**December 18, 2020**

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- All-schools Mass unites students in prayer
- Christmas Tree decorated in St. Mary’s Park
- Students crafted ornaments
- Coronavirus report
- Obituary: Father Robert Uralge
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- Bishop urges trust like Mary
- ‘Be Witnesses’
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- The Holy Innocents:
  - Church musicians reflect on year
  - Cathedral Nativity window:
    - ‘Glory to the newborn King’
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- Commentary: The mystery of God’s plan
- Finding a new normal
- Grassroots, tragedies, that are often unknown and hidden, and in the conflicts of the context in which they live, with the sentiments of Jesus so that they may become everywhere instruments and messengers of peace, to sow love where there is hatred, pardon where there is injury, joy where there is sadness and truth where there is error, according to the beautiful words of a well-known Franciscan prayer.

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**Christmas at the Cathedral**

**Christmas Mass**

- **Thursday, December 24**
  - 5:30 p.m., Mass of the Vigil of Christmas
  - 11:00 p.m., Pontifical Midnight Mass, doors open at 10:45 p.m., prelude begins at 11:40 p.m., Mass at 12 midnight
  - Midnight Mass prelude, by the Cathedral Bishop’s Choir and instrumental ensemble, on WLWT ME-TV

- **Friday, December 25**
  - 5:30 p.m., Mass of Christmas Day
  - 10 a.m., Mass of Christmas Day

- **Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**
  - **Thursday, December 31**
    - 5:30 p.m., Vigil Mass
  - **Friday, January 1**
    - 10 a.m. Mass

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**Fourth Sunday of Advent**

"Precisely this aspect of the prophecy, that of messianic peace, leads us naturally to emphasize that the city of Bethlehem is also a symbol of peace, in the Holy Land and in the world. Unfortunately, in our day, it does not represent an attained and stable peace, but rather a peace sought with effort and hope. Yet God is never resigned to this state of affairs, so that this year too, in Bethlehem and throughout the world, the mystery of Christmas will be renewed in the Church. A prophecy of peace for every person who obliges Christians to immerse themselves in the life of the city, which is the cradle of the Messiah, the Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and ever peaceful." (Isaiah 9:1-2; 5-6)

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**December 2020**

My dear Friends,

Praised be Jesus Christ!

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who lived in gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing. For a child is born to us, a son is given to us, upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and ever peaceful." (Isaiah 9:1-2; 5-6)

What consoling words! Talk about walking in darkness, living in gloom. Rather describes our last 10 months, wouldn’t you say? The darkness of the pandemic, the gloom it brings, the civil unrest, the political turmoil. When will it end? When will we get back to normal? How can we go on like this? Where’s the joy of the season? Is there any reason to rejoice? Will there ever be a reason to rejoice again?

Despite the gloom, the darkness, the unrest — there is hope. “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us, upon his shoulder dominion rests.” (Isaiah 9:6) Yes, there is reason for joy, we can rejoice again and for all time — no matter how dark it seems. For the Wonder-Counselor, the God-Hero, the Father-Forever, the Prince of Peace is here. Among us! Alongside us! Ever in our midst!

As we celebrate a Christmas in the midst of all the turmoil around us we are reminded that God loves us. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to save us. His birth brings good news that no amount of bad news can dampen. His birth brings a light that cannot be extinguished; a peace of mind and heart that nothing or no one can take from us. So yes, there is reason for joy.

The song of the angels as they announced the birth of our Savior to the shepherds rings out to this very day: “Do not be afraid, for behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ‘For today in the city of David a savior has been born to you who is the Messiah and Lord.’” (Luke 2:9-11) That good news of great joy is ours now and forever!

I wish you a truly blessed, joy-filled, peace-filled Christmas. May the Infant Jesus warm your hearts and bring you that joy that remains forever. God bless you and those you love!

Yours devotedly in the Lord,

Most Rev. Roger J. Foy, D.D.
Bishop of Covington

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*The Messenger* serves the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky since 1926
All-schools Mass unites schools across diocese in Advent prayer

Laura Keener  
Editor

Nearly 3,000 families were logged in, Dec. 14, to partici-  
pate in the live stream of the diocese’s first all-schools  
Advent Mass. Bishop Roger Foys decided to celebrate the  
Mass as a way to unite the students, who have been learn-  
ing remotely since Nov. 23, in prayer during these final days of Advent as they prepare their hearts for Christmas. While the students attended virtually, the deans, principals and superintendent of Schools were present in the Cathedral. Their presence made the students present in a more tangible way as they represented their school communities.

In his homily Bishop Foys focused on waiting and, in a special way, Advent waiting. “I’ve never met in my life anyone who likes to wait,” said Bishop Foys. “Yet the season of Advent is all about waiting — preparing and waiting. The important thing about waiting is how we wait,” noting that some people wait more impatiently than others.

The waiting of Advent serves three purposes, Bishop Foys said. “First we wait for Christmas, the anniversary of the birth of our Savior, the Lord, Jesus Christ. We also wait and prepare for Jesus to come into our own lives. And, of course, part of that is waiting and preparing for the time when Jesus will come again. He will come at the end of these last days of Advent and looking forward with hope to returning to the classroom in January.”

In Scripture, John the Baptist says, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” We are to be that voice in our time, preparing ourselves but also helping others to prepare. How do we do this?” Bishop Foys asked.

Bishop Foys said that how a person waits will make all the difference. “If we wait properly and profitably, if we prepare ourselves while we are waiting, then that for what we are waiting will bring us great joy. If we get tired of waiting, and we lose sight of what it is we are waiting, we can lose interest,” he said. “It takes faith, it takes stamina, it takes patience and it takes hope and it all comes down to how do we wait, how do we prepare ourselves, how impor- tant is God’s coming into our lives?”

In acknowledging the difficulties and sacrifices that teachers, students and parents have had to endure during this unique year, Bishop Foys said that this waiting and sacrificing can teach us to identify and to appreciate what is most important in life.

“One of the things we were forced to do during these months was to spend more time with family, time to read, time to pray, time to do projects we had been putting off, time to see what really matters,” he said. “To you students watching, my guess would be that a day off of school is not going to be so great as it once was. Being in school, in per- son with your classmates and teachers, hopefully, will look a whole lot better. Waiting tells us something about who we really are and what really matters.”

After Mass, Kendra McGuire, superintendent of Schools, addressed the students, encouraging them during these last days of Advent and looking forward with hope to returning to the classroom in January.

“We are truly blessed to gather as one school communi- ty. Today we are not 37 different schools or nearly 10,000 individual students and staff; today we are united together as a community of believers joined as one in prayer and thanks to God,” Mrs. McGuire said.

“We have one week of school remaining in this year of 2020 and though this year was full of new challenges for us as teachers and students we need to finish strong. Let’s give this last week our best effort so that when this week comes to a close we can spend time with our families and focus on the reason for being off school — to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. During this third week of Advent, the three lit candles on our Advent wreath reminds us that Jesus is near. It is a reminder for us to take a look into our own hearts to see if we are truly prepared for Jesus this Christmas ... It is time to stop doing hurtful things and instead look for ways to be like Christ to one another.”

Deck the halls

In preparation for the Christmas Tree Dedication Dec. 16, mem- bers of the Curia staff decorated the Diocese of Covington’s Christmas tree in St. Mary’s Park Dec. 15 with ornaments created by students from the diocesan schools. Each school contributed its own large ornament as well. (from left) Brian Harvey, assis- tant director, Buildings and Properties and David Cooley, co-director, Catechesis and Evangelization, brave new heights to decorate the upper branches of the 20-foot tree.

Coronavirus Report (as of Tuesday, Dec. 15)

Note: Due to the mandate that all schools transition to non-traditional instruction the following report includes only positive COVID cases and not self-quarantines. Information is self-reported.

Positive Cases
Active positive cases: 19  
Recovered positive cases: 273
Total ever positive cases: 292

Schools, Parishes, and Organizations

with active COVID cases:

Covington Catholic High School, Park Hills
Holy Spirit Parish, Newport
Holy Trinity School, Bellevue
Notre Dame Academy, Park Hills
St. Agnes School, Park Hills
St. Cecilia School, Independence
St. Paul School, Florence
St. Plux X School, Edgewood
St. Timothy School, Union
Villa Madonna Academy High/Jr. High, Villa Hills
(Villa schools without students, faculty or staff in quarantine do not need to report.)
Beloved pastor and former superintendent was devout, approachable

Father Robert “Bob” Joseph Urlage, a devoted priest and gentleman, died Dec. 9, 2020 after 62 years of service to God and the Church. He was born June 13, 1931 in Covington to Stanley B. and Mary Kohlmann Urlage. He was the last of his generation, following his siblings Margaret, Helen, Bettejean, Stanley Charles and Arthur to eternal rest. His family was close-knit and his mother’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary trickled down to her children and future generations. They were a Holy Cross family though the boys transferred to Covington Catholic High School, Park Hills and played baseball and basketball there.

When he discerned his priestly calling, Father Urlage studied at St. Mary’s College, St. Mary for philosophy and St. Patrick College, Maynooth, Ireland for theology, by order from Bishop William T. Mulloy. Later he earned a master’s in education from Xavier University, Cincinnati.

Father Urlage, who always spoke of God’s goodness to him, never forgot his time in Ireland and he liked to tell humorous stories of what it was like to eat oatmeal every day, 365 days a year, and also to enjoy the rain in Ireland for all 365 days a year. He reminisced fondly about his travel around Europe during formation.

Father Urlage was ordained June 28, 1958, by Bishop Mulloy at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. He became a champion for Catholic education as well as a role-model pastor for his congregation and fellow priests.

