. Ask yourself: when have I voted with the crowd against Jesus? When have I chosen Caesar over the King of heaven and earth?

But as you reflect, never forget the reason why the Lord offered himself as a sacrifice. Reflect not just on our own words, but also on his words. "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." Or the words that he speaks to the dying thief, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

And lastly, let us imitate the Lord as he entrusted himself to the loving hands of his Father, and together with the Lord, we say, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Blessings on the Holy Week,

Father Bill

April 3, 2022

Hear to Serve

BOLD STATEMENTS

In our second reading today, St. Paul makes a pretty bold statement in his Letter to the Philippians. “For His sake I have accepted the loss of all things and consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him” (Phil 3:8).

Can you and I also make that claim? In today’s world we place our values and our worth on material and monetary possessions and absolute truth has become covered up by relativism. How many of us would accept the loss of everything we own? How many of us are willing to let go of our comfortable religious practices and really live them? How many of us would be willing to suffer if only we could come to know Christ better and have our lives become more grounded in Him?

Since St Paul (Saul) had his dramatic encounter with the risen Christ, everything else in his life became rubbish, unimportant. His eyes, his mind, and his heart were opened up to a much greater life, a life in the Risen Christ. Paul left behind his old understanding of faith where following laws and rules was the most important thing. He realized that Christ’s resurrection will elevate us to a life so much better than we can ever imagine.

As a kid I was pretty fascinated with National Geographic Magazine. Some of my favorite pictures were of the tropical fish. I could look at them for hours. But it wasn’t until I got in the water on a snorkeling trip that I realized the injustice that pictures do to these creatures. Their color, movement, and beauty was so much more intense in the living experience of being with them.

That must have been in a small way what it was like for Paul to interact with the risen Christ. That is what he is trying to tell not only the Philippians but us today. We have to have a living relationship with Jesus. We have to look at every aspect of our faith and connect it to the living Christ. It is not about following the Commandments and all of the rules, but living them out in love of God and each other.

This is not easy. The Catholic writer, Flannery O’Connor wrote, “What people don’t realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it is the cross.” If we had perfect maturity, we would be able to see past the cost to the glory of the prize. Even St. Paul admits he hasn’t attained that perfect maturity, he hasn’t mastered it all since being taken possession of by Jesus the Christ. This is a life-long relationship that grows, changes, challenges, and matures.

We should remember that we too have been taken possession of by Jesus the Christ in our baptism. It is up to us to continue toward the goal of the next life, a better life, a life that will offer us things we can’t even imagine. St. Paul tells us to forget what lies behind us. He urges us to let go of material and monetary possessions and to forget about our self-fulfillment in relativism. None of these things are life-giving experiences. He tells us to focus on what lies ahead and aim for the prize of everlasting life through Jesus the Christ. Let us make a bold statement today.

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary

March 27, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's first reading is a celebration. After forty years of wandering in the desert, the people of Israel finally enter into the promised land. They have reached their goal!

The early Christians read this passage symbolically. The wandering in the desert represents our life here on earth, and the manna represents the sacraments (especially the Eucharist) that support us on our way. The promised land represents heaven. Notice how the manna stops once the people enter the promised land. They no longer need God to send them bread since they now eat the produce of the land. There are no sacraments in heaven. This is because in heaven we will be directly joining in the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

The manna was holy since it was a gift from God. The manna was good since it provided strength for the people to continue their journey through the desert. But God had something better planned for them. It is the same for the sacraments. They are holy since they are instituted by Christ. They are good since through them we already receive the grace and blessings from God that strengthen us on our journey through life.

During their wanderings in the desert, the Hebrew people had often forgotten that the Lord was leading them to the promised land. They were so focused on today that they forgot about tomorrow. Forgetting the great gift that God had promised them, they could not understand the hardships and difficulties of the desert. They even grumbled that they wanted to return to Egypt, to the very place where they were slaves. Nonetheless, the promise of greater things yet to come reminded them to keep on moving forward.

