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Alleluia! He is risen!

In celebration of Holy Week and Easter the Curia is closed until April 2. There will not be a *Messenger* April 5. The *Messenger* will resume publication April 12. The *Messenger* staff wishes its readers and their families a joyous and blessed Easter.

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Missed an edition? Current and back issues of the *Messenger* are available online at covdio.org/messenger.



Easter 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

He is risen! Happy Easter!

As I write this, I am remembering the story of an Easter Vigil Mass I did not see myself. A fellow seminarian shared the story three decades ago. The parish he served that year made every effort to celebrate the Easter Vigil beautifully and everything had been arranged to minute detail. The brass was polished, the Blessing of the Fire was artfully carried out, the Liturgy of the Word was extended and powerfully proclaimed, the homily was a masterpiece. In fact, everything was nearly perfect until the moment the procession flowed toward the font to bless it for the celebration of Baptism. Suddenly all realized in horror that no one had remembered to fill the large font with water. What was to be the symbol of new, abundant life, sat empty and stone cold.

I am preparing this Easter greeting in the waning days of Lent as I meditate before an image of the Pieta. I imagine the Blessed Mother, holding her son and Savior in grief, trying to heave his body closer to her heart and hold the weight of him there. I realize that, as Jesus was placed in her arms, Mary likely felt the last warmth of his body ebb away. Felt that coldness and emptiness that all who grieve over the deathbed of a loved one come to know.

Until now, I have rarely spent such time in prayer wrestling with the cold inertness of the body of Jesus in death or imagining the process by which his embodied warmth and breath returned to the world in victory on Easter morning. In her poem, *Descending Theology: The Resurrection*, Mary Karr does just that. At the end of her meditation, exhilarated by imagined beats of the resurrected heart, she shares: "Now it's your limbs he comes to fill, as warm water shatters at birth, rivering every way."

Christ is risen! Victorious over the cold rigor of death, he comes to greet us in the lively warmth of his resurrected body. Like the Spring that warms the wintered earth so that the grain, once buried, might spring up green and fruitful, so Christ offers life to the cold places of our hearts and our world so that we might bear the fruit of the Kingdom of God.

Whether because of our carelessness or another's, we are empty, even broken vessels. Like that stone cold font that stood unfilled, neglected and empty, we are incapable of restoring ourselves to life. But Christ, by the victory of his resurrection, calls us from the cold and fills our limbs. Like the font in which our newest brothers and sisters are baptized this Easter, Christ makes us cooperators and instruments in his life-giving mission.

This Easter, we will once again renew our baptismal promises and be sprinkled with the waters of baptism. May we allow Christ to restore us to life and make us whole.

May your Easter be blessed, and the Love of the Lord fill our lives with the warmth of love and the living water of the Holy Spirit. May our diocesan Church always witness to the power of the Resurrection and the grace that God has poured out upon us.

Yours in the Joy of the Resurrection,

Bishop John Iffert



CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

The risen Christ is depicted in a stained-glass window at St. Aloysius Church in Great Neck, N.Y. Relying on the Lord for his counsel, trusting in his goodness, we're learning to recognize the voice of our Shepherd leading us home.

PALM SUNDAY

Palm Sunday reminds us of our need for a savior, bishop says

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week — the end of the Lenten season as we approach the celebration of the Resurrection at Easter.

Holy Week follows the passion of Jesus, and Palm Sunday traditions tell the story of his arrival into Jerusalem. This year, Palm Sunday was celebrated



(above) Knights and dames of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem stand in their pews holding palms.

(right) The Palm Sunday congregation processes across Madison Avenue in front of a TANK bus. Traffic was paused momentarily by Covington police to make way for the procession.

early March 24 — and, while a shortage of palms was present nationwide due to the early Easter season and weather patterns, according to Bishop Iffert, Palm Sunday festivities proceeded, regardless.

Bishop John Iffert celebrated a Palm Sunday Mass in the morning at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

The congregation gathered first at St. Mark's Park across the street from the Cathedral, where the Mass's palms were blessed and the Gospel read — then, with palms in hand, the congregation processed across Madison Avenue to the Cathedral.

In addition to the procession, Palm Sunday Mass is also celebrated with a reading of the Lord's Passion.

In his homily, Bishop Iffert emphasizes just two words: "went out."

He said, remembering the disciples in the morning's readings who wanted to assist Jesus in preparing for the evening meal, and, with his instructions, "having heard that word from Jesus: they went out."

Palm Sunday's liturgy begins with song, he said, recalling how palm branches were set out for Jesus like a "red carpet ... they would wave them like fans and scepters acknowledging the kingship of Christ."

"When we pick them [the Palms] up again in the Passion, "they're no longer the palms of rejoicing, they become the palms of martyrdom."

Bishop Iffert said the palms are a reminder of "how fragile we are" — how easily it is to fall into that mob mentality. They are also a reminder of "how much we need a savior; and his merciful love."

"Let's enter this Holy Week," he said, "...joining him in bearing that Cross, for the life of the world."



(above top) Bishop John Iffert preaches prior to the morning Palm Sunday Mass, where the congregation gathered at St. Mary's Park, Covington, before processing across the street with their palms to the Cathedral.

(above) Bishop Iffert, holding his own palms, waits to enter the cathedral following the congregation.



Greece: In the Footsteps of Paul the Apostle

with Optional 3-Night Journey to Rome Post Tour Extension

Join Bishop John Iffert, Father Eric Andriot and Father Aby Thampi

Dates

October 22 to November 1, 2024

Spiritual Reflection

On this journey, feel the spirit of the New Testament as you walk in the footsteps of the great apostle St. Paul, patron of the Diocese of Covington. Experience the places where Paul lived and preached, gaining a deeper understanding of the biblical narrative.

Highlights include Daily Mass

3-night Greek Islands and Turkey cruise
Tours of Athens, Corinth, Ephesus and Philippi

Cost

Base per person rates: Double \$5,490; Single \$6,490; Triple \$5,440. (Price locked-in until April 22)

Information contact

Collette
1-800-581-8942
Refer to booking #1221094



Corinth

One of the first locations to be visited during the pilgrimage is Corinth, not far from modern Athens to be seen the morning of day 3 of the journey. St. Paul the Apostle lived in Corinth for two years, during which he wrote two epistles. (1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians)

Corinth is also the location where St. Paul was brought before the tribunal as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. A guided tour will lead pilgrims through this historic site.

To view promotional video

Go to Covdio.org.

Women religious invite volunteers to a day of service, 'live the Resurrection'

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Sisters from the Diocese of Covington are inviting people to join them, April 20, for a "Service with Sisters" day. This event welcomes individuals to join Covington's women religious in lending help to some local charities and organizations, including St. Vincent de Paul and the Brighton Center.

The day begins with prayer at 9 a.m. at Mother of God Church, Covington, where volunteers will be made acquainted with the different volunteering locations for the day before going out to work. The day ends with prayer, as well, as volunteers are invited to return to Mother of God at 1:30 p.m. for lunch and reflection.

"I like to think of it as a deepening of how we're called to learn the Eucharist," said Notre Dame Sister Marla Monahan, the diocese's Vicar for Religious, referenc-

ing the USCCB's national Eucharistic Revival that began in 2022.

"On Holy Thursday," said Sister Marla, "when Jesus washes the disciple's feet, he says 'What I've done, I ask you also to do.' I think service is not optional in our Christian lives."

Sister Marla also said that she believes "doing it in the Easter season is significant."

She said, "We are better at our Lenten program, recognizing our need for conversion — but I'm not sure we're as good at our Easter program and recognizing the call to live the Resurrection and what that means in terms of joy in our lives."

Those interested in joining women religious in this day of service can RSVP by clicking through the banner on the homepage of the diocesan website, covdio.org.



Women religious of the Diocese of Covington joined with community members of all ages, including at least a dozen students, Saturday, April 22, for a day of service. Starting with prayer, the sisters and those gathered set out to lend a hand and support wherever needed.

Divine Mercy Sunday — the ‘divine floodgates’ of mercy and graces open

Katie Schroeder
Contributor

Divine Mercy Sunday, celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter, is meant to be a “refuge and shelter to all souls, and especially for poor sinners” (St. Faustina, Diary, no. 699). Revelations concerning this Feast of Mercy were first introduced to mankind during the 20th century, when civilization was losing an understanding of the inherent dignity of human life, according to the USCCB.

In the 1930s, a Polish nun, St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, was chosen by Jesus to receive these revelations, which she recorded in her Diary. St. John Paul II, in his book “Memory and Identity,” writes of this occurrence: “This was precisely the time when those ideologies of evil, nazism and communism, were taking shape. Sister Faustina became the herald of the one message capable of off-setting the evil of those ideologies, that fact that God is mercy — the truth of the merciful Christ.”

In St. Faustina’s Diary, 14 occasions were recorded in which Jesus requested that a Feast of Mercy be observed. In one of these passages, Jesus speaks of how “the very depths” of his “tender mercy are open” (St. Faustina, Diary, entry no. 699). He states that the souls who go to confession and then receive Holy Communion on this Feast will obtain complete forgiveness of their sins and punishment, because he will “pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the Fount” of his mercy (no. 699).

Jesus uses multiple phrases throughout his revelations which reference water and cleansing, such as “a whole ocean of graces,” “fount of My mercy,” and “divine flood-



Close-up of the first Divine Mercy painting, created in 1934 based on the request of Saint Faustina Kowalska and her confessor, Michael Sopocko, by Eugeniusz Kazimirowski.

gates through which graces flow.” What he is offering to all is a complete cleansing of souls, a complete renewal of baptismal grace.

This theme is also seen within the image of Jesus which was shown to St. Faustina in a vision; his right hand is raised in blessing while his left is held to his heart, out of which red and white rays emanate. These rays represent the blood and water which poured from Jesus’ heart when he was pierced in the side with a spear while on the cross. Through the blood and sacrifice of Jesus and the waters of baptism, salvation is brought to the world.

Underneath this image, Jesus requested that the words “Jesus, I trust in You” be inscribed, and that this image be venerated across the world. Within his revelations, he stated, “I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish” (no. 48) and “By means of this image I will grant many graces to souls” (no. 742).

Jesus emphasized the importance of trust, not only through the inscription beneath his image, but through his other revelations as well, stating, “The graces of My mercy are drawn by the means of one vessel only, and that is — trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive” (no. 1578).

As a part of these revelations, St. Faustina also received the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Jesus told her to encourage souls to say this chaplet and promised that “whoever will recite it will receive great mercy at the hour of death ... Even if there were a sinner most hardened, if he were to recite this chaplet only once, he would receive grace from My infinite mercy” (no. 687).