He served as associate pastor at St. Pius X Parish, Edgewood, St. Therese Parish, Southgate, St. Bernard Parish, Dayton and St. Stephen Parish, Newport. While in his early days teaching at Newport Catholic, he oversaw the merger of the schools from 1958 to 1970.

His administrative skills led him to the role of principal at Bishop Brossart High School in 1970; he was also appointed Dean of Campbell County Deanery in 1971.

Father Urlage loved children and his work was always dedicated to them. In 1975, he was assigned the role of Superintendent of Education for the diocese, a job he held until 1982. Following this, he was a devoted pastor of St. Cecilia Parish, 1982-1992, and oversaw the beginning of construction of the new church. Because of his initiation of the project and dedication to the people of St. Cecilia, the undercroft is named after him.

His niece, Charlene Cross, said the parish and school were always close to his heart because he got to say Mass with the children. “I think that was his favorite Mass, a school Mass … He always felt like they were sponges and would soak up God’s word,” she said.

Mrs. Cross said he was a humble and kind man, very devout, but also very approachable. “He was a common man’s priest. He knew how to stand up on the pulpit and give a homily that made you feel like you were the only one he was talking to. His homilies were so realizable. I’m not saying he always told you what you wanted to hear; he always led you back to God and he always told you in a way that was acceptable even if it wasn’t what you wanted to hear.”

Father Paul Berschied, two pastors after Father Urlage at St. Cecilia, finished the church project in 2006 and remembers Father Urlage as a gracious man and a gentleman.

“Father Urlage was a fine young man who became an excellent priest,” he said. “He was what we’d call in the old days a true churchman, because he was absolutely devoted to the Church and education in the diocese … He was a great model for me, I really looked up to him.”

Father Berschied said Father Urlage was full of stories, but always ones that lifted others up. “He was able to see foibles in himself and others and see them as humorous, never in a bad light. He always saw everybody in a good way — he was a true man of peace. He just sought to do whatever the bishop asked him to do. He’d never fuss about it — I never heard him fuss about his life, never. He was realistic about it. He always remembered the funny things about his life, the silly little things that we all go through.”

Father Urlage then moved on to be chaplain of Carrol Manor, Ft. Thomas, before retiring in 1996. Post-retiree

At celebration of Immaculate Conception, Bishop urges trust like Mary

With the swell of the organ filling a mostly empty Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, Bishop Roger Foys celebrated Mass Dec. 8 for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. The outside news of rising numbers of COVID-19 cases lent a somber air to the cathedral, with the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception celebra-

bated Mary’s sinless conception, through which she was redeemed from the beginning of her life. In order to be a fit candidate for Mary’s veil for the final blessing of Mass on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Bishop Foys ended Mass by blessing the congregation with a relic of the Blessed Virgin Mary he always says to follow her example of trust and courage.

“The Blessed Virgin stands as a symbol, a sign, a witness and example to put our trust in the Lord, just as he puts his trust in us by giving us free will,” he said. “Our plans might not turn out the way we had envisioned, but trusting in the Lord, honoring the trust he has in us, will lead us to a full life and a fruitful life.”

Bishop’s Schedule

(Continued on page 10)

(above left) The side altar dedicated to Mary at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption was adorned for the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8.

(above right) Bishop Roger Foys blesses the congregation with a relic of Mary’s veil for the final blessing of Mass on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. 
The Church and the Poor

The Church’s concern for the poor is rooted in the teachings of Jesus and the tradition of the Church. In his inaugural sermon in his hometown synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus identified himself as the Spirit-anointed One — the Messiah. (TMA, n.13) In “Economic Justice for All” (1986), the National Conference of Catholic Bishops surveyed the biblical perspectives on justice and specifically highlighted the first public utterance of Jesus on his messianic mission unfolding in Luke 4: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.” (EJ, n.48) That text lays a solid scriptural foundation for the contemporary social principle called “the preferential option for the poor.” (EJ, n.52)

In the encyclical “Sollicitudo Rei Socialis” (“On Social Concern,” 1987) St. John Paul II discussed “the option or love of preference for the poor.” The option for the poor stands as “a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity and, to which the whole Tradition of the Church bears witness.” (SSS, n.42)

A year earlier, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had issued “Libertas Conscientia,” — “An Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation.” (1986) The CDF document clarified certain doctrinal aspects pertaining to liberation theology; a major section is entitled “A Love of Preference for the Poor” (LC, nn.66-70). With reference to Luke 4:18, the Instruction stated: “Christ was foretold by the prophets as the Messiah of the poor; and it was among the latter, the humble, ‘the poor of the earth’, who were thirsting for the justice of the kingdom, that He found hearts ready to receive Him.” (LC, n.66)

The implications for Christian life are clear: “the beatitudes that we proclaim can never signify that Christians are permitted to ignore the poor who lack what is necessary for human life in this world.” (LC, n.87)

In its treatise on “Love of the Poor” the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” incorporates a segment from the above-mentioned document: “...among the latter — the humble, the poor who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church, which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through the numerous works of charity which remains indispensable always and everywhere.” (CCC, n.2448). See LC, n. 66)

In his apostolic exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (“The Joy of the Gospel,” 2013) Pope Francis set forth the principle of “the special place of the poor in God’s people.” (VC, n.197)

Among the biblical illustrations of that principle, the Holy Father notes: “When he (Jesus) began to preach the Kingdom, the crowds of the dispossessed followed him, illustrating his words: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor.” (Luke 4:18)

Jesus declared the special place of the poor in the mercy of God: “Blessed are you poor... (Luke 6:20).” Jesus made himself one of them... (Matt 25: 35).”

Pope Francis confirms the principle of the option for the poor in the words of St. John Paul II: “God shows the poor ‘his first mercy’” (BG, n.198) The Holy Father also cites Pope Benedict XVI’s grounds for the option for the poor: “The principle of a ‘special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradi- tion of the Church bears witness.”


In his summation of that seminal scene of Jesus’ proclamation of Isaiah 61: 12—“the Sabbath in Nazareth, the Holy Father states that “a year of the Lord’s favor” or “of mercy” proclaimed by Jesus is “what we wish to live now”.

During the Jubilee the mercy of the disciples of Jesus are called to live out the prophetic mission of Jesus, the “Messiah of the Poor.” The lives of Christians should make Mercy tangible in “a word and gesture of consola- tion to the poor.” Christian witness should make justice visible in restoring “sight to those who can see no more because they are caught up in themselves...” (MV, n.16)

Msgr. Ronald Ketteler is director of ecumenical, diaconal liaison to the Messenger and professor of theology at Thomas More University.

‘Christ was foretold by the prophets as the “Messiah of the Poor”’
Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation (1986)

In the Gospel according to Luke, the birth of Jesus is not an event witnessed by the powerful and privileged, but by the poor. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the one who is compassionate for the poverty-stricken is no less a hero than the one who is well-to-do. In his announcement of the Messiah, the Holy Spirit sends the Word to a particular group of people: “I will send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way... After me comes... the one who is anointed to bring glad tidings to the poor; he sends me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” (Luke 4:23-25)

In his apostolic letter, “Tertio Millennio Adveniente” (“To the Third Millennium”), Pope John Paul II described the Jubilee as “a year established a period of freedom, liberation, and forgiveness.” (TMA, n.13) The proclamation of the Jubilee in Isaiah 61 narrates religious laws that could be foreseen as the fulfillment of the whole tradition of Jubilees in the Old Testament. (TMA, n.12) In connection with the “day of salvation,” the biblical jubilees “point to this time and refer to the Messianic mission of Christ, who came as the one ‘anointed’ by the Holy Spirit, the one ‘sent by the Father.’” (TMA, n.11) The Jubilee practice focused on a singular concern for justice — “a jubilee year had to be proclaimed, to assist those in need.” Justice, according to the Law of Israel contained all in the fulfillment of the word...” (TMA, n.13).

In “Economic Justice for All” (1986), the National Conference of Catholic Bishops surveyed the biblical perspectives on justice and specifically highlighted the first public utterance of Jesus on his messianic mission unfolding in Luke 4: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.” (EJ, n.48) That text lays a solid scriptural foundation for the contemporary social principle called “the preferential option for the poor.” (EJ, n.52)

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BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS — 2020

Love masked as the spirit of Christmas

Somewhere along the way, I asked myself how one recovers Christmas from the worldwide pandemics in decades, especially since COVID-19 has become one of the largest one-day killers in history. It didn’t take long for a voice from somewhere to utter this answer: “You don’t! You pray and you persevere and you thank God for each and every day of life.”

Then, I turned to my treasured book of daily meditations, “Jesus Calling,” by Sarah Young. You may recall my mentioning its tremendous personal value to me in the past. As usual, I found a gem of an answer immediately in today’s reading. In all due time and in that miraculous grace God established to establish a significant prayer life or devotional life, you will never start. Don’t

Along the Way

Ray Smith

Books for Christmas — 2020

How bad a year has it been? Let me not count the ways. Good books can hearten us in 2021 and beyond. Though Herewith, what some suggestions for...

The Catholic Difference

George Weigel

The English Princess, by Clare McGrath (William Morrow). An impressive first novel about “Vicky” daughte...

Go and Glorify

Father Stephen Banker

I suggest that, first, David’s house and kingdom last forever. God never takes from us, but God has more than much in mind. God plans to make David’s house and kingdom last forever. Israel’s God will take care of...