As we face our own difficulties and uncertainties during our "wandering in the desert," we too can have a difficult time understanding what God is doing. Notice how the Hebrews forgot the hardships of the desert once they entered the land that God promised them. It is the same for us. As we lift our eyes to God and his promises, the difficulties of the present moment seem small compared to the glory that God has prepared for us. And during this time here, God continues to nourish us through the sacraments. May we have the strength to continue to look towards the Lord and his promises, that we too may share in the celebration of entering our own promised land.

A blessed and holy Lent to you,

Father Bill

March 20, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's first reading should be familiar to most of us since it is the story of Moses and the burning bush. This story is an important stage in the history of salvation and supremely important for both Jewish and Christian theology, but it also provides a practical lesson on developing our spiritual life.

"And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, 'I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned'" (Exodus 3:2-3, ESV). In the dry desert climate, a burning bush was such a common sight that it would not have warranted much attention. But Moses was aware that God was using what appeared to be an ordinary event to reveal himself in an extraordinary way. Are we paying attention? St. Josemaria Escriva remarks that God often reveals himself through the ordinary events of our daily life, but we do not take the time to reflect and notice.

Moses was curious to see more and he laid aside what he was doing to investigate. Curiosity is an important, yet underrated, aspect of faith. Anyone who thinks the Catholic faith isn't interesting is simply not paying attention. What sparks your interest about Catholicism and draws you in deeper? This is a place to be curious and is often the place that God draws us deeper into himself.

As Moses approached this great sight, God responded, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5, ESV). Why did God ask Moses to remove his sandals? It was an act of reverence. Faith requires reverence. Reverence is the respect that we show towards God and towards holy things. Are we reverent in church and in our prayer? There is a casualness about church that is too common. While God is approachable, he also deserves our respect. A lack of reverence harms faith in three ways: 1) it is disrespectful of God the Almighty, 2) it communicates to ourselves and others that these are not important, and 3) it diminishes the mystery of our faith. Cultivating an attitude of reverence is a practical way of deepening one's faith.

There is another effect to removing the sandals: on the rough, rocky desert soil, Moses would not have been able to run away from God! By telling him to remove his sandals, God was forcing Moses to stay and listen. Bishop Ricken often encourages this prayer, "Lord, help me to do your will, not a moment too soon, and not at a moment too late, but at the moment you call me to do it." Faith requires waiting on the Lord because it's the Lord's time not our time. Prayers often seem dry or fruitless, but we rush through them. Try slowing down, and give the prayer time "to soak in," and don't be so quick to run away. God often speaks at the last moment of prayer, not at the first.

God would have also expected Moses that would try to run away since he was going to send Moses back to Egypt. This is not something that Moses wanted to do, after all, Pharaoh was seeking to kill him. Just like Moses, God has a plan for us, and more often than not at first it is something we would run away from. When God is calling, do not run away! Remember the words of the Our Father, "thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." God's plan will disrupt our lives, but God knows us better than we know ourselves, and his plan for us is greater than what we could plan for ourselves.

Praying that you will have a happy and blessed Lent,

Father Bill

March 13, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Have you ever climbed a mount? When I was stationed in San Diego, I lived close to Cowles Mountain. At only 1,593 feet, it was not a very tall mountain, but it was the highest point in the city of San Diego. And even though it was only 1,593, physical effort was still required to reach the peak.

Most Saturday mornings, I climbed Cowles Mountain since the view from the top was worth it. The view was so good that I would forget about the effort required to climb that mountain.

In today's Gospel, Jesus takes his three closest disciples up to a mountain top. However, he was not taking them to show them the view, but rather to show them his glory. What the gospel account leaves out is the effort that Peter, James, and John had to exercise as they followed Jesus up those mountain trails.

The church always reads an account of Jesus' Transfiguration on the Second Sunday of Lent. This is reminding us that on our journey as disciples of the Lord, we too are climbing a mountain. This is not a physical mount of course, but rather the Lord is showing us our future. We read in the first letter of St. John, "When he appears, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). This is our goal: to be like Jesus!