Divine Mercy Vespers will be celebrated at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption from 3-4 p.m., Sunday, April 7. All are encouraged to attend.

Divine Mercy Vespers

Join Bishop John Iffert

3 p.m., Sunday, April 7

Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament after 10 a.m. Mass thru Vespers;

Confessions available during that same time.

Franciscan at Home empowers parents as ‘intentional’ catechists and it’s free

Laura Keener
Editor

The Diocese of Covington is partnering with the Catechetical Institute, Franciscan University, to provide parents, free of charge, access to an entire library of online workshops aimed to assist them with the “intentional” Catholic formation of their children.

These workshops are available right now. Every parish and school in the Diocese of Covington is already registered and waiting for parents and parishioners to create their own free account at <https://franciscanathome.com/diocese-covington>. Through these accounts, parents and parishioners can choose from the dozens of courses, workshops and tracks — in English or Spanish — available through Franciscan at Home.

Franciscan at Home is the flagship online approach to disciple making offered by the Catechetical Institute. The Catechetical Institute is the non-degree, field level, multi-dimensional, online supported outreach of the Franciscan University, Steubenville. The mission of the Catechetical Institute is “forming those who form others.”

“We are reaching out to those who are in any kind of way forming others in the faith,” said Dr. Mark Ginter. “We don’t provide catechesis; we don’t directly aim at the person in the pew. We don’t directly aim at the person in the classroom. We aim at those who teach those who are in the pew; those who form those who are in the classroom. That



also includes parents who should be the primary, intentional catechists of their children.”

Dr. Ginter, strategic partnership liaison fellow for the Catechetical Institute, recently led two in-person, half-day introductory workshops — one with school principals and

catechists and a second with parish catechists — March 22 and 23, at Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington. He was invited by David Cooley and Isaak A. Isaak, co-directors of the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization.

Implementation of Franciscan at Home is one of the strategies Mr. Cooley and Mr. Isaak identified to achieve the diocesan goal of “empowering schools, parishes and families to fulfill their shared mission of ongoing faith formation.” This goal is part of the strategic

(Continued on page 7)

Dr. Mark Ginter, strategic partnership liaison fellow for the Catechetical Institute, leads an introductory workshop for school principals and catechists, March 22, at Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington, kicking-off the faith development process of Franciscan at Home.



Our Lady of Lourdes Parish returns to Park Hills beginning Easter Sunday

Staff report

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish will resume the celebration of the traditional Latin Mass at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Park Hills, beginning Easter Sunday.

The traditional Latin Mass will be celebrated on Sundays at 7 a.m. and 9 a.m., with the latter being a high Mass. Father Matthew Cushing, administrator, will be the celebrant at both Masses.

“I wish everyone at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish a blessed and happy Easter,” said Bishop John Iffert. “I am happy to see the parish take this important step to stability and to reestablishing its full parish life.”



Dine in or Drive Thru a Fish Fry: Episode 6

In episode six of Dine in or Drive Thru a Fish Fry, Bella and Maura travel to Our Savior, Covington, to see what makes their fish fry so great. Check it out online at www.covdio.org/messenger.



Bishop's Schedule

March 30

Easter Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 8:30 p.m.

March 31

Easter Mass — Resurrection of the Lord, Cathedral Basilica, 10 a.m.

April 2

Curia offices reopen

April 5

Blessing of Madonna House, Ft. Mitchell, 10 a.m.

April 6

Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica, 4:30 p.m.

April 7

Divine Mercy Vespers, Cathedral Basilica, 3 p.m.

April 8-11

Mission Trip

April 12

High School Senior Mass, Cathedral Basilica, 10 a.m.

April 14

Mass, Cathedral Basilica, 7:30 a.m.

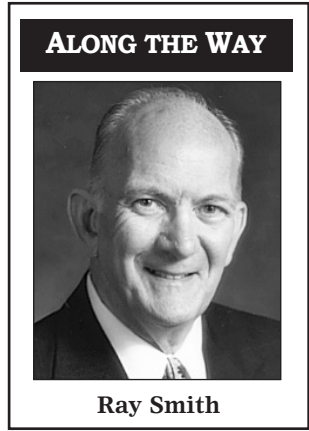
Serra Club Server Awards, Cathedral Basilica, 2 p.m.

April 15

Good Shepherd dinner, Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus, 6 p.m.

Jesus lives! Now what?

Somewhere along the way, it has probably happened to many of us. You make that huge sale that produces your biggest commission ever.



ALONG THE WAY

Ray Smith

You graduate with honors, or you just graduate, period. Your team wins the championship and you are named Most Valuable Player. You win the major prize, or at least a turkey, at the church festival. You are named “Citizen of the Day” by a radio station or you are honored as “Boss of the Year” in the local newspaper. You finally get that “big raise” and a more meaningful job title. You

survive a major health threat. You finally get to retire ... early! That long-awaited great-grandchild finally arrives! Your child or a grandchild scores their first goal in soccer. A precious, lost keepsake has finally been found after months of searching.

None of the above? Okay, just fill in some of your greatest surprises and totally unexpected achievements in life.

Now what? What!!! Did you ask, “Now what?” What are you? A human being?

Yes, and so were the meager, struggling, bungling, doubting, finite and often confused apostles of Jesus when they witnessed and were confronted by the biggest “Now what?” of all time — the resurrection of Jesus, the miracle-working itinerant carpenter from Nazareth.

The apostles, especially, had been confronted by “Now what?” many times along their way:

- When water was turned into wine at Cana.
- When lepers were made clean.
- When the lame stood up and went their way.
- When the deaf heard, the mute spoke and the blind saw.
- When Jesus beckoned Lazarus to live, foreshadowing the first Easter.
- When, on the Cross, all seemed abandoned, lost and finished.

They must have wondered, “Now what?”

Easter is the greatest hope, the permanent answer to “Now what?” and the greatest-ever Post Game Show, as described in a former edition of *The Word Among Us*, a Florida publication I once read, with the motto; “The Spirit of Catholic Living.”

Its Easter meditation rightly cited that the resurrection of Jesus changed everything and that an “age of

grace” was proclaimed on that day.

It went on that “Jesus rose from the dead and reigns forever more in heaven at the right hand of the Father and we are called not merely as servants, but as friends of Christ. Today (Easter), a river of life flows. Jesus has become a life-giving spirit, pouring out the Holy Spirit onto the whole world. From this spring of resurrection power, a mighty river is cascading. It’s the millions upon millions of lives who have experienced the power of God in conversion. Your life has been swept up, too.”

The meditation challenges us to begin to honor God for Easter’s answer to our perennial “Now what?”

But how? The writer suggested that by our following in the footsteps of the disciples in the Easter Gospel to, “like Mary Magdalene, seek out his presence.” We are urged, in the final analysis, to “keep running to him throughout the day in prayer,” keeping in mind Peter and John’s sprint to the tomb.

Finally, it suggested that if we can “peer into his empty grave, as they did, and see that Jesus isn’t dead,” we will see once and for all that Jesus has been moving in our lives all these years, making us new creations.

Now what? Now live!

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

What’s your story?

enced the Scripture passage about the conversion of St. Paul in chapter 9 of the Acts of the Apostles.

We were then directed to answer three questions to shape our own testimonies. How was my life before encountering Jesus? How did I meet Jesus? How was my life after the encounter?

As a huge fan of *The Chosen* series, I was immediately reminded of Mary Magdalene’s line in Episode 2 of Season 1, “I was one way. And now I am completely different. And the thing that happened in between was Him.”

I understood what I was being asked to do, but I wasn’t sure I could come up with an experience to share.

Over the years, I’ve listened to talks, attended formation opportunities, and read books in which people shared their conversion stories. These were amazing accounts of God’s action in the lives of others, most of which brought about dramatic, even radical change.

I loved hearing and reading them, but I was never really able to identify times like those in my life. I felt that my faith journey had been uneventful and too ordinary to inspire anyone else. One of the PMD facilitators commented that our stories do not have to be “St. Paul moments” to be effective, and for me, that simple statement was a whisper from God. He often accomplishes his work in the ordinary.

My story ended up being a memory from my childhood that is quite fitting for the holy days we are currently celebrating. It was the special occasion of watching a feature length film in school. The details surrounding the event are fuzzy, but the movie itself I have never forgotten. I had to have been in junior high, and it was probably

Holy Week. The movie was “The Robe,” a 1953 fictional, biblical epic based on the 1942 novel of the same name by Lloyd C. Douglas.

“The Robe” tells the story of Marcellus Gallio, a Roman tribune who supervises the crucifixion of Christ and who wins Christ’s robe by casting lots. It was a product of its time, but the film made a tremendous impression on my eleven- or twelve-year-old self.

I remember thinking about it for weeks afterward. It prompted me to begin considering my vocation, and looking back now, I think it may have been one of the pivotal moments when my faith became my own. And, while sharing this experience during Parish Missionary Disciples, I realized that the main character Marcellus’ life “was one way. And (then he was) completely different. And the thing that happened in between was HIM.”

“The Robe” is still one of my favorite movies; I own a copy which I watch every year on Good Friday or Holy Saturday.

Since that first PMD weekend, I’ve identified several more encounters with Jesus that I can share, and through PMD, I am gaining the skills and the confidence to share them. Once the eyes of faith are opened even a little, and we begin to see God’s action in our lives, the conversion stories, both dramatic and ordinary, become evident.

The result of the training is that Parish Missionary Disciples may be coming to a parish near you. I highly recommend that you participate. Then I’ll be able to ask, “What’s your story?”

Jamie Schroeder is chancellor for the Diocese of Covington, Ky.

Here we are once again, celebrating the Triduum and the greatest liturgical feast of our Catholic faith — Easter! How quickly Lent has passed and what a Lent it has been. One of the highlights for me has been partici-



VIEWPOINT

Jamie Schroeder

pating in the Parish Missionary Disciples (PMD) program.

Parish Missionary Disciples is an intensive training experience, developed and presented by the Catholic Leadership Institute, the organization providing support to our Diocese as we journey through the With One Heart initiative. The goal of Parish Missionary Disciples is to equip Catholics with the skills necessary for evangeliza-

tion, to train “laborers in the field” who are capable and confident in sharing their faith in Jesus Christ with others. Those disciples then train other disciples until parishes and the diocese are transformed into vibrant communities that invite people to a relationship with Christ through his Church.