Commentary

December 18, 2020

The readings for the fourth Sunday of Advent – Cycle B arc: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14a, 11a, 16; Romans 16:25-27; and Luke 1:26-38. Father Stephen Banker, in his today’s first reading begins sounds wonderful. King David, settled in his palace, enjoying the peace resulting from his enemies “on every side” being his God’s enemy. What could be wrong with that? Why does the Father...

Faith and Politics

Nicholas Nichols, O.P. (Ignatius Press): Exceptionally timed, given the torrent of nonsensical, conspiracy-mongering commentary now impeding Catholic efforts to live Vatican II’s teachings through the New Evangelization. Father Nichols’s book should be required reading in every semi-

Faith and Public Policy

O. Carter Snead (Harvard University Press): A highly original commentary on the Eight Key Texts of the Second Vatican Council. I suggest that, first, God does not need us, and because of that we need never fear God. God never takes from us, but God has more than much in mind. God plans to make David’s house and kingdom last forever. Israel’s God will take care of...

Faith and Public Policy

John Paul II. The Church is not finished; the best is yet to come. And there is no room here to quote at length from the psalm, “What David does not...

Faith and Public Policy

Barron On The God Who Doesn’t Need Us.”

Faith and Public Policy

The God of Israel is not like the gods worshipped by the nations around Israel. Israel’s God will take care of...

Faith and Public Policy

David did not write; on the other hand, it was written by Asaph, who was one of the poets of David’s court.

Faith and Public Policy

There is no room here to quote at length from the psalm, but verse 12 gives us the gist: “If I were hungry, I would not tell God; I would not say to my God, ‘You’ve made...

Faith and Public Policy

The best lunch companion imaginable. The next few years are going to be tough for the advocates of school choice. They should take comfort, especially parents of those who haven’t understood that yet. Brilliant book should inspire everyone who believes there is more...

Faith and Public Policy

Key Texts of the Second Vatican Council,” by Aidan Nichols (O.P). (Ignatius Press): Exceptionally timed, given the torrent of nonsensical, conspiracy-mongering commentary now impeding Catholic efforts to live Vatican II’s teachings through the New Evangelization. Father Nichols’s book should be required reading in every seminary and every parish’s Christmas...
Karen Kuhlman
Messenger Correspondent

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Benedictine Sister Mary Frances Dirr, SND

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12 Sister Margaret Jacobs, CDP
13 Sister Mary Jo Hummeldorf, CDP
14 Sister Mary Ruth Lubbers, SND
18 Sister Janet Rose Carr, CDP
20 Sister Aileen Bankemper, OSB
21 Sister Mary Agnes Cashman, CDP
26 Sister Maria Grace Reis, CP
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The following is a schedule of Mass times at parishes in the Diocese of Covington for the feast of Christmas, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Due to spacing concerns surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, parishioners are encouraged to plan ahead to ensure a seat at a Christmas Mass. The capacity for each church is listed in parentheses following its first listing. It is important to note that the capacities are reduced due to protocols to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. During this year, parishioners are encouraged to be flexible remembering that, with so many other things this year, they may not be able to celebrate “like normal.” Pastors and parish staff are working hard to ensure the safety of all parishioners while accommodating as many in-person worshipers as possible.

The Messenger has learned some tips from pastors that can help parishioners with their planning. For example, pastors tell us that Christmas Eve Masses tend to be more crowded. If you usually attend Christmas Eve Mass, consider a Christmas Day Mass instead this year. If all Christmas Masses at your suburban parish are usually crowded, consider attending Mass at one of the urban parishes, where congregations are smaller and more consistently socially distanced. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass is still in effect due to continuing illness and health risks from the virus.

Parishioners who are at higher risk of having an adverse outcome of COVID-19 are encouraged to watch Mass instead this year. If all Christmas Masses at your suburban parish are usually crowded, consider attending Mass at one of the urban parishes, where congregations are smaller and more consistently socially distanced. The dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass is still in effect due to continuing illness and health risks from the virus.

No matter how you choose to celebrate Christmas Mass, everyone is encouraged to continue to make the birth of Christ the center of family celebrations by attending Mass in-person or online.

Christmas Eve

4 p.m.
- St. Agnes (270); St. Anthony (100);
- All Saints (150); St. Barbara (315);
- Blessed Sacrament (305); St. Bernard* (150); St. Cecilia (150); St. Francis Xavier (60); St. Henry (200); Holy Cross (200); Holy Spirit (315); Immaculate Heart of Mary (150); St. James Mission (35); St. John, Baptists (100); St. John, Carrollton (100); St. John the Baptist (50); St. Joseph, Camp Springs (75); St. Joseph, Cold Spring (220); St. Joseph, Crescent Springs (420); St. Mary (150); Mary, Queen of Heaven (75); St. Patrick, Maryville (146); St. Patrick, Taylor Mill (240); Sts. Peter and Paul (40); St. Philip (145); St. Pius X (475); St. Thomas (200)*; St. Timothy (305)
- 4:15 p.m.
  - St. Pius X
- 4:30 p.m.
  - St. Benedict (125); St. Catherine (205); St. James, Brooksville (50); St. William (120)
- 5 p.m.
  - St. Augustine, Covington (200)*; Sts. Boniface and James (150); St. Edward Mission (40); St. John, Covington (125); Mother of God (160); St. Paul (144); St. Rose of Lima (85); St. Therese (200)
- 5:30 p.m.
  - Cathedral Basilica (200), Divine Mercy (100); St. Edward, Cincinnati (100)
- 6 p.m.
  - St. Agnes; St. Barbara, Blessed Sacrament; St. Henry, Holy Cross; Holy Spirit; Immaculate Heart of Mary, St. John Mission; St. Joseph, Camp Springs; St. Joseph, Cold Spring; St. Joseph, Crescent Springs; St. Mary, Mary, Queen of Heaven; St. Matthew, St. Pius X, St. Timothy
- 6:30 p.m.
  - All Saints, Blessed Sacrament; St. Cecilia; St. Henry, Holy Cross; St. Joseph, Crescent Springs; St. Mary, St. Matthew; St. Pius X, St. Timothy
- 7 p.m.
  - All Saints; St. Patrick, Maryville; St. Paul, St. Thomas*
- 8 p.m.
  - St. John, Carrollton***
- 8:30 p.m.
  - St. Augustine, Augusta
- 9 p.m.
  - St. Patrick, Maryville; St. Patrick, Taylor Mill; St. Therese; St. William
- 9:30 p.m.
  - St. Ann, Covington (200)
- 10 p.m.
  - All Saints, Blessed Sacrament; St. Cecilia; St. Henry, Holy Cross; St. Joseph, Crescent Springs; St. Mary, St. Matthew; St. Pius X, St. Timothy

Christmas Day

7:30 a.m.
- St. Anthony; St. Augustine; Augustinian Friars
- 8 a.m.
  - St. Henry, St. James, Brooksville; St. Joseph, Cold Spring; St. Mary, St. Matthew; St. Pius X, St. Therese
- 8:30 a.m.
  - St. Agnes; St. Francis Xavier

8:45 a.m.
- Holy Redeemer (25)
- 9 a.m.
  - St. Barbara, Blessed Sacrament; St. Edward, Cincinnati; Holy Cross; Immaculate Heart of Mary; St. John Mission (28); St. John the Baptist; St. Joseph, Camp Springs; St. Joseph, Crescent Springs; St. Joseph, Wason (75); Mary, Queen of Heaven; Our Lady of Lourdes; St. Patrick, Maryville; St. Paul
- 10 a.m.
  - Midnight Mass will be televised live on MeTV and livestreamed from the Cathedral’s website, www.covcathedral.com.

Midnight

All Saints***; St. Anthony; St. Augustine; Augustinian Friars; Covington, Cathedral Basilica; St. Catherine; Divine Mercy; St. Edward, Cincinnati; St. Francis Xavier; Immaculate Heart of Mary; St. Joseph, Camp Springs; St. Joseph, Wason (75); Mary, Queen of Heaven; Our Lady of Lourdes***; St. Patrick, Maryville; St. Paul

11:30 p.m.
- St. Philip

11:45 p.m.
- Midnight Mass will be televised live on MeTV and livestreamed from the Cathedral’s website, www.covcathedral.com.

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**Extraordinary Form
***Spanish
*Overflow Mass = 5/10 minutes later
**Sanctus
( ) Parentheses indicate capacity of parish.

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Missed an edition? Current and back issues of the Messenger are available online at cvdio.org/messenger.
Spectacular astronomical sight involving the two planets

The Great Conjunction of 2020 will yield an expected spectacular astronomical sight involving the two planets near each other in the night sky — all year. That the conjunction can be as inspiring as what the Catholic Church calls a sacramental such as a saint’s relic, a blessed medal or rosary.

Brother Consolmagno will discuss the conjunction and the Star of Bethlehem four times in online presentations between now and Dec. 22. One is for the British Broadcasting Corporation’s Sky at Night magazine at 2 p.m. Eastern, Dec. 17. Tickets cost 10 euros ($12.50). To register, go to skyatnightmagazine.com/virtuallecture.

The Jesuit astronomer encouraged people to take the time to look at the night sky any time.

Better yet, he said, “spend some time away from people, but also away from your house. Spend some time with nature and remember that God is there.”

Austrian Peace Light tradition continues, despite pandemic

Audi Serfontein  
Catholic News Service

BERLIN — The year, the Christmas tradition of the Peace Light of Bethlehem continues, despite COVID-19 restrictions and border and church closures.

In mid November, the Austrian public broadcasting corporation, ORF announced that the light had been lit from the oil lamp test-told CNN, “that night (Dec. 23) can be a sacramental that people look up to and ask ‘What was it like when Christ was born?’ To me this is an opportunity for people to get out that night and meditate on what it may have been like when Christ was born. What does the birth of Christ mean to me?”

