On a breezy Sunday evening in early March, a handful of parishioners attempted to light 273 red votive candles, set up in the shape of a cross, on the walkway in front of St. Jude the Apostle Church in Baton Rouge. Still, as quickly as the candles were lit, many succumbed to the wind. But the group never stopped trying, lighting and relighting the candles.

It is in that spirit that Father Trey Nelson, pastor of St. Jude, continues the annual Candlelight Vigil Prayer for Peace and Healing in light of the Feb. 14 school shooting at Majory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. But, it was another school shooting, one that claimed the lives of 20 first-graders at Sandy Hook Elementary on December 14, 2012, that prompted the first prayer vigil.

"We did it that year because that was an event that really, really rocked everybody," said Father Nelson. "It was an elementary school, we’re an elementary. Obviously. We had just made a lot of security upgrades to the campus and..."
Tradition with a twist

Italian cookie cravings? Fancying fava beans? Then you’re in luck as Catholic families and church parishes are putting the final touches on their annual St. Joseph’s Day altars, carrying out an old tradition dating to the parched soil of Italy during an extended drought.

Poor farmers viewed their barren fields with dismay, their wheat cracking beneath their every step. The Sicilians directed their prayers to St. Joseph, their patron saint, petitioning him to finally bring some relief and end the famine.

Finally, the skies opened, Mother Nature turned on her much-welcomed spigots and the people, in their exuberance, prepared a table with an assortment of foods they harvested to show their gratitude. Through the years, families have added their own unique touches, some with quite a bit of flair, on their annual tables.

Creativity is the norm, with many of the breads, pastries or cookies being baked in a variety of shapes, some even reflecting religious items such as chalices or staffs.

When Sicilians emigrated to the United States, tradition was their traveling companion, bringing along the St. Joseph Day altars.

Many families believe the altars invite good fortune into their homes, and often they will attribute the recovery of a loved one to St. Joseph.

But let’s face it, no one does St. Joseph altars like those in southeast Louisiana. Elaborate displays can be found from churches to a family’s garage. All are welcome, the feasts will include the traditional cookies and pastries, but since seafood is our staple, a variety of delicacies will also be added that will not be found in any other part of the country.

Toss in some fig cookies, Milanese spaghettis (pasta with eggs in the gravy, no sauce for the unknowing and eggplant for the unknowing), a smattering of cucuzza when people leave. The bean carried with it, in imitating Jesus, with my compass and tar should have some traditional relevance, that it’s Lent. Each of the foods on the altar should have three tiers to reflect on their annual St. Joseph’s Day altars, carrying out an old tradition dating to the parched soil of Italy during an extended drought.

The prophet, Ezekiel writes, “I (Yahweh) will open your graves and have you rise from them.” This is God’s plan for salvation. Jesus, in turn, reveals the concreteness of this when he raises Lazarus from death. Even though mortal bodies are subject to decay, those who believe (faith) and act on that belief will realize eternal life as the body and soul are raised on the last day. Ask yourself, am I living life according to the Spirit, in imitation of Jesus? As darkness covered the land that hour, so too are we covered in darkness of our sins. But our redeemer has opened the way from death to life. Hope has risen. But for now, we kneel in silence and meditate on why Jesus did this. The purpose of his death was to obtain the salvation of all mankind and to teach us how to love, for greater love than this no man has, than to lay down his life for his friends. This man is Christ on the cross. He did it for all, and he did it for you.

 Verde: Dina Dow

Enjoy!!

Richness of the Spirit

By Dina Dow

Christ became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name. – Phil 2:8-9

The Mass readings of the fifth Sunday of Lent prepare the faithful for the following Sunday, known as Passion (Palm) Sunday. There are great riches and depths in these readings, too plentiful for this space. For now, the focus will be on the Holy Spirit and the humility of Jesus.

Life in the Spirit

With baptism comes an infusion of the Holy Spirit, where the grace of faith is planted deep within. The power of the Holy Spirit enables the baptized to live in the fullness of Jesus. That being said, the faithful are baptized into the body of Christ, a life of joy and suffering. By the power of the Holy Spirit faith, healing, restoration and transformation occur. St. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, “If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also, through his Spirit dwelling in you,” (Rom 8:11) Life begins in the Spirit. Life is to be an imitation of Jesus’. Life is destined for eternity with the father.