But how do we climb this mountain? These trails are not marked by sign posts, but rather, the Word of God and the examples of the saints show us the way. And just like climbing a physical mountain, it will require effort. During the season of Lent, this trail to climb the Lord's mountain is marked by three signs: 1) prayer, 2) fasting, and 3) almsgiving.

If we have taken Lent seriously so far, these three practices are not strangers to our daily life. If we have taken Lent seriously so far, we have experienced the sacrifice that these three practices require. Like climbing a mountain, Lent should be hard. But this Sunday, we look towards the mountain top, and we see our destiny. Let this be an encouragement for us in our Lenten sacrifices. That every moment of time sacrificed for prayer, every act of self-denial that allows us to fast and give alms, every effort of Lent is one more foot that we have climbed on the mountain of holiness.

I encourage you to reflect on this passage from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "Do you not know that runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown" (1 Corinthians 9:24-25, NAB).

As disciples, we are seeking something much more than a mountain view, or a gold medal. As disciples we are seeking eternal life. If the mountain view is worth the climb, and if the gold medal is worth the discipline of athletic training, how much more effort should we be willing to put into our eternal life?

Blessed and holy Lent,

Father Bill

March 6, 2022

My brothers and sisters,

Lent is once again upon us. It is a time when we are asked to increase our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It is a time when we as Catholics are asked to really put the emphasis on others and not ourselves. It is time for your deacon to make his annual plug for the CRS Rice Bowl.

The thing I love about Catholic Relief Services and their Rice bowls is that nothing is wasted. When you give to Catholic Relief Service, 92% of your donation goes to the actual program. The remaining 8% is used for administrative costs, advertising, and other general expenses. PLUS and this is a big PLUS, whatever you give to the CRS Rice Bowl, 25% of your donation stays right here in our Diocese of Green Bay to help the hungry in our area. You can't do better than that, can you?

The Rice Bowl donations help CRS to target hunger faced by people around the globe. They buy seeds for farmers, goats so families can have milk, and CRS has programs so people can have fresh water. They also teach people to run small businesses so they can be self-sustaining.

Last year I brought up the 1% guide. I believe this worked out well because our donations were up for the Rice Bowls. Remember I asked that you total up your monthly expenses, mortgage, rent, car payments, utilities, food, etc. Whatever that comes to, you give 1% of your expenses to the Rice Bowl. A one-time deal. So, if your monthly expenses total \$2000, you make a one-time donation of \$20.

Well, this year I'm going to ask for a little more. If you can find it possible to give one and a half percent to the CRS Rice Bowl, it would really make a great difference. As costs have risen for us, you can rest assured costs have also risen for those doing charitable work. Inflation is at 6 or 7% in our country, we know groceries are more expensive. If you tried to build or remodel, you know the cost of building materials is through the roof.

There are several ways we can get the extra half a percent. We can put a Rice Bowl in our car and deposit our change every time we go through a drive thru or come out of a store. As we fast and give up chocolate, dessert, and beer for Lent, we can put the money we would have spent on those items into the Rice Bowl.

Catholic Relief Services is gearing up for the war in the Ukraine where they are already providing food, shelter, hygiene supplies, and counseling for the women and children fleeing into Poland and other countries.

So, as you give for the Rice Bowl make sure you mark your check or your envelope CRS Rice Bowl so the Holy Ladies in our parish offices get your donation to the right place.

This Lent let us Pray, let us Fast, and let us give Alms for those in the world who are less fortunate. May our Lenten observances align us with the will of Christ.

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary

February 27, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In just a few days, Lent begins with the celebration of Ash Wednesday. The first Sunday of Lent follows, and the church always reads one of the Gospel accounts of the temptation of Christ in the desert. Christ spent forty days in the desert, and Lent is also forty days. This is not a coincidence. The Church is asking us to imitate Christ.