Whatever the Star of Bethlehem, Father Kurzynski and Brother Consolmagno said the upcoming astronomical event can allow people time to step outside to observe the beauty of creation and to realize that God is greater than any planetary dance, especially as the world continues to battle the coronavirus pandemic, confronted political divisiveness and experience social ills.

The conjunction will see bright white Jupiter and Saturn to put on ‘Christmas Star’ show at winter solstice

The hulking orbs appear in conjunction about every 19.8 years, but not every close alignment is as near as this one. The last occurred May 26, 2000, but was nearly impossibly to see because the two planets were in the sun’s glare in the early morning sky.

The last time Saturn and Jupiter appeared this close was July 16, 1922, but again it was widely unlikely that it was seen because it occurred near the sun at sunset.

The last easily visible super conjunction with such an apparent minimal separation was March 4, 1326.

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Jupiter, Saturn to put on ‘Christmas Star’ show at winter solstice

To me, asking ‘What was the star?’ is a lot of fun, but not particularly significant astronomically or theoretically. Nothing’s really at stake if it turns to be this explanation or that explanation,” Brother Consolmagno said.

Ideas about the Star of Bethlehem range from the natural — a great conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter near the time of Jesus’ birth or a comet — to the supernatural as a sign from God.

Or it could have been a metaphor used by St. Matthew “to show how important Jesus’ birth was to humanity,” said Father James Kurzynski, pastor of St. Olaf Parish in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and an amateur astronomer.

“We need to remember that the Star of Bethlehem could have had different meanings for the people that Matthew was writing to,” Father Kurzynski explained.

“Was it a supernatural event? Was it an event to signal somehow, some way that there was something that was happening in the world that was signaling the birth of a king that was not just a human being, but that there was something different about this king?”

He suggested that Matthew may have even meant that Jesus’ birth was the “great light” bringing people out of the darkness in which they walked, as told in the Book of Isaiah.

Father Kurzynski said the conjunction can be as inspirational as what the Catholic Church calls a sacramental such as a saint’s relic, a blessed medal or rosary.

“Whether this conjunction is a Star of Bethlehem can dictate or not — there’s been talk with CNN — that night (Dec. 21) can be a sacramental that people look up to and ask ‘What was it like when Christ was born?’ To me this is an opportunity for people to get out that night and meditate on what it may have been like when Christ was born. What does the birth of Christ mean to me?”

Whatever the Star of Bethlehem, Father Kurzynski and Brother Consolmagno said the upcoming astronomical event can allow people time to step outside to observe the beauty of creation and to realize that God is greater than any planetary dance, especially as the world continues to battle the coronavirus pandemic, confronted political divisiveness and experience social ills.

The conjunction will see bright white Jupiter and fainter yellowish Saturn separated by 0.1 degree, about one-fifth the diameter of a full moon. Binoculars will reveal the slim separation, but to the unaided eye, the planets will appear to converge.

In reality, Saturn will be twice as far from Earth as Jupiter will be. The close alignment occurs as Jupiter laps Saturn as they orbit the sun.

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Tragedy’s role in redemption: The Holy Innocents

David Cooley

The liturgical Christmas season is really a beautiful and interesting time of year. While the secular world has the tendency to let go of the joy of the season on Dec. 26 and move on to the next “big” thing, Catholics stay focused on the birth of Christ and the idea of light conquering darkness in our world. We don’t mark the end of Christmas until the celebration of the feast of the Baptism of the Lord — which falls on the Sunday after the feast of the Epiphany (usually the second Sunday of January).

In addition to the Epiphany — a feast we easily connect to Christmas (wise men discover Christ on the path to true knowledge) — there are several other Catholic feast days that fall within the Christmas season. Some of these feasts, such as the feasts of St. Stephen (Dec. 26), St. John the Apostle (Dec. 27), St. Thomas Becket (Dec. 29), and St. Sylvester I (Dec. 31), don’t have much of a connection to Christmas and are often, unfortunately, overlooked. But then there are also the feasts that have a profound connection with the Nativity of Christ — the feast of the Holy Innocents (Dec. 28), the feast of the Holy Family (first Sunday after Christmas) and the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (Jan. 1).

The feast of the Holy Innocents, in particular, can seem like a strange if not horrific break from the overall theme of joy that comes with the Christmas season. However, a close reading and further reflection can prove that this story from the Gospel of Matthew, although disturbing, can also be a message of hope.

Herod (the not so great) was king of Judea when Christ was born and he was a cruel dictator. He was absolutely obsessed with power. When he believed his sons became a threat to his reign, he executed them. He also killed his wife, his brother and his sister’s two husbands, just to name a few of his victims. He was an insecure tyrant capable of extreme brutality.

When Herod heard about the magi in his midst looking for “the newborn king of the Jews” he sent for them right away, hoping to learn all he could to protect his throne. He believed his sons became a threat to his reign, he executed them. He also killed his wife, his brother and his sister’s two husbands, just to name a few of his victims. He was an insecure tyrant capable of extreme brutality.

When Herod heard about the magi in his midst looking for “the newborn king of the Jews” he sent for them right away, hoping to learn all he could to protect his throne. He attempted to trick them into telling him exactly where he could find the child but his plan failed and he became furious. He had already proven that he would stop at nothing to keep his power and so he ordered the execution of all male children in the region two years of age and under.

(Continued on page 19)
A week from today, Christians all over the world will celebrate a great mystery. It is the greatest of all mysteries, one that has existed from before time and lives beyond the grasp of the future. It is the mystery of the Nativity of Our Lord, when God became incarnate in Jesus, a man like us, and in this way opened up for us the road to his heavenly Kingdom, to full communion with him.

The story of this event, its grandeur, the expression of the gift freely given to humanity, and the new creation that began with the Son of God becoming man can be found in the historic Nativity Window at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. Produced by Mayer and Company of Munich in 1909, the Nativity window is the second in a series of four large stained glass works on the south side of the nave. It is executed in the “Munich Pictorial Style” and draws its story from the infancy narratives of St. Matthew and St. Luke. But creating a window of such stunning beauty and catechetical importance is not a simple matter of artists creating a picture in glass to illustrate a Gospel story. They understood that the narrative of Christ’s incarnation — along with its theological underpinnings and purpose of divine plan — must be revealed to the viewer in the very art itself — in the window design and through the compositional techniques used, the visual elements, their placement, arrangements, colors and heraldic symbols. Everything had meaning, and everything meant something important.

One of the pre-eminent design techniques used in the window by the Mayer Company involved the use of Cyrillic script to connect the scenes, as well as to represent angels, and other figures. The script forms a background, a setting, a context for the scene, and it is a reminder to the viewer of the theological purpose of the scene. The use of Cyrillic script is a beautiful and clever way of connecting the scenes, and it serves to reinforce the theological message of the window.

The story of the Nativity window at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, is a story of beauty and grace, of the Incarnation of Our Lord, and of the message of salvation for all who believe in Him. It is a story that is told through the medium of stained glass, and it is a story that is told with great care and attention to detail. It is a story that is worth telling, and it is a story that is worth hearing.
artists was the Divine Ratio or sectio divina, also known as the Golden Mean or Divine Proportion. The Greek philoso-
pher Plato (428-328 B.C.) theorized about the Divine Ratio, believing that if a line was divided into two unequal seg-
ments so that the smaller segment was related to the larger in the same way the larger segment was related to the whole, the result would be a special proportional relationship. About 1200 A.D., mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci noticed Plato’s theory as an absolute numerical ratio that appeared throughout nature, a sort of design that is uni-
versally efficient in living things and is aesthetically pleas-
ing to the human eye. Medieval artists believed God was behind this mathematical construct, and so they incorpo-
rated this Divine Ratio in their art as a way to praise God.

Mayer artists used the same design tool throughout the Nativity window’s main scene. In one form, it shows up as a great spiral that begins in the lower right portion of the frame, curves in a line upward through the three figures at right, progresses through St. Joseph’s head, then arcs downward in an increasingly tightening spiral, plunges downward through the three figures on the left side of the frame, then upward again toward its mathematical conclu-
sion, ending at Jesus in the manger. In other places, it appears as a sequential relationship of squares, as a trian-
gular relationship between certain figures, and as a five-
pointed star pentagon. Each example complements the other throughout the composition, resulting in a work not only of remarkable beauty and grace, but also of great the-
ological emphasis and power.

Measuring 21 feet high by 9 feet wide, we read the story beginning from the top. In the apex is the “angel of the Lord” as he appeared to the shepherds of the field accom-
panied by a stratus or army of angels (Luke 2:9). The pur-
ple in his wings is the color symbolizing sovereignty and he is surrounded by the firmament of Heaven and seven stars. He holds a banner that reads in Latin, “Gloria in excelsis Deo!” (“Glory to God in the highest!).

Below him are two more angels, also with purple wings. Both are seated in the firmament surrounded by six stars. In the Bible, the number six symbolizes man and human weakness, the creature and condition Jesus came to redeem. The angel on the left plays a lyre, the symbol of King David, recalling the 110th Psalm in which the Messiah is not only a sacrifice, He is the eternal High Priest offering the sacrifice of Himself to God. “In holy splendor before the daystar, like dew I begot you,” the Psalm sings. “You are a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek.” (Psalm 110:4) The image also recalls the words of the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:32: “…and the Lord God will give Him the throne of David his father.” The can-
ticle of Zechariah similarly announces: “He has raised up a mighty Savior, born of the house of his servant David.” (Luke 1:68) The angel on the right bears on his head a red cross with five small, white circles, foretelling Jesus’ future sacrifice. He plays the lute, an ancient instrument that was around in Jesus’ day and which in heraldry sym-
bolizes order and harmony. The angel’s message is that through Jesus’ blood and crucifixion, only then will har-
mony and order be restored to the world.