One of the activities during the first weekend of PMD was very powerful for me. We, the participants, were asked to reflect and share a time when an encounter with Jesus resulted in a change in our lives. First, we refer-

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Sometimes the tension is the answer

People naturally swing to extremes. It seems part of human nature. It's evident in our increasingly polarized society today. When we see something we don't like, our natural inclination is to swing back to the opposite extreme.



ANGELICO PROJECT

Bradley Torline

Sometimes this is not such a bad thing. When exposed to something extremely wrong or erroneous, the answer really is to push back in an extreme way. Sometimes this is not the right thing to do, however. Oftentimes the answer lies in the middle. Great thinkers and teachers of history, such as Aristotle and Buddha, have encouraged people to avoid extremes and seek "the middle way."

What does Jesus say?

I think Jesus' teachings contain elements of both of these approaches. Aristotelian virtue language has long been adopted by the Church as perfectly commensurate with Christian moral teachings. It seems that very often in life the answer really is to seek the middle way between two extremes.

But Christ also certainly advocated radical responses to radical evil. A certain episode with a whip and many turned tables comes to mind. And remember his words; "If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out!" The Church assures us that Jesus does not want us to actually maim ourselves, but his emphasis is clear: we should not have a middle-road approach to sin. Sin should be vehemently avoided. While Christ sometimes advocates radical responses and sometimes advocates compromise, he also does something else, something unique. He gives us tensions to live in.

I had a great professor in college who has had a lasting

impact on my life. There was one lesson in particular I will never forget. When confronted about not giving a direct answer to a question, he responded that sometimes the best thing a teacher can do is to not give a direct answer but to instead impart the right tension. What did he mean by that?

Think of the following teachings of Christ: "Blessed are those who hunger." "No one who comes to me will ever be hungry." "My yoke is easy, my burden light." "How difficult the road that leads to life." "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you." "Do not think I have come to bring peace, but the sword."

In every single one of these instances, Christ seems to directly contradict himself. Why does he do this? Why does he teach in these paradoxes? Because, as my professor would say, sometimes the best thing to do is not just teach the right answer, but to teach the right tension.

Christ wants us to live in the tension between not overly seeking fulfillment of our natural desires (hunger) but knowing that our ultimate fulfillment will come in him. He wants us to recognize that his requests are hard but not as heavy or hard as the burden of sin. And he wants us to seek peace, but his peace, not the peace of the world.

By giving us two apparently contradictory statements, Christ actually draws our attention to the tension between them, which is, in fact, the answer to the dilemma. When faced with two apparently contradictory approaches, especially two approaches we seem to agree with, we should ask ourselves if there is an important tension between them that is actually the answer. Perhaps it's a "both-and" situation instead of an "either-or."

I think this approach can be helpful, especially in a world so prone to radicalization and polarization. Yes, sometimes the answer to a dilemma is to push back radically against a radical wrong. Yes, sometimes the answer is to find middle ground. But sometimes, the tension itself is the answer.

Brad Torline is executive director of The Angelico Project, an organization dedicated to building Catholic culture through beauty and the arts, online at www.AngelicoProject.org.

Love makes room

My heart started beating faster and my face flushed when I glanced at the messages popping up in text bubbles on my phone one early morning last March.



GUEST

George P. Matysek Jr.

"Are you at work?" one asked.

"Can you let me know when you are there?" another said.

"Uh-oh," I thought. "Someone died."

Stepping away from a conversation with a colleague, I closed the door to my office and called Treasa — bracing for bad news.

The voice at the other end of the phone lacked

urgency, however, and even had a carefree quality. My wife said she wanted to text me a photo and "get my opinion on something."

In the next instant, I was staring at a pregnancy test that showed two telltale vertical lines.

"You think it's positive?" Treasa asked.

"Yes," I said.

Treasa continued chatting about this life-changing development in a relaxed way that would arouse no suspicion among our five kids. Despite the hushed tone of her voice, however, I could tell she was ecstatic.

My heart was still beating furiously. I, too, was overjoyed. Yet, part of me was thinking back to earlier conversations my wife and I had about growing our family. We have always been unconditionally open to life, but questions lingered in my mind.

Was I too old at 50 to be the father of a sixth child? How would we pay for the countless expenses that would go into raising an even larger family? Would we need a new van to fit two adults and six kids? Having lost our first-

born son six weeks before his due date, what would we do if we had that experience again, or if the baby was born with health challenges — and how would that impact our children, who ranged in age from 4 to 9?

When we started sharing the news with family and friends, most were supportive. But a few weren't exactly encouraging.

"You need to find another hobby," one person told me.

Another's jaw literally dropped, and someone else asked if I thought I was a Hollywood movie star — Al Pacino or George Clooney — still having kids later in life. "Reeeeeeally?" said one, rolling his eyes.

I knew they were teasing ... mostly.

Yet, I could tell in some of the reactions that the path we walked was perceived as weird, naive and maybe even foolish by some.

Treasa had a different outlook.

Welcoming a new baby would teach our children to be more generous, she said. Our little ones would give and receive love in a new way. They would learn to make sacrifices and bond more strongly. Their support system would grow.

We brought the newest Matysek child home from the hospital in December, an early Christmas gift. The reaction of the children squashed any earlier concerns I had. One by one, each held his or her baby brother, beaming proudly. In these first few weeks, they've showered him with love, doting on him and offering to help with everything from getting his binky to reading him stories and voluntarily (!) cleaning up around the house.

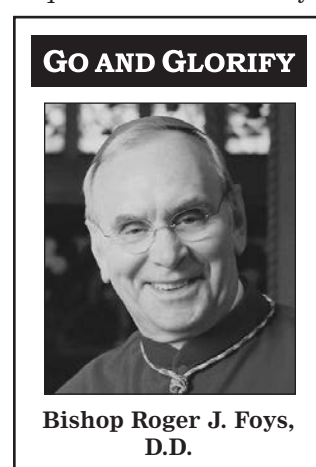
During his epic 1979 visit to Washington, D.C., Pope St. John Paul II noted that decisions about the number of children in a family "must not be taken only with a view to adding to comfort and preserving a peaceful existence."

Parents, he said, "will remind themselves that it is certainly less serious to deny their children certain comforts or material advantages than to deprive them of the presence of brothers and sisters, who could help them to grow in humanity and to realize the beauty of life at all its ages

Christ indeed is risen

The readings for Easter Sunday, The Resurrection of the Lord — Cycle B — are: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4 and John 20:1-9.

Christ indeed from death is risen, our new life obtaining. Have mercy, victor King, ever reigning!" (From the Sequence of Easter Sunday Mass)



GO AND GLORIFY

Bishop Roger J. Foys, D.D.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad! We celebrate this day the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Christ conquers sin and death once and for all. Death and sin no longer have any power over him — or over those who believe in him.

His victory over sin and death, having conquered the grave, is indeed reason to rejoice! And in these difficult days who of us does not seek to

rejoice in something worthwhile, in something and someone that brings life and light into our world, into our lives, into our hearts. Christ obtains for us new life, everlasting life, a life filled with goodness and joy.

In the Gospel reading for today (John 20:1-9) Mary of Magdala goes to the tomb on Easter morning only to find the stone rolled back and the tomb empty. With haste she runs to the Apostles and announces that "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they have put Him." (John 20:2)

Receiving this startling news Peter and John rush to the tomb only to find it as Mary has reported. John enters the tomb and sees the burial cloths rolled up, but the body of Jesus is nowhere to be found. "... he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead." (John 20:8-9)

We really can't blame Mary or Peter or John for being shocked and not understanding. This was entirely new to them. Yes, they had been followers of Jesus for some three years. Yes, they had listened to him teach and preach to the multitudes. Yes, they had seen him work many miracles and perform wondrous signs. Still, they were just not sure for they had never witnessed such things before.

We have such an advantage over those first followers of Jesus. Unlike them, we know the rest of the story. We know that Jesus has indeed risen from the dead, for we have witnesses who have testified to that truth. We have the Scriptures and the tradition of the Church which his early followers did not have.

So, what is our response to the Lord this day? How can it be anything other than gratitude and joy. Profound gratitude and exuberant joy!

Christ indeed from death is risen, our new life obtaining. The tomb is empty. Death is no longer victorious. Christ has overcome sin and death — for us! He did this for us!

Only love can lead someone to give up one's life freely. Imagine the love that God has for us to send his Son to save us. Imagine the love that Jesus has for us to have willingly become one of us and surrender his life so that we may have life.

Amidst any problems, any sorrows, any difficulties, any doubts we might have in our lives, today we place them all in the hands of the Lord. We know the rest of the story. If ever there was a happy ending, this day is it.

Christ indeed from death is risen, our new life obtaining! This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad!

A blessed and joy-filled Easter to all

Most Rev. Roger J. Foys, D.D. is bishop emeritus of the Diocese of Covington, Ky

and in all its variety."

He and Treasa are right. Love makes room.

George P. Matysek Jr. is managing editor of the Catholic Review, the news outlet of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. His column has been provided by OSV News.

Be Witnesses

*“Wake up the world!
Be witnesses of
a different way
of doing things,
of acting, of living!”*
— Pope Francis

Religious Communities in the Diocese of Covington

Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburg
Monastery www.stwalburg.org

Brothers of the Poor of St. Francis
www.brothersofthepoorofstfrancis.org

Passionist Nuns
www.erlangerpassionists.com

Sisters of Divine Providence
www.cdKentucky.org

Sisters of Notre Dame
www.sndusa.org

Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker
www.ssjw.org

Public and Private Associations

Franciscan Daughters of Mary
www.fdoMary.org

Missionaries of St. John the Baptist
www.msjb.info

Trusting in God and answering God's call



A group photo of the participants of Hope Esperanza 2024 in Chicago, Ill. The event was a gathering of sisters under 65 and lay associates interested in exploring a religious vocation's current and future realities.

Karen Kuhlman
Correspondent

“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.” Romans 12:2

The importance of community cannot be overstated. Whether the ordinary or the seminal moments of our lives, we need the company of family, friends and those on whom we can depend.

The people of the Diocese of Covington have been blessed to enjoy the legacy of the women religious working with one another and side by side with us through all the moments of our lives since 1859. The Sisters handed us the keys to success through determination and generosity by building schools, hospitals, social service agencies and Thomas More University.

God always puts the right people in the right place at the right time. The women religious laid the groundwork for the success of our region by teaching others how to be teachers, nurses, medical personnel and entrepreneurs. The women religious have done their jobs well, and by design, today, the laity join the sisters' efforts.