Lent begins with ashes to remind us about the passing nature of this world. In days of old, before a Pope or king was crowned, a velvet rope was burnt before him by a friar, while the friar announced, “Sic transit gloria mundi,” which is Latin for “thus passes the glory of the world.” The ashes on our foreheads should remind us of the passing glory of the world and help us to shift our perspective to focus on those things that do not pass away. This Wednesday, take time to reflect on what’s important to God. St. Paul gives us a clue on what is truly important, “So faith, hope, love remain, and the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13, NAB).

On Ash Wednesday we are also required to fast. This means that Catholics, between the ages of 18 and 59, are required to restrict their intake of food to one regular size meal, and may take two additional small meals to maintain strength. This fast is also required on Good Friday. In addition, all Catholics age 14 and older are required to abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent. These are minimum requirements for fasting, but Pope Paul VI (Pope from 1963 to 1978) encouraged all Catholics to voluntarily embrace more fasting especially during Lent. With fasting we imitate Christ, who hungered in the desert.

Why fast? Generations for Catholics (and not just Catholics, but most major world religions) experienced fasting as a powerful spiritual tool. Fasting is an act of reparation, by voluntarily enduring the hardship of hunger, we can make amends for our own sins and the sins of others. Fasting is an act of asceticism or spiritual training, by voluntarily choosing to restrict our food, we can train our appetites and grow in moral and spiritual freedom. Fasting is a powerful tool to combat temptations. Fasting is an act of solidarity with the poor. Many people throughout the world are malnourished. By going hungry, we can share in their cross and the money we would have spent on food can be given to charity.

Lastly, fasting awakens a spiritual hunger. As Catholics, we understand that there is a deep connection between the soul and the body. By choosing to endure hunger voluntarily, often we notice that a deeper spiritual hunger for God awakens within our souls. The experience of the saints and other spiritual masters has shown that the combination for prayer and fasting is the quickest way to inflame an otherwise lukewarm faith.

For our spiritual ancestors, the forty days leading up to Easter were known simply as “the Fast.” They knew the power of this spiritual practice. I ask for you to prayerfully consider your fasting this Lent, that you too can experience that power in our life of faith.

Many Blessings,

Fr. Bill

February 20, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's second reading, the Apostle Paul compares the life of the first man, who is earthly, and the second man, who is spiritual.

As Christians, we believe that we have a body and a soul. Both a body and a soul require care. Since we can see a body, it's easy to notice the needs of the body: good nutrition, proper clothing and housing, and medical attention when necessary. These are the needs of the earthly man that the Apostle Paul writes about.

The spiritual man is the life of Christ in our soul. As Christians, we believe that Christ dwells in our souls from the moment we are baptized. Paul writes about this to the Colossians, "You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). Since Christ's life in our soul is mysterious and unseen, it is all too easy to forget about the needs of our Christ life. Our souls need just as much (if not more) care and attention as our bodies.

Lent is approaching in just a few weeks. On Ash Wednesday, when we come forward to receive our Ashes, we will hear these words, "Remember that you are but dust, and to dust you shall return." Lent is a time to re-examine our spiritual priorities. While no one should neglect the needs of the body, after all the body was crafted by God from the mud of the earth, the body will pass away. The treasures we invest in our body will only last as long as our time here on earth. As Psalm 90 tells us, "You sweep man away as with a flood; he is like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers" (Psalm 90:5-6). The body is important, but it is not eternally important.

Rather during Lent, we are called to give priority to the care of our souls. We return to the words that the Apostle Paul writes to the Colossians, "If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is" (Colossians 3:1). Our soul is already our participation in eternal life, and we should give it the attention and care that it needs. The soul is eternally important.

During Lent the Church proposes three powerful tools to renew the life of Christ within our souls: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving. In prayer, we renew that conversation with God that nourishes our souls and builds up our faith. In fasting, we voluntarily go hungry. Fasting not only is an effective tool at combating temptation, but it expresses a trust and hope in the Lord, "who sends the rich away hungry, but fills the hungry with good things" (Mary's song from Luke 1:53). In almsgiving, we show our love for our neighbor, which fulfills the second half of the greatest commandment, "to love your neighbor, as yourself" (see Matthew 22:39). Almsgiving also helps us to realize the proper place of our worldly good in light of the perspective of eternity.