The rest of the tracery is decorated with tree branches bearing leaves of the same shape and variety as those in the Immaculate Conception window. There they illustrat-
ed the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden, but the branches and leaves in these win-
dows are blue, the color of Mary. They tell us that although Eve fell from grace, Mary comes to us as the New Eve through whom all humankind is restored to the grace and harmony of a New Eden. Sprouting from the end of her blue branches is a single red rose, the symbol of Christ. Its five lobes again remind us of his five crucifixion wounds with the red as the color of his blood and suffering.

The main story of Jesus’ birth follows below the trac-
ery. Like his ancestor David, the Savior begins his earthly life humbly amid poverty and strife and surrounded by shepherds and beasts of burden. In general arrangement, three figures frame each side of the picture, with only Jesus, Mary, Joseph and a shepherd in the center. The shepherd again recalls the lineage of King David. The child Jesus looks straight at us, showing us his true nature.

(Continued on page 14)
Pope Francis will celebrate the Vatican's traditional Christmas "Mass during the Night" Dec. 24, but will begin the liturgy at 7:30 p.m. local time so that the few people invited to attend can get home in time to observe Italy's 10 p.m. curfew.

The curfew is one of many measures the Italian government has employed in an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

In addition to the early start time, the Vatican’s COVID-19 measures are still in force: only a small congregation will be allowed inside the basilica; people’s temperatures are checked as they arrive; masks are required for the congregation and servers; the seating is social-distanced.

While the nighttime Mass often is referred to as "Midnight Mass," it has not been celebrated at midnight at the Vatican since 2009 when Pope Benedict XVI moved it to 10 p.m. Pope Francis moved it to 9:30 p.m. in 2013, his first Christmas as pope.

The pope’s Christmas blessing “urbi et orbi” (to the city and the world) will be given, as usual, at noon Christmas Day from the balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica.

Other liturgies announced by the Vatican Dec. 10 include:

— Dec. 31, 5 p.m., evening prayer and the singing of the “Te Deum” in St. Peter’s Basilica to thank God for the past year.
— Jan. 1, 10 a.m., Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica for the feast of Mary, Mother of God, and World Peace Day.
— Jan. 6, 10 a.m., Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica for the feast of the Epiphany.

CNS photo/Paul Haring

Pope Francis kisses a figurine of the baby Jesus as he arrives to celebrate Christmas Eve Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican in this Dec. 24, 2019, file photo. The pope will celebrate the traditional Christmas Eve Mass with a small congregation, beginning at 7:30 p.m. in Rome so people can get home without breaking Italy’s 10 p.m. COVID-19 curfew.
Church musicians reflect on different year, amid pandemic

Allegro Thatcher
Assistant Editor

“No pull out all the stops at Christmas,” said LeeAnn Kordenbrock, the cathedral soloist. Pun intended or not, we will be standing next to the organ during Midnight Mass. “If we don’t have as many personnel, that doesn’t mean we won’t make it as beautiful as we possibly can.”

Ms. Kordenbrock and Dr. Gregory Schaffer, basilica principal organist and choirmaster, have been providing nearly all of the music at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, since the public celebration of Mass resumed May 21 in the Diocese of Covington after the COVID-19 shutdown. As Christmas approaches, they reflected on the challenges of the year as church musicians.

“I think it was the weekend of March 15 when Father had to pull the plug on music,” said Dr. Schaffer. “We had (Cathedral Bishop’s Choir) rehearsal that Wednesday, and by Friday evening, all the music was cancelled. ... It was totally unexpected, but by the weekend, I think none of us were that surprised because things were developing on a daily basis around the entire country.”

Music resumed when public celebration of Mass did, but everything had to look different. Since many of the choir members were at higher risk of catching COVID-10, Dr. Schaffer didn’t feel comfortable approaching any of them to solicit help, due to the risk factor. He also knew that many had signed on because of the group experience. That’s when Ms. Kordenbrock volunteered to solo.

“Greg and I talked, and I offered to do whatever any- body needed,” she said. She has since become a staple, along with Dr. Schaffer, for weekly Cathedral Masses. A few other singers have helped out along the way as well.

When public Mass resumed with the provision that the congregation could not sing, due to the threat of droplets spreading the virus, Dr. Schaffer had to restructure his entire Mass plan. “You have to approach it with a completely different set of variables. Every detail of what we do for the liturgy had to be re-thought, re-processed, and to an extent tested out. With one voice singing, you can’t play full organ like you would with the congregation singing along with a hymn. It’s been quite a learning curve.”

As far as the music they choose, Ms. Kordenbrock said it takes a lot more effort and planning on a weekly basis, “but it’s not quite as paralyzing as it was when the first quaran- tine statement was made.” They have developed a much simpler repertoire for the soloist arrangement.

While they’ve always tried to include a variety of styles in the Cathedral due to the variety in Mass-goers — parishioners and vis- itors alike — Dr. Schaffer and Ms. Kordenbrock have tried out some new styles this year. They’ve adopted the Mass proper, antiphons which are a more traditional method of music in the liturgy, and are com- monly replaced by hymns. They are sung at the procession, the offertory, communion and the recession. This was, in part, due to a con- cern that the congregation would feel left out.

“At first I was concerned about doing very familiar hymns with just a cantor and organ, that might be perceived as teasing the congre- gation,” said Dr. Schaffer. “Not that it would be intentional, but still the idea that I know this hymn and I want to sing it and I can’t. It’s frustrating.”

Beside the proper, they also started using familiar texts with unfamiliar melodies so that there might be some meaning in the music, particular to that day or celebration, “without per- haps scratch- ing at a scab of someone who wants to be singing,” said Dr. Schaffer.

“Sometimes when we sing tunes that we’ve sung forever and ever and we know the words... sometimes the meaning gets lost a little bit, so when you change it up,” added Ms. Kordenbrock. “It’s been a growth exercise in the best of ways.”

When asked how they persevered through it all, Ms. Kordenbrock said, “I’m not a scientist, but the whole deal that we’ve all believed from the time we’ve entered our faith life, is that we stay the course. So it will get better, we’ll get through it.”

“Certainly without the unwavering support of Bishop (Roger) Foyes, Father (Ryan) Maher and the community that would be much more of a ques- tion mark over my head,” said Dr. Schaffer. “So it’s been quite inspirational to me week to week that we’re doing something we should be doing, and we continue on the same path. There will be an answer at some point.”

For Midnight Christmas Mass, they will be joined by a vocalist in the choir loft. The live broadcast from the Cathedral will feature a recording of the Cathedral Bishop’s Choir and instrumental ensemble. From 2019 starting at 11 p.m., and the in-person celebration will feature the trio beginning around 11:40 p.m.

Both musicians advised people in choirs everywhere, who haven’t been able to sing with their group, to take care of their voices while at home. “There will be a learning curve coming back, whether you’re professional or ama- teur — if you don’t do it, you lose it,” said Ms. Kordenbrock.

“I want to acknowledge choirs everywhere that are pin- ing to return to some form of sung liturgy — I share in that anticipation,” Dr. Schaffer said. He also hopes congrega- tions will respond boisterously when they are once again allowed to sing in Mass.

“No matter what the circumstance, we can make some- thing meaningful out of it,” he said.

For a complete listing of Christmas Mass times around the diocese, see page 7.
by touching his left hand to his heart and blessing us with his right hand. The position of the fingers informs us of his true nature as being both human and divine as well as being a part of the Trinity. He is covered with a white blanket symbolizing purity, which is decorated with golden eight-pointed stars symbolizing kingship and resurrection. Above him streaks the eight-pointed star of the Magi accompanied by five more eight-pointed stars. “We saw his star at its rising and come to do Him homage.” (Matthew 2:1) In Christian symbolism, eight-pointed stars symbolize the “eighth day of the week” which symbolizes the day of Christ’s resurrection.

Dressed in white and blue, Mary kneels beside the manger in prayer and humility. Almost every figure in the scene looks at Jesus. But Mary’s gaze is fixed elsewhere, directed to the lamb lying on the floor in the foreground, its legs bound in sacrifice. Jesus in the manger is likewise bound for sacrifice, bound by the Father’s divine plan and will to redeem mankind through his suffering and death. The lamb’s proximity to Jesus — and Mary’s fixed gaze upon it — foreshadows Jesus’ own death as the Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world.

The full meaning of the Nativity window now becomes clear: Jesus was destined to die for our sins. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in his 2013 Catechesis on the Incarnation, called the incarnation “the mystery of a God with the heart of a man.” In this Christmas season, we again reflect on the great mystery of God who came down from heaven to enter our flesh. The eternal and infinite One immersed himself in human finiteness, in his creature, to bring back man and the whole of creation to himself.

(Continued from page 9)
Beloved pastor

(Continued from page 3)

ment, he often served Mass as the helping priest at St. Therese Parish, where Father Berschied, then associate pastor, remembers him best.

"On Sundays, he had breakfast between Masses with Father Clarence Heitzman and me. The ladies of the parish would cook us a breakfast and it was just delightful, we had that for 11 years. I just enjoyed sitting and eating breakfast with him. He could talk about any subject: language, theology, philosophy, science. He could just talk about anything and everything. He was extremely well-read and a brilliant conversationalist. If you brought up a topic, he would be interested, and he would in due time say what he thought about the topic. A really fine person."