And yet, there continues to be a worldwide need for the skills of women religious. To address the need, a leadership collaborative was formed from several organizations already involved in leadership training and support for congregations of women religious from around the world. The women recently came together to attend Hope Esperanza 2024 in Chicago. The event was a gathering of sisters under 65 and lay associates interested in exploring a religious vocation's current and future realities.

Hope Esperanza was accompanied by a virtual gathering for those unable to attend in person. This year's event was a hybrid, with 100 to 150 in-person participants and about 80 participating online.

Sister Cathy Bauer, a Benedictine Sister of St. Walburg Monastery and vocation director for her order, participated in the event by Zoom.

“As we look to the future, we ask ourselves what is important and how do we shape the future? One of my concerns is

the importance of caring for the Benedictines' older sisters. Another is discerning what membership as a Benedictine will look like in the future,” Sister Cathy said. “When I entered in 1979 people came at 18, had nothing, and were giving up nothing. People entering now have jobs and education. They worked hard for their job and promotions in the world where they worked. Benedictine leadership puts peers together to talk, and that is important. I have been a vocation director for many years and have been connected to many religious communities. It is more complicated now, as young women often live among the laity and hold jobs before entering. I see our greatest need right now is prayer. Prayer for peace to end the conflicts of war around the world, an end to the divisions in America, and a search for a place with quiet peace.”

Sister Leslie Keener is vocation director for the Congregation of Divine Providence and meets with young women who are discerning a religious vocation. Sister Leslie attended the Hope Esperanza 2024 conference in Chicago with friends. She is very connected across the congregations with her generational peers in other communities.

Sister Leslie said, “Some of my friends have aged out of other conferences for younger women. This conference was a great opportunity to reconnect with longtime friends. I enjoyed looking at the realities of religious life, where we have been, looking at the future with hope, and doing so with peers. The conference seemed like an excellent, positive space to discuss all that — and it was! It was a very energizing experience!”

“Sometimes, people talk about religious life as something of the past and disappearing, but that is not true. There may be some shifting in demographics, but the conference was attended by over 200 — we're still here! We don't know what will happen in our future, but we know that God still calls us to mission, spirituality and community life. Just as in other parts of our world, there is a lot of uncertainty about what will happen. In some ways, we don't need to know because we are trusting in God and walking through it with each other for mutual support.”

These women believe in the future of religious life. It is a witness to us all to trust God and live our vocation each day. God is with us showing us the way.

For more information about consecrated life in the Diocese of Covington, contact Sister Marla Monahan at mmonahan@covdio.org or (859) 392-1569.

'I walked away from God, but he didn't walk away from me' said candidate Wesley Hamilton

Bella Young

Multimedia Correspondent

During the Easter Vigil, at parishes throughout the diocese, 107 catechumens and 108 candidates will become the newest members of Catholic Church in the Diocese of Covington. The Messenger is highlighting the stories of a few of these members. In this fourth in a series of articles, Wesley Hamilton, a candidate at St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring, shares his path to the Church.

"I walked away from God, but he didn't walk away from me," said Wesley Hamilton, an RCIA candidate from St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring.

Mr. Hamilton grew up as a southern Baptist, the same religion as the rest of his family. Around his sophomore year of high school however he left the church and would go on to spend, "a good six years somewhere between

agnostic and atheist," he said. He would not return to faith until the start of law school.

"I moved up here in 2020 for law school and I was really alone, a lot of my friends and family live in the Louisville area ... It was the farthest from home I had ever been. At that point I knew I needed to come back to the faith."

Mr. Hamilton said that it was "in a moment of real crisis," that he took a chance and spoke with Msgr. Gerald Reinersman, former pastor of St. Joseph Parish. "He was there for me, and he was so calm, so collected and so certain in his faith," said Mr. Hamilton, "That was my first tangible experience with the Catholic Church."

After his conversation with Msgr. Reinersman, Mr. Hamilton said it took attending Mass twice before he was certain this is where he needed to be. "After the second one I was hooked ... I needed no more convincing I was in the

presence of God. It felt real," he said.

His family, specifically his father, has been supportive of his decision to convert. "My dad is just happy that I returned to God ... he has been the rock of my faith when I didn't have any."

Mr. Hamilton went on to say, "I believe that I walked away from God, but he didn't walk away from me and the part of him that didn't walk away from me was my father."

Mr. Hamilton also says what he is most excited for his First Communion saying, "I look forward deeply to the first day I get to take part in it."

When talking about coming into full communion with the Church, Mr. Hamilton said, "I'm glad to say I think I've found the one true Church, the one true iteration of our faith. I am so glad, so happy to be here, it feels like home."

Franciscan at Home

(Continued from page 3)

diocesan pastoral plan developed through the With One Heart initiative. School and parish catechists will also be using the Franciscan at Home workshops for their ongoing faith development. This initiative is being funded by the Diocese. It doesn't cost parishes, schools or individuals to participate.

"What we are actually providing is a mentored approach of accompaniment," said Dr. Ginter about Franciscan at Home. Unlike a program, that has a beginning and an ending date, Franciscan at Home has "the perspective of lifelong learning."

"Every disciple of Jesus Christ needs to continue to be formed by the Holy Spirit for the entirety of our earthly days," said Dr. Ginter.

Franciscan at Home has learners in over 131 countries and over 100 partnering (arch)diocese and eparchies in the United States.

"When we thought about providing the convenience for learners anywhere in the world, we thought it'd be most convenient to provide them learning in the home," said Dr. Ginter. But Franciscan at Home is about more than convenience.

"It's always been our aim for building up the domestic church, for the home to be the place where the faith is handed on," said Dr. Ginter.

It is often said, Dr. Ginter noted, that parents are the primary catechists of their children. Dr. Ginter makes an important differentiation, "we want parents to be the primary 'intentional' catechists of their children." Every day, in varied and unintentional ways parents are always teaching their children something, "But it may not be the Catholic faith," he said.

"They are the catechist sometimes of the world's perspective — what they believe about sports, what they believe about careerism, what they believe about money, what they believe about non-Catholic ideas," Dr. Ginter said. "Because by baptism, and especially by the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, parents have the vocation to lead their children in holiness and evangelizing them. That's why we want them to be the primary 'intentional' catechists of their children."

For more information and to create a free account go to <https://franciscanathome.com/diocese-covington>.



Serrans hear about campus ministry

The Serra Club for Vocations, Northern Kentucky, invited Deacon Brian Cox to speak at its membership meeting, March 19. Deacon Cox talked about his experiences at the recent SEEK gathering in St. Louis and his ministry as director of Campus Ministry at Northern Kentucky University and how the program is growing. Pictured (from left) are: Jeff Jehn, president, Serra Club for Vocations president; Deacon Cox, and Serrans Diana Henke and Nick Winnike. The Serra Club for Vocations is an association in Christian fellowship that encourages and supports priestly and religious vocations and the spiritual growth of its members. For information visit www.serranky.org.

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Cathedral Basilica hosts return of Shroud of Turin and sudarium

The Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption will again host a display of an exact copy of the Shroud of Turin and Sudarium of Oviedo during Easter Week this year. The cloths will be on display in the Cathedral's St. Paul Relics Chapel and will be available for viewing throughout the week during regular Cathedral hours.

The centerpiece is an exact copy of the Shroud of Turin, believed throughout Christianity to be the burial shroud that wrapped Jesus' body when it was placed in the tomb on Good Friday. Also on display is an exact copy of the Sudarium of Oviedo, believed to be "the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head." (John 20:7)

The Shroud of Turin is the single most scientifically studied artifact in history. The cloth is fourteen and a half feet long and three and a half feet wide, made of herring-

bone twill linen and bears the front and back image of a crucified man. The image shows scourge marks over the man's entire body, nail wounds at his wrist and feet, and puncture injuries to his brow and scalp consistent with the "crown of thorns" pressed onto his head at the time of his crucifixion. In the man's right side, a gaping oval wound can be seen from which a stream of blood flows.

Christian believers worldwide venerate the actual Shroud (kept in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Turin, Italy) as the burial cloth of Jesus Christ. The Holy See, which has had custody of the Shroud since 1983, has never taken a definitive stance on its authenticity, but many popes have visited it and attested to its devotional power. Since 1978, the cloth has been the object of extensive scientific and forensic scrutiny by legions of scientists

who hoped to determine its origin, its history, and particularly who the man in the image might be. Most scientists approached the cloth determined to quickly prove it was a fake. But the accumulated evidence over 46 years of scientific scrutiny has only generated more questions than answers.

No paints or oils have ever been found on the Shroud, and the image is not the product of an artist or other medieval process. Type AB blood has been found all over its surface, the same type of blood that is present on the Sudarium of Oviedo. Most mysterious of all is the image itself: scientists have never been able to determine how it was created. According to physicist Dr. John Jackson, a lead investigator of the 1978 scientific team that first investigated the Shroud, the image was likely formed by a



The Shroud of Turin and the Sudarium of Oviedo

An exact replica of the Shroud of Turin and Sudarium of Oviedo will be on display throughout Easter Week at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, Monday-Friday, April 1-5, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. and on Saturday, April 6 from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

The display is provided courtesy of the Knights, Dames and Squires of the Covington-Lexington Section of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

Crowds view the Shroud in 2023.

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process still unknown to science, but something that resembled an instant burst of high energy that “scorched” only the top one or two micro-fibers of the cloth’s surface.