With the days we have left before Lent begins, please take time to consider seriously, prayerfully, and intentionally, how you will be caring for your soul during Lent.

I leave you with the words of the Gospel of Matthew, "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven: where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 9:20).

Many Blessings, Fr. Bill

February 13, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, Luke addresses the financial and social conditions of the human race: the rich, the poor, the hungry, the satisfied, those grieving, those laughing, the outcast, and those socially acceptable. Some people become so consumed by their troubles, they are unable to recognize God's tremendous love for them. With our Hearts Filled with Hope, we are called to help those struggling most in life.

Through your support of the Bishop's Appeal, Catholic Charities counselors are able to help people resolve their problems. Whether helping a grieving widow, a teenager with a drug addiction, or a family in extreme debt, counselors are there bringing hope.

As a chaplain in the navy, I have personally benefited from the counseling services offered for free to service members. However, these services are not available to the general public. I am grateful to learn that men and women from our diocese have free counseling services available through Catholic Charities, so that everyone who is struggling with challenging life issues may receive competent and caring help. You help to support these services through your support of the Bishop's Appeal.

Join me in helping lift up those who are struggling most in life. Please prayerfully consider making a gift to the 2022 Bishop's Appeal. Visit the Bishop's Appeal website at www.catholicfoundationgb.org/give to make your gift today! Thank you for your support of the 2022 Bishop's Appeal.

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

February 6, 2022

Hear to Serve...

FISHING IS HARD WORK

More than a few years ago, a good friend and I decided to go smelt fishing. We took our nets to all of the piers in the area and, like the Apostles in today's Gospel reading, we didn't have anything to show for our efforts. When we stopped for gas, an old guy at the next pump began talking to us. He told us to go out to the nuclear plant because the smelt like the warm water discharge.

Off we went armed with our dip nets and several five gallon buckets. Well, let me tell you the old man was right because before long we had a bucket full of smelt. We were astonished and delighted when we realized we had soon filled five buckets.

Well, let me tell you what seemed like a great idea wasn't so much a great idea after cleaning the first bucketful of those tiny fish. At 4:30 in the morning, we were sorry we had ever met that old man.

As I read the Gospel today, I couldn't help but think about Peter when he cries out, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Yes, we all could be a bit more humble and admit to the Lord we are sinful people. But I wonder if there was something else that was bothering Peter? Did Peter realize before anyone else that when Jesus comes into your boat, comes into your life, that there is going to be work to do? And sometimes what seems to be impossible work?

Our call to serve Christ can come in so many different forms. Sometimes we are called to dip the nets of our time and talents. Our parishes are in need of volunteers to work at and run our Fish Fry and Fall Festival. We need people to be on our councils. We are in great need of readers and altar servers. We need parents who are willing to volunteer and to teach their children the value of service. We are also called to spend time learning more about our faith and sharing it with others.

We are also called to lower the nets of our treasure. We are asked to give to the Bishop's Appeal. When each of us sacrifices what we can, we are assured of a great catch. Let's work together to meet our goals in record time.

Fishing for the Lord is hard work, harder than cleaning buckets of smelt. While my friend and I were eventually rewarded when we feasted on our catch, Jesus will reward our labor and sacrifices at His great feast in Heaven.

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary

January 30, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Peace be with you! Today's second reading is familiar to anyone who has recently attended a wedding. It's Paul's "discourse on love." The poetic reflection on love makes it an obvious choice for bridal couples. Paul did not, however, originally intend to reflect on romantic love. He intended to reflect on the love that should prevail among his disciples and among ourselves as Christians.

Paul's idea of Christian love is beautiful, but not widely practiced in our culture. "Love is patient..." Are we patient? "Love is not quick-tempered..." Are we quick-tempered? "It does not brood over injury..." Do we brood? Our current times thrive off of being offended, and on being quick tempered, and self-seeking. As Christians, we are not called to conform ourselves to the world, but rather to be transformed by the Spirit of Christ (see Romans 12:2). If we take seriously Paul's call to love patiently, kindly, and selflessly, we can transform not only our own hearts, but the world around us.