The prophet, Ezekiel writes, “I (Yahweh) will open your graves and have you rise from them.” This is God’s plan for salvation. Jesus, in turn, reveals the concreteness of this when he raises Lazarus from death. Even though mortal bodies are subject to decay, those who believe (faith) and act on that belief will realize eternal life as the body and soul are raised on the last day. Ask yourself, am I living life according to the Spirit, in imitation of Jesus? As darkness covered the land that hour, so too are we covered in darkness of our sins. But our redeemer has opened the way from death to life. Hope has risen. But for now, we kneel in silence and meditate on why Jesus did this. The purpose of his death was to obtain the salvation of all mankind and to teach us how to love, for greater love than this no man has, than to lay down his life for his friends. This man is Christ on the cross. He did it for all, and he did it for you.

Flashback

Bishop Muench Flashback: Bishop Robert W. Muench is to tide in the annual St. Patrick’s Day parade, which starts at the Catholic Life Center. The bishop is pictured with former Baton Rouge Mayor Kip Holden. The parade this year is scheduled to roll March 17 with Bishop Muench once again tossing goodies to the thousands of fans along the route.
Sacred Heart to host St. Padre Pio relics

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina OFM has been called Italy’s most beloved saint whose appeal transcends cultural boundaries. People in the Diocese of Baton Rouge will have the opportunity to venerate his relics on Friday, April 6 at Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baton Rouge.

The relics of St. Pio toured the United States in 2017, in connection of the 130th anniversary of the saint’s birth. Such an interest was shown that another tour was scheduled for this year to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his passing.

Luciano Lamonarca, opera singer and president and CEO of the Saint Pio Foundation, sent a letter to Bishop Robert W. Muench that there was an opening in the tour and asked if a church in the Diocese of Baton Rouge would be interested in hosting a viewing and veneration of the relics.

On behalf of Bishop Muench, Father Paul Yi, chancellor of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, asked Sacred Heart pastor Father Miles Walsh, who has a devotion to St. Pio, if Sacred Heart would host the veneration.

Father Walsh noted that April 6 is the first Friday after Easter and the first Friday of the month, when Sacred Heart will have a noon Mass and novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

“Right away we said ‘Yes, we would love to host the veneration.’ I’m grateful to Father Yi, Bishop Muench and the Diocese of Baton Rouge for this opportunity,” said Father Walsh.

During his lifetime, St. Pio was known as a mystic with miraculous powers of healing and knowledge.

He is reported to have had a variety of supernatural abilities and miraculous events including: the reading of souls; prophecy; bilocation (being in two places at once); the odor of sanctity; discernment of spirits; living on very little sleep; miraculous healings; personal visits from Jesus and Mary; and daily communication with his guardian angel. He was also especially devoted to souls in purgatory.

In 1956 St. Pio also opened a hospital in San Giovanni, Casa Sollievo della Soferenza or home for the Relief in Suffering, which is considered one of the most efficient hospitals in Europe.

But St. Pio may be most well-known for bearing the stigmata, the term the church uses to describe the wounds an individual receives that correspond to the crucifixion wounds of Jesus Christ.

His stigmata emerged during World War I, after Pope Benedict XV asked Christians to pray for an end to the conflict. St. Pio had a vision in which Christ pierced his side. A few weeks later, on Sept. 20, 1918, Jesus again appeared to him, and he received the full stigmata. It remained with him until his death on Sept. 23, 1968.

Pope John Paul II canonized him in 2002.

The relics that will be available for veneration at Sacred Heart include St. Pio’s glove; crusts of St. Pio’s wounds; cotton-gauze with St. Pio’s blood stains; a lock of St. Pio’s hair; St. Pio’s mantle; and St. Pio’s handkerchief soaked with his sweat just hours before he died.

Father Walsh said his devotion to St. Pio started in 1972, when he was in a college seminary. A woman spoke about her infant daughter who had a life-threatening urinary infection. St. Pio, who was alive at the time, prayed a healing prayer for all the babies present. Her daughter was healed from that point. At the time of her talk, St. Pio was in the process of being beatified, and she was asking for prayers that the canonization would go without complications for the friar who had touched the life of her and her daughter.