Father Urlage went above and beyond the call of duty, often coming in to celebrate the Sunday 7 a.m. Mass at St. Therese. "Retired priests shouldn’t be getting up that early, but he wanted to take it every other week," said Father Berschied. "He had dinner with us many nights throughout his time. Monday was open table night for all the priests who wanted to come. He was always there, and we’d invite him other times in the week."

Father Albert Ruschman, a more recent member of the group who frequented the St. Therese rectory for fellowship and meals, knew Father Urlage for approximately 60 years. "I was impressed by the friendliness and delightful personality that Bob had," he said. "He was a great conversationalist."

He also worked with Father Urlage professionally through the Catholic Schools Department. "Bob will be remembered as humble and competent in his work and friendly to everyone that he worked with or met. His example will last for a long time among the priests and people he served," he said.

Later in life, Fr. Urlage loved to play golf with his fellow priests, a group of clergy others have deemed the "Giants" for their work helping the bishops build up the Diocese of Covington into what it is today.

He remained close to his brothers and sisters. When his brother Arthur, Mrs. Cross’ father, became ill, Father Urlage would often come over and say a private Mass for him. "He dearly loved talking baseball, sports… they spent many an hour discussing the Reds and aspects of the game," said Mrs. Cross. His three sisters never married, so they all lived close by until they passed and he would frequently spend time with them as well.

Bishop Roger Foys said, “Father Bob Urlage was a kind and considerate person who demonstrated those virtues throughout his 62 years as a priest. I found him to always be supportive and encouraging. This is how he lived his life in his parish ministry and especially in the ministry of education as both instructor and administrator as a principal and as superintendent of schools. He took his priesthood seriously and was always willing to help out wherever and whenever he could, even after his retired from the responsibilities of administration. When he was no longer able to make the trip to our annual priests’ retreat, he requested that the talks be videotaped so that he could be a part of the retreat. This shows the depth of his spiritual life and his desire to continue to be a part of the presbyterate in every way possible. We will miss Father Urlage but are confident that he has gone home to the God he served so well in this life. May he rest in peace.”

Father Urlage is survived by many nieces, nephews, great-nieces and nephews and great-great nieces and nephews.

Connley Brothers Funeral Home handled the arrangements for the family. The visitation was held Dec. 15 before an 11 a.m. funeral Mass at St. Cecilia Parish with interment at St. Cecilia Cemetery. Memorials can be sent to the Priests’ Retirement Fund of the Diocese of Covington.
The eighth-grade class at St. Therese School, Southgate, led by Mr. Stephen Young, set a goal to collect 2,020 canned goods for those in need this winter. They invested the help of the entire school, and exceeded their goal by Nov. 19.

The Parish Kitchen is in need of new sleeping bags and blankets for its guests. Donations can be dropped off Monday-Friday at either Parish Kitchen, 1561 Madison Avenue, Covington, 8-11 a.m. or Catholic Charities, 922 Church Street, Latonia, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

Advent light
(right) Junior high students at St. Henry School, Elsmere, made Advent wreaths to keep near them during their NTI instruction at home.

May the season bring much harmony and bliss,
For family and friends near, and those you will miss,
With the blessings of Heaven’s goodwill and grace,
Reflected in the shining smiles on every face!

Live Nativity takes a gap year in classic tradition

The annual Diocese of Covington Live Nativity has drawn the faithful to a touching and personal encounter with the birth of Jesus for 25 years. And this year’s night will be a bit more silent, since safety concerns surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic have caused the event to take a year off.

The light-draped stable, crowned with a star, normally features live animals and live actors playing the part of Jesus, Mary and the shepherds. Sponsored by the Knights of St. John Commandary #94 since 1994, the event started off small and has grown significantly over the years. The Knights have scores of volunteers to sing and to take shifts as the Holy Family. Many more people come to the prayer service and visit the stable as a family. For nine days, starting with a blessing of the crib after a vigil prayer service and visit the stable as a family. For nine days, starting with a blessing of the crib after a vigil prayer service and visit the stable as a family. For nine days, starting with a blessing of the crib after a vigil prayer service and visit the stable as a family. For nine days, starting with a blessing of the crib after a vigil prayer service and visit the stable as a family. For nine days, starting with a blessing of the crib after a vigil prayer service and visit the stable as a family. For nine days, starting with a blessing of the crib after a vigil prayer service and visit the stable as a family. For nine days, starting with a blessing of the crib after a vigil Mass, anyone can stop by between 6:30 and 8:30 p.m.

In the beginning, Bishop William Hughes approached the Knights of St. John and asked them to help with a nativity scene to which the entire diocese could contribute. For the two initial years, 1994-1996, they set up at the Catholic Center, Erlanger. Volunteers constructed a stable, made into panels that could be reused every year forward.

Those two years saw bad weather and also resulted in low participation due to the more obscure location. Because of this, the Live Nativity moved in 1997 to St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, by the invitation of Father Ray Hartman. It remained there until 2007, where it was more visible to the public eye. The St. Joseph’s Men’s Group assisted in the responsibility of hosting. Over the years, the event rallied hundreds of visitors, whether volunteers or simply the curious, stopping by.

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After those 10 years, Father Rick Bolte approved the nativity to move to St. Timothy Union, where it has been since. The Boy Scout Troop 702 from Union lent their aid to hosting the event. Pusateri will not be able to glimpse the Holy Family telling the Christmas story this year in Edgewood as planned. Instead, like many other cancelled events in 2020, it is anticipated to be back in splendor next year with new ideas from the planning committee.

The spirit of giving

To help spread a little holiday cheer, students in Mrs. Nicole Hartig’s fifth grade at St. Joseph School, Cold Spring, participated in the Macy’s Believe Project, which donates two dollars to The Make a Wish Foundation for every letter to Santa they receive. The project worked on letter writing skills, but more importantly it helped to emphasize the importance of giving from the heart.
Father Ray Stratman loved people and the priesthood

Father Raymond Richard Stratman died Nov. 21 at Taylor Manor Nursing Home in Versailles, Ky. He was 88 years old and had served as a priest for 62 years. Recalled for his love of the priesthood and the people he served, he had many friends going back to before the beginning of his ministry. Born in 1932 to Robert J. and Florence (Huesma) Stratman, he attended Holy Cross School in Latterna, Ky, where he met classmate Bob Nieberding in 1948. The two would remain friends for the rest of Stratman’s life, playing baseball in their childhood summers, vacationing together — often with their mothers — for decades and enjoying golf and Scrabble on their days off.

“He was most compassionate, understanding, patient and kind. He reached out to those in need and was always ready to go the extra mile,” said Father Nieberding, who now serves as vicar general of the Catholic Diocese of Lexington.

Father Stratman attended St. Meinrad Minor and Major Seminaries, as well as St. Patrick’s College in Maynooth, Ireland, where Bishop William T. Mullboy sent Stratman and another seminarian, Bob Ungle, Covington seminarians who had previously studied in Ireland all had Irish roots.

“Ray and Bob were true Blue German,” Father Stratman recalled. “The bishop tried to find an Irish con
tact. He asked about their mothers’ maiden names. They were just as German. Finally the bishop said ‘You’ll enjoy Ireland anyway.’”

Father Stratman’s time in Ireland allowed him to travel to the Holy Land, Rome, Germany and France. He was ordained a deacon in Ireland in 1957 and a priest at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption in Covington, Ky. on June 28, 1958. The first 15 years of Father Stratman’s priesthood were spent in various teaching and parish associate posts.

“Very early in his priesthood he became actively involved in the Cursillo movement,” said Father Nieberding. “He often served as chaplain both for men’s and women’s Cursillo. He shared with me the influence of this in his own spiritual life.”

In 1974, Father Stratman became dean of men at St. Pius X Seminary in Erlanger, as well as director of vocations and chaplain for the Northern Kentucky Serra Club. He served as chaplain of St. Charles Nursing Home in Covington beginning in 1976. His first assignment as pastor was at St. Aloysius in Covington, beginning in 1975. He began serving as spiritual director of the St. Vincent de Paul Society the following year. He served as pastor at St. Mark in Richmond from 1983 to 1996, during which time the Catholic Diocese of Lexington was formed out of the Covington diocese.

After a sabbatical at the University of Notre Dame, Father Stratman served as pastor at St. Leo in Versailles from 1996 till his retirement in 1997. In 1996, he took on the role of associate vocation director.

Father Stratman, as well as hearing stories of his semi
tures, was at St. Aloysius in Covington, beginning in 1979. He became actively involved in the Cursillo movement. From 2015-16, he returned to nursing home chaplaincy at Taylor Manor in Versailles and from 2016-20 lived in residence at the Cathedral of Christ the King in Lexington.

Father Paul Prabell, rector of Christ the King, said he will miss cheering on the Reds, the Bengals and UK with Father Stratman, as well as hearing stories of his semi
natures.

“He was a man of prayer ever faithful to his God, his Church, his family and friends and to the people he served,” said Father Nieberding. “To know Father Ray was to love him. Everybody Loves Raymond.”

Father Stratman’s funeral Mass was held Saturday, Nov. 28, at Cathedral of Christ the King, Lexington.

Obituary appears courtesy of Cross Roads/Catholic Diocese of Lexington.

Father David Wheeler, one of the youngest priests of the diocese, ordained in 2019, cited Father Stratman as an influence in his own vocation. He encountered him in his retirement when he came to St. Ann in Manchester to celebrate the Triduum at the small mission community he started in the early 1990s. Wheeler said that Father Stratman was “an example of joy and fulfillment of a priestly vocation that is lived well” and “a voice of constant encouragement to me on my path toward the priesthood.”