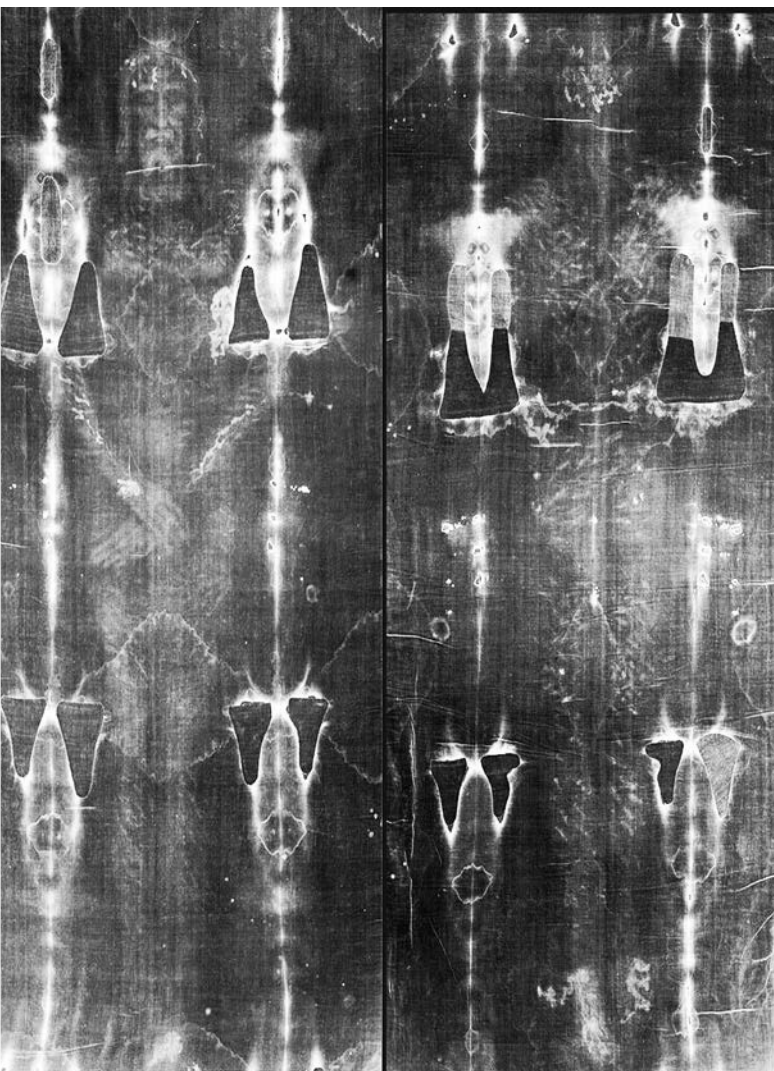
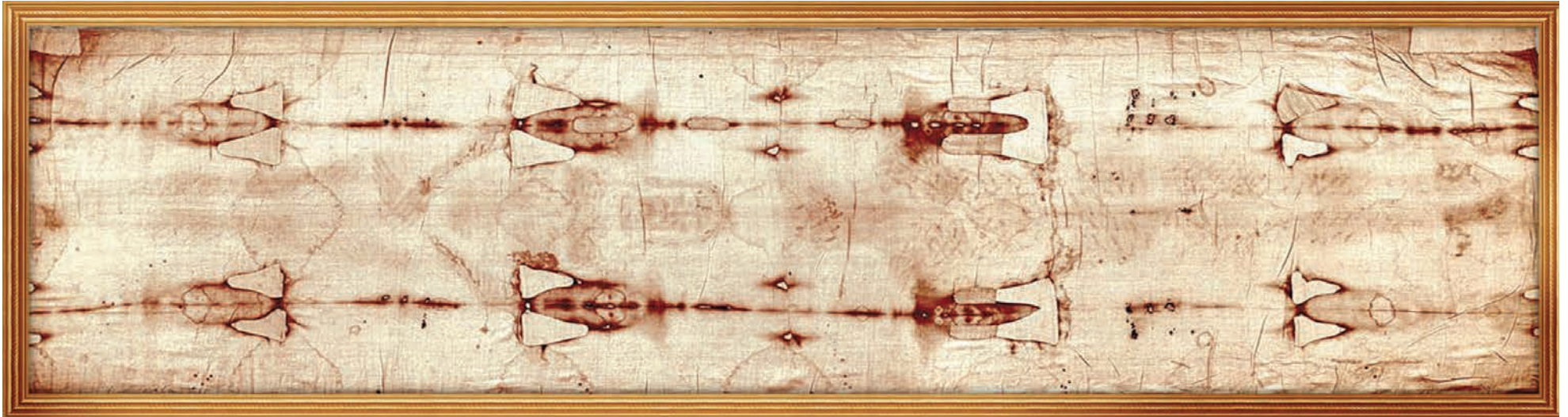
Recent tests on the Shroud of Turin date the cloth to the first century A.D. According to Edward Pentin writing in 2022 for the National Catholic Register, Italian scientist Liberato De Caro of Italy’s Institute of Crystallography of the National Research Council in Bari used a “Wide-Angle X-ray Scattering” method to examine the natural aging of cellulose that makes up the linen cloth. His peer reviewed

research showed the Shroud is much older than the seven centuries claimed in 1988 using carbon-14 dating techniques and is actually around 2,000 years old.

“We hope people take away a sense of what the first century Christians might’ve experienced when they encountered the empty tomb and the risen Christ,” says Sir Stephen Enzweiler of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre. “Something completely life-altering happened to them when they peered into that tomb and saw the cloths “set in place” (John 20:6-7). That experience turned

them from being frightened fugitives to being lions of faith.”

The Shroud of Turin and the Sudarium of Oviedo will be on display throughout Easter Week during regular Cathedral hours (Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.) and on Saturday, April 6 from 10 a.m.–2 p.m. The display is provided courtesy of the Knights, Dames and Squires of the Covington-Lexington Section of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.



(above top) The Shroud of Turin.

(above) The Sudarium of Oviedo.

(far left) Shroud image in negative shows the entire crucified figure.

(left) The face on the Shroud.

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Chrism Mass

Bishop Iffert says Christ's mission and vision are seen 'alive and well' in the sacred oils

Laura Keener
Editor

The Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption was filled to capacity, March 26, for the annual celebration of the Chrism Mass. The Chrism Mass is the great diocesan assembly par excellence. All priests and deacons of the diocese gather as Bishop John Iffert blesses the holy oils and consecrates the sacred Chrism.

Also in attendance are representatives from every parish, school and Catholic organization ministering in the Diocese. These representatives receive the three oils — Oil of the Sick, Oil of the Catechumens and the Holy Chrism — taking them back to their parish, schools and organizations for use in the administration of the sacraments.

The Chrism Mass is a sign of unity — bishop, priests, religious and people — and service. During the Mass, the priests renew their ordination promises.

As Bishop Iffert began his homily, he drew a parallel between Jesus' act of returning to the temple of Nazareth, the place where he had grown up, to announce his "divine mission for the world" to a meeting last Saturday, where Cathedral parishioners gathered to hear the goals of the parish's pastoral plan.

"Something similar is happening today in the Gospel that we hear. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River and anointed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit then moved him out into the wilderness where he faced temptation ... there he comes to the understanding that it is time for him to inaugurate his ministry ... so he goes home ... He finds in the prophet Isaiah, his mission, the way to describe himself, to reintroduce himself to his family and to the world."

Reading from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus proclaims, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord ... Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

"We know," said Bishop Iffert, "that the mission of Jesus is still alive and well in the world, still alive and well in the Church, still alive and well in each one of our vocational calls ... And we see it in these oils that will be blessed and consecrated."

These oils used in baptism, used in the pastoral care of the sick, used in the sacraments of confirmation, frees us from sin, allows us to accept and unite our sufferings to the cross of Jesus and by simple grace be transformed, Bishop Iffert said.

"These mysteries we celebrate tonight, the vision of Jesus who comes to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to the lowly forgiveness to the poor and the needy ... that grace is made available to us, to you and to me, TODAY in the sacred mystery."



(above) Priests process to the altar through a filled Cathedral, March 26, for the celebration of the Chrism Mass.



(left) Deacon Barry Henry carries the Oil of the Sick to Bishop Iffert.



(right) Banners from parishes and from across the diocese line the pews at the Chrism Mass, representing the diocese's people, religious and organizations.



(above) Holding his hands over the vessel, Bishop Iffert blesses the Oil of Catechumens which will be used at parishes across the Diocese of Covington.

(above right) Bishop John Iffert preaches the homily at the annual Chrism Mass, March 26.



(above) A mom holds a sleeping child during the Chrism Mass.

(left) Bishop Iffert mixes balsam with olive oil to create the sacred Chrism.



(left) Bishop Iffert raises the Eucharist.

(below) All priests present extend their hand during the consecration of the Eucharist.

(right) The Squires, Dames and Knights of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

(below right) Priests stand for the Renewal of Priestly Promises, where they renew their promises to God and the Church.



(above) Bishop Iffert accepts the Oil of Catechumens from Deacon Richard Malsi.

(left) Seminarians Andrew Pugh and Hank Bischoff carry candles leading the procession.

(right) Eighth-graders from St. Pius X Parish, Edgewood, bring up the Eucharistic gifts.



Successful Ministry Expands Its Efforts to Supply Safe Water in Africa With Support From U.S. Catholics

Cross Catholic Outreach and its supporters in the U.S. have become a major force for good in Africa, particularly through their efforts to provide safe water in countries where poor families have been relying on insufficient or contaminated sources. After major successes in Kenya, the ministry is expanding its efforts in Zambia and Malawi, where local Catholic leaders will be implementing water projects as the charity's in-country partners.

"Safe drinking water is so accessible in the United States that we tend to think everyone enjoys the same benefit — but nothing could be further from the truth. Water is scarce in many developing countries, and even where it can be found it's often contaminated and is a health risk for those using it," explained Michele Sagarino, president of Cross Catholic Outreach. "Keep in mind, these families can't rely on the modern water systems we have. They typically draw their water from a murky pond, a stream used by animals, or a shallow pit they've dug by hand near an old riverbed. All of those sources are teeming with bacteria, animal waste and parasites, but they have to use the water they collect there because it's essential to their survival."

As with all of its humanitarian efforts, Cross Catholic Outreach will be implementing its water projects in Africa by working through local, trusted Catholic leaders. In this case, its in-country partners will be Malawi's Dioceses of Karonga and Mzuzu, Zambia's Diocese of Chipata, and the Daughters of the Redeemer in Zambia's Diocese of Kabwe.

"Whenever possible we work through Catholic ministries already in place overseas because that's the most

effective and efficient way to help the poor," Sagarino said. "It is also the best use of our supporters' donations. Our donors want as much of their contributions as possible to reach needy families, and by working through the Church and existing ministry staff, we can achieve that goal. More of every donated dollar we receive can directly benefit the poor."

The approach Cross Catholic Outreach uses to solve water scarcity problems in Africa is also suited to local needs. Rather than install complicated and difficult to maintain modern water systems in poor communities, the ministry relies on a tried-and-true solution to securing safe water. It brings in professionals to drill wells that will include manual pumps.

"Drilling a well has proven to be the best way to provide safe water in an impoverished African village," Sagarino said. "In fact, in remote places with little or no access to electricity, it's really the only way to provide families with a reliable and abundant source of safe water. In some cases, we include a solar-powered pump to make drawing water easier, but that can be done at a reasonable cost too. Many of our Catholic donors are eager to fund the installation of a well when they learn just how inexpensive it is and how much of an impact it has on so many lives."

While installing a clean-water well is a less complicated process than building a more sophisticated water system, there are still very important steps involved.