Paul is not just writing from theory but from his own experience. Remember that he was not always an Apostle. He started as a persecutor of Christians. He was responsible for imprisoning Christians and even handing them over to be executed. Then he was converted by Christ on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:1-22, the Feast of the Conversion of Paul was just celebrated this past week, January 25). Paul was blinded by the Light of Christ and had to be led by the hand to the Church in Damascus.

What do you think Paul expected when he was brought into the Church? These were the family members and friends of the same people that just days before Paul had handed over to be killed. These people knew that Paul was coming to Damascus with the intention of putting them in chains to bring them back to face trial in Jerusalem. And now, Paul was asking to be baptized, and accepted by them.

If anyone had the right to be quick-tempered and to brood over their injuries, these people had that right. If these people reflected our current culture, Paul would have expected recrimination and even vengeance.

But what did Paul experience?

Paul was received with patience and kindness. The Christians were not self-inflated nor rude. Instead of being quick-tempered, they were quick to forgive. Instead of brooding over injury, they rejoiced that God's grace was powerful enough to convert someone like Paul.

Paul writes beautifully about love because he received this love from other Christians. It healed him. To love like Paul calls us to love is challenging. It's more than challenging, it's sacrificial. But it's powerful. It's powerful enough to convert Paul, and powerful enough to convert our neighbors. It is the love that we are called to share with others.

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

January 23, 2022

How much time do you spend with the Word of God that comes to us through Sacred Scripture? The letter to the Hebrews tells us that the Word of God is living and effective (4:12). The Word of God has power. I encourage every member of the parish to spend at least ten to fifteen minutes a day meditating on Sacred Scripture. Invite the power of God's Word into your hearts, lives, and homes. Yes, at times it can be difficult to understand, but the power of God's Word does not come from our understanding, rather the power comes from the Holy Spirit. Some suggestions for incorporating in your prayer would be participating in a Bible study. One is offered every Tuesday at 9:00 am at Holy Trinity, and we will be looking at starting one at St. Gregory's in the near future. There are also a number of free Bible studies offered online, check out <https://stpaulcenter.com/>, <https://amenapp.org/>, or listening to one of many popular "Bible in Year" podcasts (<https://ascensionpress.com/pages/biy-registration>).

Blessings,

Fr. Bill

January 16, 2022

Hear to Serve

“WOMAN”

In John’s Gospel today we hear Mary make a request of her Son when the wine ran out at the wedding they were attending in Cana. We hear Jesus respond to his mother in what we would consider a disrespectful tone. Jesus addresses His mother in this way, “Woman, what concern is that to you and me?” The only other time we hear of addressing His Mother as “Woman” is also in John’s Gospel when He is on the cross. Jesus says to her, “Woman, behold your son.” (Jn 19:26). Why is this? Doesn’t Jesus have respect for His mother?

St. Augustine answers the question as he tells us that Jesus was not trying to disrespect His mother, the person who He received flesh from. No, Jesus wanted to prioritize His divinity instead. As Jesus was about to do His first miracle and change water into wine, He wanted His divinity to stand out and the divinity that made the woman, rather than the humanity that was made in her. In other words, Jesus is responding to the situation not as Mary’s son but as Mary’s God.

This is exactly as it should be, for Mary also wants our focus to be on our Lord, Jesus. When Mary was carrying Jesus in her womb, her soul cried out, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.” So, at the wedding in Cana, even though Jesus seemed to ignore her plea, Mary still put the focus on Jesus and his divinity. She told the servants, “Do whatever He tells you.” Mary always leads us to the Divine. Mary always leads us to her Son because Mary knows her Son is extraordinary.

Just as Adam and Eve led all of humanity away from God, away from the extraordinary life of the Divine through their fall into original sin, Mary wants to lead us back to her son. Mary encourages us to be drawn back to the Divine.

As we start back in Ordinary Time this week, let us not be fooled into thinking our lives should be ordinary. By our Baptism we become sons and daughters of God, and we are called to be something much more than ordinary.