From 1997 to 2000, Father Stratman served as vicar for retired priests and as spiritual advisor for the diocesan Cursillo movement. From 2015-16, he returned to nursing home chaplaincy at Taylor Manor in Versailles and from 2016-20 lived in residence at the Cathedral of Christ the King in Lexington.

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SCHOOL CAFETERIA MANAGER

The School Food Services Office of the Diocese of Covington Department of Catholic Schools seeks candidates for a School Cafeteria Manager position at St. Philip Elementary School in Campbell County, Ky. The position is nominally thirty hours per week, during the school year. The School Cafeteria Manager’s primary responsibilities involve overall supervision of the School’s meals program, including: managing employees; ordering, receiving, and managing inventory; preparing and serving meals; operating the point-of-sale system; and interacting with school staff, students, and their parents. Organizational and interpersonal skills are essential to this position. To request an application, contact Stephen Koplyay, SPHR at skoplyay@covdio.org. Scan and return the completed application by e-mail, including references with contact email addresses and compensation history. Applications may also be faxed to 859/392-1589.

PAYROLL/STAFF ACCOUNTANT

The Finance Office of the Diocese of Covington seeks candidates for the full-time position of Payroll/Staff Accountant. Responsibilities include accounts receivable, accounts payable, cash receipts, and general ledger, as well as maintenance of various spreadsheets, databases, and reconciliations. Payroll responsibilities involve assisting with data entry. A practical knowledge of basic bookkeeping principles and practices is essential, and other necessary requirements include experience with Microsoft Word and Excel. Qualified candidates should send a resume, cover letter, and at least five references by e-mail (skoplyay@covdio.org), fax (859/392-1589), or mail to Stephen Koplyay, SPHR; Diocese of Covington; 1125 Madison Avenue; Covington, KY 41011-3115.

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SCHOOL CAFETERIA MANAGER

The School Food Services Office of the Diocese of Covington Department of Catholic Schools seeks candidates for a School Cafeteria Manager position at St. Philip Elementary School in Campbell County, Ky. The position is nominally thirty hours per week, during the school year. The School Cafeteria Manager’s primary responsibilities involve overall supervision of the School’s meals program, including: managing employees; ordering, receiving, and managing inventory; preparing and serving meals; operating the point-of-sale system; and interacting with school staff, students, and their parents. Organizational and interpersonal skills are essential to this position. To request an application, contact Stephen Koplyay, SPHR at skoplyay@covdio.org. Scan and return the completed application by e-mail, including references with contact email addresses and compensation history. Applications may also be faxed to 859/392-1589.

PAYROLL/STAFF ACCOUNTANT

The Finance Office of the Diocese of Covington seeks candidates for the full-time position of Payroll/Staff Accountant. Responsibilities include accounts receivable, accounts payable, cash receipts, and general ledger, as well as maintenance of various spreadsheets, databases, and reconciliations. Payroll responsibilities involve assisting with data entry. A practical knowledge of basic bookkeeping principles and practices is essential, and other necessary requirements include experience with Microsoft Word and Excel. Qualified candidates should send a resume, cover letter, and at least five references by e-mail (skoplyay@covdio.org), fax (859/392-1589), or mail to Stephen Koplyay, SPHR; Diocese of Covington; 1125 Madison Avenue; Covington, KY 41011-3115.

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NOVENA TO THE SACRED HEART

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be adored, glorified; loved and preserved throughout the world now and forever. Sacred Heart of Jesus pray for us St. Jude, worker of miracles, pray for us. St. Jude, help of the hopeless, pray for us. Say this prayer 9 times a day. By the 8th day your prayers will be answered. Say it for 9 days. Thank you St. Jude. Amen. M.F
Love masked
(Continued from page 9)

I am only human, so I won’t speculate on how Ms. Young reads the mind of Jesus. But, based upon my personal experience of feeling Jesus’ loving presence time and again, I submit that at these times, Jesus is near. He promises, “If you seek Me, you will find Me; where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” Jesus asserts that He is with us always, even to the end of the age, and “all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

The Holy Innocents
(Continued from page 9)

The details of the massacre are for the most part left to our imagination but the devastation of the mothers and fathers led St. Matthew to quote Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children ...” (Matt 2:18)

What are we to make of this horrific story of an evil king killing the young boys of Bethlehem in order to preserve and wield his power over the people?

Of course our hearts and minds go first to the innocent little ones and their families. It is natural for us to ask why couldn’t God just prevent this slaughter? Truthfully, there is no explanation that could satisfy our human craving to understand why the terrors of this life are allowed. Suffering is indeed a mystery and cannot be endured with faith and trust in God's perfect plan.

And what are we to make of Herod? These small passages are perhaps among the most poignant in the New Testament in demonstrating what antichrists and the fruits of their labor look like. This story has repeated itself again and again throughout all history. It is man’s attempt to silence God and eradicate him from the earth. It is man’s attempt to become God; to decide for himself what is good and what is evil; to believe that he can rule over everything with no consequences. Herod is someone who has walled off his heart to Christ and therefore offers the world the opposite of what Christ offers. To build himself up, he tear others down. What he desires is power and possessions, what he offers is misery and destruction.

Choosing darkness over light will always lead to death — if not for us, than for someone else, perhaps at another place, another time. The feast of the Holy Innocents reminds us that the coming of Christ into the world is a lifeline from the darkness of evil that lies in the hearts of those who selfishly choose power and ultimately death over the good, the true and the beautiful. Christ is our hope.

Let us face it, all through life's journey, with all of its ups and downs and question marks, God is with us and is with you. If you can find a better deal, grab it!

Ray Smith is a commissioned Lay Pastoral Minister for the Diocese of Covington.

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PARISH OFFICE
Saints Boniface and James Parish in Ludlow, Ky. has a job opportunity for a qualified, actively-practicing Catholic candidate who is interested in a part-time, flexible, weekday schedule. The primary responsibilities in this one-person parish office will include: general office administration, creation of the weekly parish bulletin, receiving visitors, and answering the telephone. The twelve-hour work week is envisioned with a flexible, weekday schedule. The primary responsibility is to be confirmed.

Let this Christmas be our strengthening wake up call. I am feeling something special about it, something no disappointment or world-wide disaster can dispel. Jesus is here, more evident than ever, in the lights, in the colorful decorations, in the music, in the perfected spirit in many of us and in our homes. Respectfully, stores are humming and running out of wrapping paper, decorations, etc. Live Christmas trees are hard to come by. The spirit of Christmas is alive and well. Compared to last year, twice the number of homes on our street are brightly decorated.

It is no surprise why the world is at peace and especially with the current daily pandemic casualty toll.

Love masked (Continued from page 9)

misunderstand me; if you have used your time to begin a prayer life or pay more attention to God, great. But if you wait until everything in our lives is in order before we do the important things. So let us not wait until everything in our lives is in order before we do the most important thing: make space in our hearts, our days and our lives for the One who will return to take us to the Father.

Father Stephen Bankemper is pastor, St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ft. Thomas, Ky.

ACCOUNT MANAGER
St. Joseph Academy is currently hiring a part-time Account Manager with potential of being full-time. The position requires accuracy, attention to detail, and a thorough understanding of basic accounting procedures. Competency with Quickbooks, the ability to create well-organized spreadsheets, knowledge of or a willingness to learn donor Perfect, PayPal, and F.A.C.T.S. is also required. This position supports some administrative needs that are important to ensure we operate within budget and plan effectively for our future needs. It also requires a knowledge base of Word Press to keep our website current. Organizational skills are a must. A flexible work schedule will be considered. Applicants must have previous bookkeeping experience. Interested applicants can submit resume and cover letter to Sister Patricia Jean, SJWJ, Principal at principal@sijawallon.com.
Ground broken and trails blazed for Emergency Shelter of Northern Kentucky

The Emergency Shelter of Northern Kentucky broke ground for its new building located at 436 West 13th Street in Covington, Dec. 15 at 11 a.m. (From left to right) Jude Hehman, CEO of Furlong Building, Mike Sutton, attorney; Kim Webb, executive director; ESNKY; Jon Draud, Kenton County Commissioner; Emily Toebbe, vice president, ESNKY Board of Directors; Kris Knochelmann, Kenton County judge executive; Divine Providence Sister Janet Bucher; Jamie Weaver, president, ESNKY Board of Directors; Brent Cooper, president and CEO of the Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce; Emma Adkinson, architect, PCA Architecture. Also present were Steve Hersley, director, Homeland Security and Emergency Management; Joe Shriver, county administrator and a representative from St. Elizabeth Healthcare. 

(above, left) Kim Webb, executive director, ESNKY, shows off the keys to the new lot.

The Emergency Shelter of Northern Kentucky broke ground for its new building located at 436 West 13th Street in Covington, Dec. 15 at 11 a.m.
When in need, don’t be ashamed to pray, pope says at audience

Junno Arocho Esteves
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Praying to God in times of joy and sorrow is a natural, human thing to do because it connects men and women to their father in heaven, Pope Francis said.

While oftentimes, people can look for their own solutions to their suffering and difficulties, ultimately “we should not be shocked if we feel the need to pray, we should not be ashamed,” the pope said Dec. 9 during his weekly general audience.

“Do not be ashamed to pray: ‘Lord, I need this. Lord, I am in difficulty. Help me!’” he said.

Such prayers are “the cry, the cry of the heart to God who is the father.”

Christians, he added, should pray “not only in bad times, but also in happy ones, to thank God for everything that is given to us, and not to take anything for granted or as if it were owed to us: everything is grace.”