The project typically begins with commissioning a hydrogeological survey to determine the best location for the well. Once experts have chosen a promising site, a special rig is brought in to drill the well. Since the terrain



A completed well project becomes a source of great joy in the entire community. The health of the people improves dramatically, and the abundant flow of clean water becomes a symbol of Christ — the living water — strengthening the people's faith.

varies greatly from region to region, determining the depth of the well becomes a critical decision too.

"We've had to drill down 200 meters in some cases to ensure we would be able to reach a plentiful source of water," Sagarino explained.

After the well shaft is encased in a special tubing to preserve its strength and purity, pump tests are run to ensure that there is enough water for the community, and water quality is checked to make sure it is safe for people and animals.

"We have proven the success of this approach in Kenya, where we've been able to install 83 wells in recent years — and now we're excited to bring that same blessed relief to children and families in Zambia and Malawi," Sagarino said. "Catholic leaders in the Dioceses of Chipata, Kabwe, Karonga

and Mzuzu are ready to get underway. All we need now is funding support from Catholics in the U.S. To secure that help, we've been reaching out to individuals, parishes and Catholic schools, and the response so far has been encouraging. I'm confident we'll reach our goal because this is exactly the kind of mission work Catholics love to support."

Readers interested in supporting Cross Catholic Outreach's work for the poor can contribute through the ministry brochure inserted in this issue or send tax-deductible gifts to: Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC03032, PO Box 97168, Washington, DC, 20090-7168. The ministry has a special need for partners willing to make gifts on a monthly basis. Use the inserted brochure to become a Mission Partner.

Cross Catholic Outreach Introduces Catalog of Merciful Gifts To Provide Families With Unique Lenten Almsgiving Options

The long-held tradition of almsgiving during Lent has always been a blessing to Catholic households, but there have been times when families longed for ways to extend their compassion to international communities where the ravages of poverty are often more extreme. We know those needs exist. The challenge is in finding a way to connect U.S. Catholics with families and communities in dire need.

This year, the respected relief and development ministry Cross Catholic Outreach has offered a solution — its

Easter Catalog of international mercy projects in need of funding. Through the catalog, individuals, families and parishes can build homes, provide meals to combat malnutrition, sponsor educational scholarships for poor children, address urgent medical needs and undertake many other acts of compassion, all under the supervision of respected Catholic leaders in the countries being served.

The opportunities listed in the catalog truly span the globe, including missions of mercy in the Caribbean, Central and

South America, Africa, and beyond.

"And because the projects listed in the catalog are very specific, those who donate will know exactly how their alms are being used," explained Michele Sagarino, president of Cross Catholic Outreach. "That creates some wonderful opportunities for parents with young children being taught the importance of almsgiving. Imagine the excitement of your son or daughter knowing their contribution at Lent built a home for a struggling family or ensured a child would finally be

able to attend school. These are not just symbolic charitable efforts. The projects being accomplished are life-transforming."

This unique Easter Catalog is easy to access. Readers will find a link for it at the ministry's website (CrossCatholic.org), or they can reach it directly by entering the web address CrossCatholic.org/Easter.

"Lenten almsgiving is always a blessing, but its impact is even more significant when it blesses those with the greatest needs," Sagarino said.

Church Leaders Working To Lift Enormous Burdens Water Scarcity Puts on Women and Young Girls in Africa

In Miriam's village in Zambia, neighbors whisper about a recent lion attack. Dangerous animals are one reason Miriam never stops to rest during her hourlong chore to fetch water. The other is because any delays she experiences in completing her task will make her late for school.

Sadly, the young teen has only made it to second grade, and setbacks of that kind are tragically common for the girls in her village. While the chore of

According to Sagarino, Catholic leaders in Zambia and Malawi are working with Cross Catholic Outreach to provide solutions. (See related story on the opposite page.)

Father George Banda is one of those eager to see the suffering end. He serves distant and underserved villages within Zambia's Diocese of Chipata by bringing the Eucharist to the sick and elderly, mentoring Catholic families, and sharing the Word of God. While



As Fr. George travels to remote areas to share the love of God, he sees clear signs of how water scarcity impacts families — particularly women and young girls.

collecting water from a distant source is part of the reason, illnesses are more often to blame. Miriam's murky water comes from a hand-dug pit contaminated with bacteria.

"When we are sick from the water, we miss school. So it makes it hard for us to achieve our dreams," Miriam explained. "It gives us little time to do our homework or study. I pray for a good life free from illness."

When it comes to Africa's issues with water scarcity, women and girls are among the hardest hit.

"Women and young girls are typically responsible for the time-consuming task of water collection, and they face risks of injury and illness on a daily basis," confirmed Michele Sagarino, president of Cross Catholic Outreach, a respected Catholic relief and development ministry working to provide solutions to this water crisis. "As a mother of two, it pains me to think these girls are being plagued by illnesses from drinking contaminated water and are missing out on the important benefits of an education — a blessing my own children enjoyed."

he is encouraged by the strong faith of those families, he has been troubled by the hardships they must endure.

"It's a sad situation. There are a lot of people who are sharing water with animals. And some of the water that people are drinking is contaminated," Fr. George said. "These people are struggling."

Also partnering with Cross Catholic Outreach to end the suffering in Zambia are Bishop George Cosmas Zumaire Lungu of the Diocese of Chipata and Sister Prisca Matenga of the Daughters of the Redeemer. In Malawi, Cross Catholic Outreach will be working with Bishop Martin Anwel Mtumbuka from the Diocese of Karonga and Bishop John Alphonsus Ryan of the Diocese of Mzuzu.

"With their support, our plan is to bless 49,000 people with a lifetime of clean water and other targeted interventions to serve the poor and strengthen their faith," Sagarino said. "We call the project *Wells of Salvation* because its primary objective is to build or repair more than 100 wells to supply safe, clean water."



U.S. Catholics can help end the water crisis faced by Miriam and her community.

For girls like Miriam, this effort will be a literal answer to prayer. It will remove the heavy burden of water collection from her shoulders and ensure her health is no longer at risk.

"Our hope is that U.S. Catholics will want to support this effort with

their prayers and financial support," Sagarino said. "I know if my own child or grandchild was facing the challenges Miriam endures, I wouldn't hesitate to relieve her suffering. In this case, we can actually transform the lives of Miriam and thousands like her!"

How to Help

To fund Cross Catholic Outreach's effort to help the poor worldwide, use the postage-paid brochure inserted in this newspaper, scan the QR code, or mail your gift to Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC03032, PO Box 97168, Washington, DC, 20090-7168. The brochure also includes instructions on becoming a Mission Partner and making a regular monthly donation to this cause.

If you identify an aid project, 100% of the donation will be restricted to be used for that specific project. However, if more is raised for the project than needed, funds will be redirected to other urgent needs in the ministry.



Lamb of God points directly to Jesus Christ present at the altar

Father Luke Spannagel
USCCB

As *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* explains, “The gesture of breaking bread done by Christ at the Last Supper, which in apostolic times gave the entire Eucharistic Action its name [Breaking of the Bread was a common name for Mass in the early Church], signifies that the many faithful are made one body (1 Cor 10:17) by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life, which is Christ, who for the salvation of the world died and rose

again.

The fraction or breaking of bread is begun after the sign of peace and is carried out with proper reverence, and should not be unnecessarily prolonged or accorded exaggerated importance ... The priest breaks the Bread and puts a piece of the host into the chalice to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation, namely, of the Body of Jesus Christ, living and glorious” (*GIRM*, 83).

You may be thinking, Hold on, Father! What about the

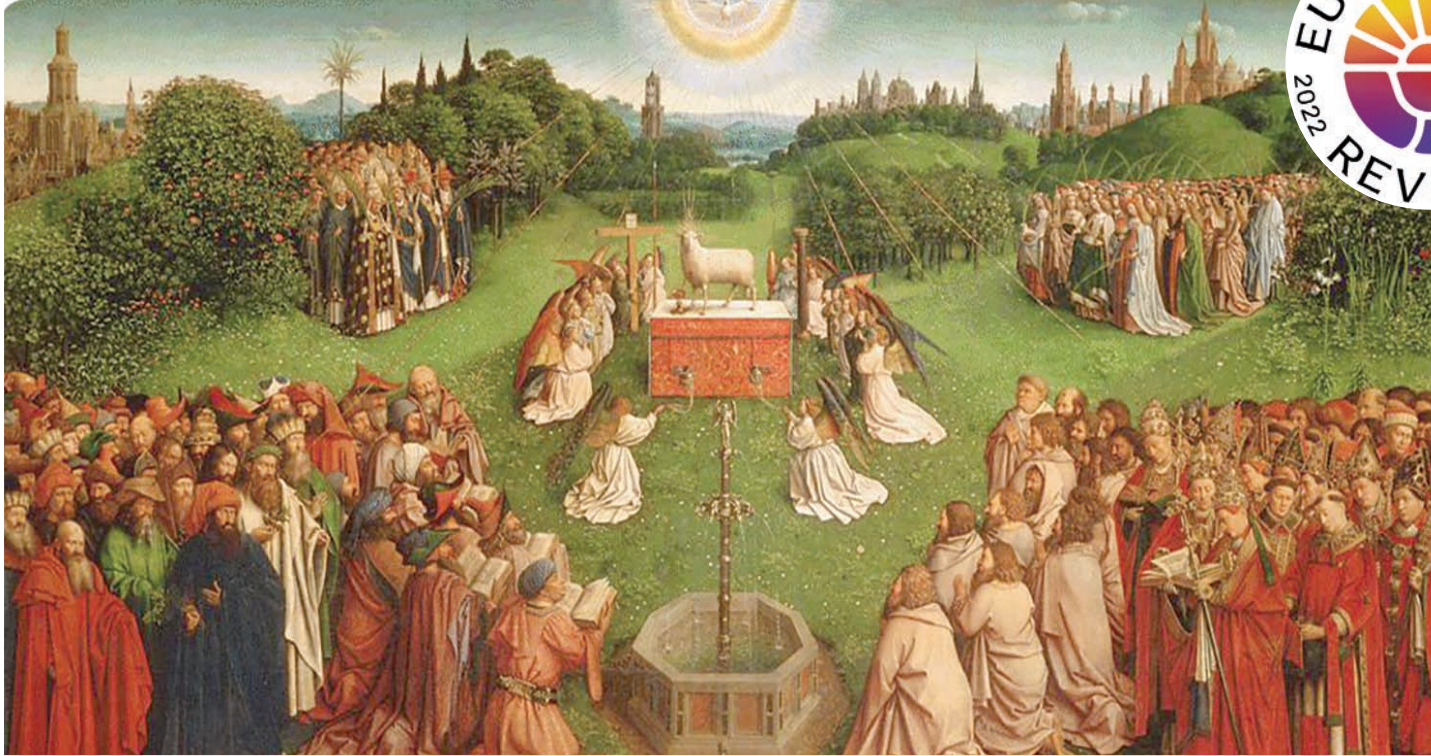
love for us for the forgiveness of sins. As the Diocese of Peoria teaches, “The slaughtered lamb is of extreme importance throughout Sacred Scripture. The prophecy of Jeremiah is that the suffering Servant of the Lord would be like a ‘lamb led to the slaughter.’ The Book of Revelation states that enthroned on the Heavenly Altar is the Lamb of God showing the marks of being slain for our offenses. For

the Jewish Passover, the lamb was the prescribed animal of sacrifice. The sacrifice of Jesus is the new Passover. In fact, as the Gospel of John details, Jesus is the Lamb of the new Passover” (*A Study of the Mass*, p. 18).