Jesus took ordinary water, and he changed it into something even better--wine. Then, He did something extraordinary and made wine into His blood so we could become extraordinary. When we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, we share in the Divine life.

So, let us listen to Mary. Let Mary lead us to her Son, our God and Savior, Jesus the Christ. And let us, “Do whatever He tells us to do.”

Viva Christo Rey,

Deacon Gary

January 9, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today is the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This feast concludes the Christmas season, and tomorrow we begin Ordinary Time.

What does it mean to be baptized? Most of us were baptized when we were too young to remember, and as a result it is easy to take this sacrament for granted. St. Louis the King understood the importance of baptism, as he reflects, "I think more of the place where I was baptized than of Rheims Cathedral where I was crowned. It is a greater thing to be a child of God than to be the ruler of a Kingdom. The crown I shall lose at death but baptism will be my passport to an everlasting glory."

We celebrated the Feast of the Holy Family, which reminds us that Jesus entered a human family. Jesus makes a great exchange by becoming Incarnate: he enters a human family here on earth so that we might become members of God's family in heaven. He was the only child of Mary, but he wanted to make her a spiritual mother of many children. As Saint Paul writes, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (Romans 8:29). Baptism makes us a child of God, and hence a brother or sister of Christ.

There is nothing small about being a son or daughter of God, but it is something that we often forget. Today's feast should remind us to celebrate our own baptism and to rejoice in being called a child of God. Take the time to pull out the family Bible and mark the anniversary of your baptism on the calendar. Celebrate that day as a second birthday. Pray for the priest (or deacon) who baptized you. And renew your baptismal promises.

May this feast be a source of joy for you this week, and may its celebration spurn you on to continue to grow in holiness and grace.

Many Blessings

Fr. Bill

January 2, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Peace be with you and Merry Christmas! Today we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord (which is traditionally celebrated on January 6). Since there are twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany, this is where we get the traditional twelve days of Christmas. The American Bishops transfer Epiphany to a close by Sunday for the convenience of the faithful. So if you had your heart set on a gift of “eleven pipers piping,” you will have to wait for another year.

There are three traditional aspects of Epiph-any: (1) the visit of the Magi bearing gifts, (2) the Baptism of the Lord, and (3) changing water into wine at Cana. The Catholic liturgy spreads out these three celebrations over three Sundays, celebrating Epiphany today, the Baptism next Sunday, and the wedding feast at Cana is read the following Sunday.

In many cultures, gift giving happens on Epiphany instead of Christmas. This remembers the gifts that the Magi brought to the baby Jesus. Were these the gifts that Jesus wanted? Gold, frankincense and myrrh are not as practical as diapers, wipes, and onesies, but they are important symbols. With gold, the Magi were proclaiming that Jesus was their king. With frankincense, the Magi were confessing that Jesus was Lord and God. And with myrrh, a burial spice, they were recognizing that Jesus would die for the sins of the world. So while these gifts were not the most practical gifts for a mother and her infant, they were perfectly appropriate for Mary the Mother of God and Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

What gifts can we offer to Jesus? He no longer needs gold, frankincense and myrrh. At every Mass, we are asked to offer our gifts, when we hear the priest say: “Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God our Almighty Father...” St. Paul helps us to answer this question in the letter to the Romans: “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice...” (Romans 12:1).

At every Mass, Jesus wants three gifts from us: (1) He wants the lives of Christians be devoted to him. Every Christian has a mission from God, and the more we seek to do his will the more we give our life to him. (2) He wants hearts eager to grow in holiness. By growing in holiness, we come to resemble him, and share in his glory. (3) And, he wants our love and gratitude. Recall the words of the prayer of St. Francis, “It is in giving that I receive and in dying that I am born to eternal life.” Jesus does not want these gifts for the sake of his own ego, but rather the more that we give ourselves to him, the more that we receive his life, and his life is our joy!

Let us imitate the Magi today, by giving Christ the gifts he truly desires!

Merry Christmas,

Fr. Bill