During the general audience, which was broadcast from the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican, the pope continued his series of talks on prayer and reflected on prayers of petition.

Prayers of petition, including the “Our Father,” were taught by Christ “so that we might place ourselves in a relationship of filial trust with God and ask him all our questions,” he said.

Although the prayer includes imploring God for “the highest gifts,” such as “the sanctification of his name among people, the advent of his lordship, the realization of his will for good in relation to the world,” it also includes requests for ordinary gifts.

In the “Our Father,” the pope said, “we also pray for the simplest gifts, for the most of everyday gifts, such as daily bread” — which also means health, home, work, everyday things; and it also means for the Eucharist, necessary for life in Christ.

Christians, the pope continued, “also pray for the forgiveness of sins, which is a daily matter; we are always in need of forgiveness, and therefore, peace in our relationships. And finally, that he may help us face temptation and free us from evil.”

Asking or supplicating God “is very human,” especially when someone can no longer hold on to the illusion that “we do not need anything, that we are enough for ourselves, and we live in total self-sufficiency,” he explained.

“At times, it seems that everything collapses, that the life lived so far has been in vain. And in these situations, when it seems that everything is falling apart, there is only one way out: the cry, the prayer, ‘Lord, help me!’” the pope said.

Prayers of petition go hand in hand with accepting one’s limitations, he said, and while one may even reach the point of not believing in God, “it is difficult not to believe in prayer.”

Prayer “simply exists; it presents itself to us as a cry,” he said. “And we all know this inner voice that may remain silent for a long time, but one day awakens and cries out.”

Pope Francis encouraged Christians to pray and not be ashamed to express the desires of their hearts. The season of Advent, he added, serves as a reminder that prayer is “always a question of patience, always, of withstanding the wait.”

“Now we are in the time of Advent, a time that is typically of expectation, of the expectation of Christmas. We are in waiting. This is clear to see. But all our life is also in waiting. And prayer is always in expectation, because we know that the Lord will answer,” the pope said.
Mary is reminder of God’s blessing, pope says on Guadalupe feast
Junno Arocho Esteves
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The humble image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is a reminder of the gift of God’s abundant blessings to all men and women, Pope Francis said.

By contemplating her, Christians can fully understand God’s gift “in the abundance of his son by nature and his mother by grace,” the pope said in his homily during a Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica Dec. 12, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

“This is the gift that God presents to us and has wanted to continuously highlight and reawaken throughout revelation,” he said.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Mass was celebrated at the Altar of the Chair in the back of the basilica, with a limited group of faithful present.

At the start of the Mass, the pope — dressed in white, the symbol of purity — made his way to a replica of St. Juan Diego’s tilma, which bears the image of Mary, who appeared to the indigenous saint in 1531.

With a choir singing a Marian hymn accompanied by a guitar, the pope stood before the image, bowing reverently and incensing it three times.

In his homily, the pope reflected on the Gospel reading from St. Luke, which recalled Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth. The reading, as well as the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, offer a reflection of three realities in the lives of Christians: abundance, blessing and gifts, he said.

Unlike human beings, who “by our very nature, by our limitations” always “need comfortable quotas,” he said, God “always offer himself in abundance” and “gives in abundance.”

“Thinking about the mystery of Christmas, the Advent liturgy takes much of this idea of abundance from the prophet Isaiah,” the pope said. “Generosity can be — I like to think of it as — at least one ‘limitation’ that God has: the impossibility of giving himself in any way that isn’t in abundance.”

Recalling Elizabeth proclaiming Mary as “blessed among all women,” the pope said that it reflects the reality of blessing. “God’s style is always to say ‘good,’ while the devil’s style is to curse others, be mean and be ‘unable to give oneself totally.’”

“God always is to say what is good. And he says it with pleasure, he says it by giving himself,” he said. “He gives of himself in abundance by saying what is good, by blessing.”

Pope Francis said that the final reality — the “gift” — is reflected in the coming of Christ, who was “given to us in the one who is ‘full of grace.’”

By “contemplating the image of our mother today, we ‘steal’ from God a bit of this style that he has: generosity, abundance, blessing — never cursing — and transforming our life into a gift, a gift for all,” the pope said.
After shipwreck, bishops denounce treatment of Venezuelan refugees

VATICAN CITY — After a boat carrying refugees was allegedly denied entry into Trinidad and Tobago and subsequently shipwrecked, Venezuelan bishops said the treatment of migrants fleeing the country constitutes a serious human rights violation. In a statement Dec. 14, the Venezuelan bishops’ conference said that remarks from authorities in Venezuela and Trinidad trying to criminalize humanitarian organizations helping refugees were “unacceptable and inadmissible. Far from accepting their responsibility and adopting the necessary measures” to ensure such tragedy occurs again and that the human rights of migrants is protected, the bishops said the authorities were trying to blame international agencies and the humanitarian helping Venezuelan migrants, which “is a particularly vulnerable group with respect to its human rights and humanitarian situation.” Venezuela has been in a severe economic spiral since 2014, and millions of people have fled the country. The BBC reported that about 20 migrants boarded a makeshift boat Dec. 6 hoping to seek asylum in Trinidad and Tobago.

Report finds no evidence of alleged murderers at Vermont orphanage run by nuns

BURLINGTON, Vt. — Vermont Attorney General T. J. Donovan Dec. 14 released the results of an investigation into allegations of abuse and murder at the former St. Joseph’s Orphanage in city of Burlington. “Most notably, the present task force found no evidence of alleged murders that were committed by the nuns at the orphanage,” Donovan said. Donovan announced the results of the investigation in a joint statement from Vermont Catholic Charities and the Diocese of Burlington. “Most notably, the present task force found no evidence of alleged murders that were committed by the nuns at the orphanage,” Donovan said. Donovan announced the results of the investigation in a joint statement from Vermont Catholic Charities and the Diocese of Burlington.

Bishops: Getting COVID-19 vaccine is ‘act of charity,’ supports the common good

WASHINGTON — The “gravity” of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and “the lack of availability of alternative vaccines” are “sufficiently serious” reasons to accept the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, the chairmen of the U.S. bishops’ doctrine and pro-life committees said Dec. 14. “Receiving the COVID-19 vaccine ought to be understood as an act of charity toward the other members of our community,” they said. “In this way, being vaccinated safely against COVID-19 should be considered an act of love of our neighbor and part of our moral responsibility for the common good.” “The bishops addressed the moral concerns raised by the fact the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have some connection to cell lines that originated with tissue taken from abortions. However, this connection to morally compromised cell lines is so remote and the public health situation is too grave to reject the vaccines, said Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committees on Doctrine, and Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Pro-Life Activities. Late Dec. 11, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration gave emergency-use approval to the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

Pope says Vatican City will aim for net-zero carbon emissions

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis pledged Vatican City State would achieve net-zero carbon emissions before the year 2050, and urged everyone in the world to be part of a new culture of care for others and the planet. “The time has come for a change in direction. Let us not rob the new generations of their hope in a better future,” he said in a video message for a global summit. Pope Francis was one of about 75 leaders who contributed to the Climate Ambition Summit, which was held online Dec. 12. Co-hosted by the United Nations, the United Kingdom and France, and in partnership with Chile and Italy, the meeting marked the fifth anniversary of the Paris Agreement on climate change. During the meeting, the leaders renewed or strengthened investment pledges and commitments to cut greenhouse gas emissions and achieve carbon neutrality by some 24 leaders announced at the summit their commitment for net-zero emissions, which would achieve a balance between greenhouse gas emissions produced and greenhouse gas emissions taken out of the atmosphere, for example by switching to “green” energy and sustainable agriculture, increasing energy efficiency and reforestation.

Argentine’s lower house votes to allow abortion; bill moves to Senate

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — Argentina’s Chamber of Deputies approved a bill to decriminalize abortion during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy despite vocal opposition from the country’s Catholic bishops. Lawmakers approved the legislation in the early hours of Dec. 11, voting 131-117 after debating through the night. The bill would allow abortion at any time for health reasons or in the case of rape. The version approved by the lower house was modified to allow more provisions for conscientious objection and to require patients under the age of 18 to have the permission of at least one parent or guardian. It now goes to the Senate for debate. A similar proposal was narrowly voted down by the country’s Senate in 2018 after being approved by the lower house. Pro-life demonstrators dressed in blue and abortion rights activists wearing green handed out pamphlets near the Congress in Buenos Aires as the bill was debated. Days earlier, the president of the Argentine bishops’ conference had called on lawmakers to “reflect” as they prepared to debate the bill. If it becomes law, Argentina would become the third country in Latin America to legalize abortion, following Uruguay and Cuba.

Spanish bishops decry ‘moral rupture’ as euthanasia law gains traction

ROME — Progress in passing a bill that would legalise euthanasia in Spain signals a failure of morality and of the government’s mandate to protect the life of its citizens, the country’s bishops said. The Spanish bishops’ conference released a statement Dec. 11 denouncing the legislation after Spain’s Justice Commission approved the bill, paving the way for it to be passed to the Senate, where it is expected to be approved. According to a report by the European news agency Euronews, the legislation could “come into effect in early 2021.” The processing of the bill, the bishops said, was “carried out in a suspiciously accelerated manner, in a time of pandemic and a state of alarm, without listening to or engaging in public dialogue. This event is especially serious, since it establishes a moral rupture, a change in the purposes of the state to defend life, to be responsible for inflicting death,” the statement said.

Glory to the New Born King

Oh holy day, oh joyous day; He sent His Son, to who the way. And wherever you may go, May you bask in His holy glow For those who seek, will see the light And it will illuminate all that is right.

Thank you for the good faith you’ve shown to us.
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