In greater depth, Charles Belmonte states, “The figure of the ‘Lamb of God’ is full of meaning and is helpful to enkindle our devotion before Communion. The Lamb foretold by Isaiah and announced by St. John the Baptist should wipe out our sins through his obedience to God’s will: ‘Innocent, he never opened his mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughterhouse, like a sheep that is dumb before its shearers’ (Isa 53:7)... [T]his lamb was also foreshadowed by the paschal lamb the Jews sacrificed on the eve of their departure from their slavery in Egypt.

The expression of John the Baptist reminds us of the lamb of which the Jews celebrated the Passover every year, the pledge of the reconciliation of man with God. St. John the Evangelist, who was at the foot of the cross, observed that Jesus’ legs were not broken as in the case of the two thieves. We find in this detail some similarity with the prescription of God for the Paschal lamb: ‘You must not break any bone of it’ (Ex 12:46)

Finally, the *Agnus Dei* [Lamb of God] is also



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SCAN ME

Lamb of God? Well, as we will see, at this moment of the Mass a couple of actions will be overlapping.

At this point in the Mass, we either sing or say the *Agnus Dei*: “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.” The Roman Missal instructs that the first phrases may be repeated if needed, but the final time always ends with “grant us peace.”

As John the Baptist heralded, Jesus is the Lamb of God — the one true sacrifice offered out of

a nuptial hymn to celebrate the wedding of the Lamb with his bride, the Church, in peace and unity, as is described in the Book of Revelation. There, on the altar, the Lamb lies alive, but as if slain. Twenty-four elders are around the Lamb. They are clothed in white robes and crowned with gold. Thousands of angels hymn the sacrifice and triumph of the Lamb. Certainly, each Mass is only a prelude and a token of the future adoration of the Lamb in eternity” (*Understanding the Mass*, p. 180-81).

So, just like so many of the other Mass parts we have reviewed, the Lamb of God is filled with meaning and symbolism, all of which are pointing directly to Jesus Christ, truly present on the altar: his Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity.

Just before we are ready for Holy Communion, these words remind us of Who is present on the altar and that, in his great love, he offered himself in sacrifice to save us from our sins. Here is the One who fulfills the prophecies of old. Here is the One for whom hearts have been longing. Here is the One whose perfect sacrifice draws us together in love and opens a sharing in the beauty and perfection of heaven.

What a great Savior! How blessed are we that he is truly present in our midst.

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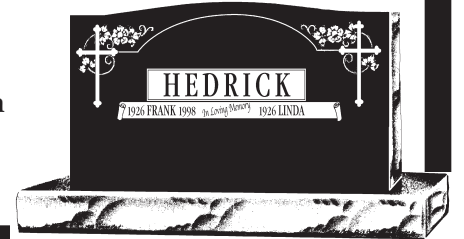
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Step 3: Your account becomes active when your background check, VIRTUS session and Acceptance Form are posted on your account. You will receive 12 bulletins per year. You will receive e-mail notices at system@pub.virtus.org unless your computer program blocks them.

Bulletins:

- March bulletin: posted Sunday, March 3; due Tuesday, April 2.

www.virtusonline.org, enter you user id and password. If your account is suspended contact your primary location where you volunteer or are employed. Your primary location contact information is found under your Contact Tab.

VIRTUS Training:

- Wednesday, April 17, 1:30-4 p.m., Catholic Charities, Training Room, Covington
- Wednesday, May 15, 9-11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Wednesday, May 15, 6-8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Tuesday, June 18, 9-11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Tuesday, June 18, 6-8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

- Thursday, July 18, 9-11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Thursday, July 18, 6-8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Tuesday, July 30, 9-11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Tuesday, July 30, 6-8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Wednesday, Aug. 7, 9-11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

- Wednesday, Aug. 7, 6-8 :30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

Note: If your Training Tab is missing or you cannot access your account, contact your parish, school or institution.

For other difficulties, contact Marylu Steffen at (859) 392-1500 or msteffen@covdio.org

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Notre Dame Academy is a Catholic all-girls high school sponsored by the Sisters of Notre Dame. NDA has a rich tradition of success and excellence. Interested candidates should submit a cover letter and resume to Mrs. Trish Miller at ndahr@ndapandas.org. Upon submission, candidates will receive a search prospectus outlining further details about the position and the application process. This position will be posted until filled.

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Middendorf Funeral Home in Ft. Wright is looking for part time Funeral Assistant. Please call Dave Middendorf or Noah Middendorf at (859)-341-7800.

ADVERTISING SALES

Due to an upcoming retirement, the Diocese of Covington is seeking a full-time ad salesperson for its official newspaper, the *Messenger*, beginning in May. The successful candidate will be a practicing, knowledgeable Roman Catholic who will be an excellent representative of the newspaper and the diocese. The successful candidate will be ready to embrace the mission of the diocesan newspaper, has some previous sales experience, works well as a team member, is attentive to detail, and will be energetic in serving existing customers as well as expanding sales to new customers. Interested candidates are asked to e-mail a letter of interest and a résumé outlining sales experience and other qualifications to

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Discernment is essential to discipleship, papal preacher says

Cindy Wooden

Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The Holy Spirit is like a line prompter at a theater, behind the scenes and constantly whispering to Christians the words of Jesus, said the preacher of the papal household.

“However, he does not mechanically suggest the words of the Gospel, like from a script, but explains them, adapts them and applies them to specific situations,” Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa told Pope Francis, cardinals and members of the Roman Curia.

Concluding his series of Friday Lenten meditations March 22, Cardinal Cantalamessa insisted that listening to the Holy Spirit and discerning what the Spirit is saying to individuals and to the church at large is an exercise essential to following Jesus.

“We don’t start out knowing the concrete path of holiness God wants for each of us,” he said. “God reveals it step by step, so it is not enough to have a well-crafted plan and then follow it. There is no model of perfection that is identical for everyone.”

God does not produce saints with a cookie cutter — “God does not like cloning,” he said. “Every saint is an original invention of the Spirit.”

Faith, for a Christian, is not just a belief or even a feeling of love for the Lord, the cardinal said, it is a call to follow Jesus concretely in the way one lives and shares in the mission of the church.

And that, too, is different for each person, he said.

A person comes to understand their unique call through prayer; meditating on Scripture, speaking with a spiritual guide and following the teaching of the church, he said. But especially important are the promptings and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which also give the person “the necessary strength and often the joy to accomplish it if the person consents.”

Of course, Cardinal Cantalamessa said, understanding that call requires discernment, which is not as easy as judging something as good or bad.

“The most delicate problem about inspirations has always been to discern those that come from the Spirit of God from those that come from the spirit of the world or from your own passions or from the evil spirit,” he said.

Jesus told his disciples that a true or false prophecy can be judged by the fruit it produces, the cardinal said, which is a helpful thing to keep in mind as the universal church continues to grow in the process of synodality and its encouragement to listen and pray together to discover the



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher of the papal household, gives a Lenten meditation to Pope Francis, cardinals, members of the Roman Curia and Vatican employees in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican March 22, 2024.

promptings of the Holy Spirit for sharing the Gospel today.

“In the moral field,” Cardinal Cantalamessa said, “a fundamental criterion is the Spirit’s coherence with itself. One cannot ask for something that is contrary to divine will as expressed in the Scriptures, in the teaching of the church and in the obligations of one’s own state in life. A divine inspiration will never ask one to do something the church considers immoral.”

“The flesh,” he said, tries to make its own arguments and sometimes they sound good, “for example, that God is love and everything that is done for love is from God.”

St. Ignatius of Loyola taught that “what comes from the Spirit of God brings with it joy, peace, tranquility, sweetness, simplicity, light. What comes from the spirit of evil,

instead, brings with it disturbance, agitation, anxiety, confusion, darkness,” he said.

“But it is true that in practice things are more complex,” he said. “Inspiration can come from God, and despite that, cause great disturbance. But this is not due to the inspiration, which is sweet and peaceful like everything that comes from God. Rather it is born from resistance to the inspiration or from the fact that we are not ready to do what we are asked to do.”

However, he said, “if inspiration is accepted, the heart will soon find itself in a deep peace. God rewards every little victory in this area by making the soul feel its approval, which is the most beautiful thing, the purest joy that exists in this world.”



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PEOPLE AND EVENTS

The weekly TV Mass from the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption is broadcast locally on The CW, Sundays, 10 — 11 a.m. Viewers can tune-in on the following channels: antenna 12.2; Spectrum 117 or 25; Cincinnati Bell 17 or 517; and DirectTV 25.

Bishop Iffert and the priests of the Diocese of Covington will pray a Holy Hour for survivors of sexual violence and for the sanctification of priests, 3 p.m., every third Thursday monthly, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. All are welcome.

St. Mary's Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, offers Veneration of a relic of the True Cross, on the first Friday of every month, from noon–1 p.m. Confessions are offered concurrently. The monthly veneration is held in silence and concludes with a blessing and the opportunity for the faithful to come forward to personally venerate the True Cross relic. The monthly veneration is sponsored by the Knights and Dames of the Covington-Lexington section of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

Holy Cross District High School, Covington, 26th annual mulch sale. Students will deliver mulch to your home, business or rental property anywhere in Kenton, Boone and Campbell Counties and will put it anywhere on your property, starting March 30 and continuing for at least four weeks. Call (859) 392-8999 for information.

St. Augustine Parish, Covington, will celebrate Tenebrae, Spy Wednesday, March 27, 6 p.m. All are welcome.

New Beginnings is an 8-week program for separated or divorced individuals, which provides an opportunity to heal and move forward despite a complicated situation. Led by facilitators who have been through their own personal losses, this program invites participants to move toward their own new beginning. The next session will be held on consecutive Tuesdays – March 19, March 26, April 2, April 9, April 16, April 23, April 30, and May 7, 2024, Time: 7 to 8:30 p.m. at Catholic Charities – Diocese of Covington, 3629 Church St., Covington. Register at covdio.org/new-beginnings.

DCCH Children's Home Flea Market, Ft. Mitchell, year-round, 8:30 a.m.– noon, Monday, Thursday, and Saturday; (Dec.– April, Monday, Thursday and every 3rd Saturday). Donation drop-off during Flea Market hours or at drop-off box anytime.

Sisters of Notre Dame, Park Hills, Women's Retreat Weekend, April 6–April 7, the theme is "Forgiveness." Cost is \$50 for materials and meals. Commute only, no overnight stays left. For information call Margie Schnelle at (859) 392-8229.

Euchre Tournament April 12, doors open 6 p.m.; play begins 7:30 p.m., St. Paul Parish Carline Center, Florence. Cost \$30 to play; \$15 to observe. Proceeds benefit the St. Paul School 8th grade class trip to Washington D.C. Contact casdoering@hotmail.com



Science fair winners

Twelve St. Pius X, Edgewood, 7th graders attended the regional science fair in Louisville. As a group, they won third place in the middle school division. Individually, five students placed within their divisions.

mail.com or (859) 750-5085.

The Newport Central Catholic Drama Club will present The SpongeBob Musical, April 19–21 and April 26 and 27. The Gala Performance will be Friday, April 19. For more details visit: NCCGala24.givesmart.com. Additional performances: April 20, 7 p.m., April 21, 2 p.m., April 26, 7 p.m. and April 27, 7 p.m. To purchase tickets, visit: <https://link.edgepi-lot.com/s/3d801c0f/rc39T-HK0CC8M99mfNjMA?u=https://gofan.co/app/school/KY6479> Tickets may also be purchased at the door by credit card.

Covington Latin School will host a College and Career

Fair for all Diocese of Covington high school students, April 23, 5:30–7:30 p.m. in the school courtyard and cafeteria. Come learn about careers, programs and scholarships from popular colleges and local businesses.

It is time for Spring cleaning! **The Sisters of Notre Dame are in need of items for their 102nd annual 4th of July festival.** We are looking for services, sports items, jewelry, gift certificates, antiques, anything you can think of. Re-gift to the sisters. If you have items to donate call Margie at (859) 392-8229 or e-mail mschnelle@sndusa.org. Item drop offs during the day at 1601 Dixie Hwy, Park Hills or arrange a pick-up.



St. Mary robotic teams take State

The St. Mary School, Alexandria, VEX Robotics teams had a stellar day at the KY State Middle School Championship, March 2. The 8th grade team, "Steel Saints," earned the No. 1 overall seed in qualifying, putting them in position to pick an alliance partner, where they chose the St. Mary School 7th grade team. Together the St. Mary teams won the first two matches in a best of three Finals achieving the title Vex Ky. State Champs. The 7th graders also brought home the Excellence Award — presented to a school that exemplifies overall excellence in creating a high quality VEX robotics program — the highest award given to a team in the tournament. This is the first time two St. Mary teams joined ranks to win State Championships together. Both are qualified for the World Tournament in Dallas, Texas in April. The 8th graders are also the 1st St. Mary team to win back-to-back State Championships.



Seek retreat

Eight grade students at St. Agnes School, For Wright, participated in a Seek Retreat conducted by Sister Cathy Bauer, OSB, on March 19–20. The retreat focused on Catholic social justice in our community where students walked in Covington to visit and learn first hand from the volunteers and clients at the Emergency Drop In Shelter, the Parish Kitchen and the BeCon ministries.

National/World

Baltimore Archdiocese ministers to crew aboard ship involved in bridge collapse

BALTIMORE — The Archdiocese of Baltimore’s Apostleship of the Sea is normally a “friendly face” for international seafarers visiting the port. That role is about to expand, according to its director, Andy Middleton, after a containership was involved in the catastrophic collapse of one of Baltimore’s major thoroughfares. The Francis Scott Key Bridge collapsed about 1:30 a.m. March 26 after a 900-foot container ship collided with one of its major support pilings. According to state and U.S. Coast Guard officials, a search-and-rescue mission was underway for an unknown number of survivors. Middleton said the Apostleship of the Sea, based at St. Rita Parish in Dundalk, had ministered to members of the crew on March 24 and 25, delivering Easter boxes to the group aboard Dali, which was berthed at Seagirt Marine terminal. Middleton said he had been in touch with a member of the crew just hours after the collision and all were safe and uninjured. The organization, begun by the archdiocese in 2003 to serve visiting crews, plans to assist the sailors once bridge debris is removed from the ship and it settles in a berth. “Let us join in prayer asking the Lord to grant consolation and strength as we cope with this terrible tragedy,” said Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori, who will celebrate a 5:30 p.m. Mass at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen to pray for all those impacted by the bridge’s collapse.

Supreme Court justices express skepticism over standing amid abortion pill arguments

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court heard oral argument March 26 in a case concerning mifepristone, a pill commonly used for abortion but more recently has been used for early miscarriage care. This is the first major case involving abortion on its docket since the high court overturned its previous abortion precedent in 2022. A coalition of pro-life opponents of mifepristone, which is the first of two drugs used in a medication or chemical abortion, filed suit over loosened restrictions by the Food and Drug Administration on the drug, which included making it available by mail, arguing the government violated its own safety standards in doing so. The FDA has argued the drug poses little risk to the mother in the early weeks of pregnancy. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that more than half of the abortions performed in the U.S. are chemical or medical, rather than surgical. During oral argument, justices from across the court’s ideological spectrum appeared skeptical that the pro-life doctors challenging the reduced regulations had legal standing to bring the lawsuit, with the question of standing becoming more of a focus than whether the FDA acted lawfully. The timing of the mifepristone case could result in the court issuing its decision amid the 2024 presidential campaign.

Abortions soar to highest number in over a decade post Dobbs, study finds

WASHINGTON — A recent study from the Guttmacher Institute, an organization that supports abortion access, found that the number of abortions in 2023 increased to the highest number and rate in the United States in over a decade. That was the first full calendar year since the US Supreme Court’s decision that overturned Roe v. Wade. In response to this study, Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia, pro-life chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told OSV News that pro-lifers need to be “proactive” and “visible” to women seeking abortion and “show our radical solidarity so that we also transform hearts.” Guttmacher also highlighted a large increase in medication abortions overall, now accounting for 63 percent of all abortions in the formal health care system. Tessa Longbons Cox, senior research associate at Charlotte Lozier Institute, the research arm of SBA Pro-life America, called this increase in medication abortions “nothing short of a tragedy.” Bishop Burbidge called prayer in this matter “critically important,” saying the abortion pill not only kills a child in the womb, but that “we’ve heard from women how extreme-

ly upsetting and violent and painful” the experience is.

England’s halt of routine puberty blockers ‘important news,’ say two U.S. experts

WASHINGTON — England’s decision to halt routine prescriptions of puberty blockers following a review is “absolutely very important news” and shows that research is a “game-changer” in the debate over gender transitioning for children, two U.S.-based experts told OSV News. NHS (National Health Service) England announced March 12 it would no longer automatically prescribe puberty suppressing hormones to child patients at its gender identity clinics, citing “gaps in the evidence” and joining a growing list of European countries to limit such usage. The “emergence of research, particularly substantive evidence reviews, assessing the risks and benefits of treatments for ‘gender confusion’ ... has been a game-changer not only in health care settings but also for the cultural conversation,” said Mary Rice Hasson, co-founder and director of the Person and Identity Project at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington. “The decision by the National Health Service in England is a very welcome sign,” said Dr. Patrick Lappert, a retired board-certified plastic surgeon and deacon of Annunciation of the Lord Parish in Decatur, Alabama. Deacon Lappert, who has spoken nationally about the risks of puberty blockers, said the sex hormones acted on by the drugs are responsible for regulating the developing child’s skeletal growth, the development of muscle mass, the development of coordination, coordinated movement, as well as the development of higher executive functioning of the brain.

Hong Kong fast-tracked security law criticized by leaders, including Catholics

HONG KONG — Hong Kong’s legislature has fast-tracked a controversial new law which some observers claim could see priests imprisoned if they do not reveal to the authorities certain crimes confessed during the sacrament of penance. So-called “Article 23” was unanimously passed by the region’s pro-Beijing parliament, targeting a range of offenses deemed to be treasonous. Church leaders said the new law will not affect the

“seal of confession” — the obligation on a priest to preserve inviolably the secrecy of anything discussed in the context of the sacrament. In a brief statement, the Hong Kong Diocese said it recognizes that as a citizen, it has an obligation to ensure national security under Article 23 and that the legislation “will not alter” the nature of the sacrament of penance. Meanwhile, a group of 83 lawmakers and public figures from across the world, including the U.S., Canada and South Korea, issued a joint statement March 19 expressing “grave concerns” over the legislation, which expands on the National Security Law imposed by Beijing in 2020 and criminalizes secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces. Chris Patten, a Catholic member of the U.K. legislature and the last governor of Hong Kong under British rule, labeled the new law “another large nail in the coffin of human rights and the rule of law in Hong Kong.”

Polish state agency raids three houses run by religious congregation, arrests priest

WARSAW, Poland — The Polish state Internal Security Agency March 26 raided three houses run by the the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as part of an ongoing investigation by Poland’s new government into funding the congregation received from the previous government’s Justice Fund for its ministry for victims of abuse. Sacred Heart Father Michal Olszewski, who leads the ministry, was arrested March 26, along with three former employees of the Ministry of Justice who were connected to the Justice Fund. Accused of having “no experience” in the field, the congregation’s foundation didn’t receive the last batch of the funding — \$7.5 million. Creators of the ministry said the funding is “indispensable to finish construction and start helping those abused both in society and in the Church.” The Archipelago — Islands Free from Violence project, as the ministry is called, is meant to be a safe haven and shelter for victims of abuse in families, institutions and in the Church. Father Olszewski and his congregation’s foundation, Profeto, won the bid in the state-run Justice Fund for \$10 million in the spring of 2020. The audit commissioned by the government did not disclose irregularities in running the Archipelago project. No information was available on why the priest was arrested and there are no charges publicly disclosed.

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