Additionally, Father Walsh also had the opportunity to spend time at San Giovanni Rotondo in Italy, where St. Pio was a Capuchin Friar for over 50 years.

The Padre Pio Shrine in San Giovanni Rotondo receives 7 million pilgrims a year and is second only to the shrine of our lady of Guadalupe in numbers of annual visitors.

The timing of the invitation for the veneration of the St. Pio relics also has special meaning for Father Walsh, who is the chaplain of the Baton Rouge Chapter of Legatus, an organization for Catholic business leaders committed to learn, live and spread the Catholic faith. He had recently attended a Legatus Summit Conference in Orlando. St. Pio’s relics were in the city for veneration, so he was able to spend time with the relics.

The opportunity to venerate the relics of such a beloved saint will be for the church, as well as the many people who are expected to come, a “blessing from heaven,” according to Father Walsh.

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FRANCISCAN MONASTERY OF THE HOLY LAND
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LSU gymnastics team leads prayer rally for cancer victim

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

As a young girl battles a life-threatening illness, she and the LSU gymnastics team are balancing each other.

The team and other students and friends gathered early in the morning of March 7 at the LSU Gymnastics Training Facility to pray at the same time with the family of Gracie Zaunbrecher, 8, with the rosary for a miracle during their trip to Lourdes, France. During the morning of prayer, Father Eddie Martin, parochial vicar at St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge, explained the power of praying the rosary and led off the beginning of prayers from the attendees. Tears freely flowed.

Zaunbrecher went to a gymnastics meet in Houston the weekend of March 4-5, 2017 to compete with her team, something that she loves doing. At the meet, however, her balance was off and her eyes were out of alignment. She was stumbling and disoriented. Two days later, she underwent an MRI at Texas Children’s Hospital and was diagnosed with DIPG, an inoperable rare and aggressive brain tumor in the part of the brain stem called the pons, which controls essential bodily functions such as heartbeat, breathing, swallowing, eye movement, eyesight and balance.

But, through the outreach of LSU gymnastics team member Lexi Priessman, who attends Christ the King Church and Student Center in Baton Rouge, Zaunbrecher has fallen into the supportive arms of the LSU gymnastics team, which had recently won its second consecutive regular season SEC championship. Priessman saw Zaunbrecher’s story on Facebook.

“I remember opening my laptop and something told me to reach out to the family,” said Priessman.

Priessman and Zaunbrecher’s parents, Maile and Byron, who are members of St. Lawrence Church in Eunice, planned for Zaunbrecher to meet the team, which changed the team member’s lives as well as Zaunbrecher’s.

“She flipped around and we helped her to make that wish come true,” said Priessman.

But the team members agreed that Zaunbrecher’s presence did more for them than they could ever imagine doing for her.

“Her life and ours changed for the better,” said Priessman.

“She taught us to never give up and to smile through adversity.

“I think her life stands as a lesson for all of us. To put things in perspective. She is fighting for her life, which is much different than fighting for a perfect grade or a score in gymnastics.”

Since the first visit, the team has kept in touch with Zaunbrecher’s family, and she has attended some of their home meets. When Priessman finished as the SEC specialist of the week following LSU’s win against Texas Woman’s University, Zaunbrecher was there.

“She’s more like a sister,” said Priessman, who had the lettering “Gracie Strong” on the back of her gymnastics sweatshirt. She continues texting and shapchatting with Zaunbrecher.

Gymnast McKenna Kelley, a junior, said her experience with Zaunbrecher has been humbling.

“She has this ‘aura’ about her that is filled with light, truth and joy,” said Kelley. “She brings innocence into a darkened world.

“It’s beautiful that so many people have gotten together to help a little girl who has only had to be herself. Remarkable.”

Student Coach Ashleigh Gnat noted Zaunbrecher’s strong perseverance.

“Gracie is so strong, but you can tell she is so trusting that God has a plan and everything will be okay. It’s inspired me to trust God in all circumstances.”

LSU head gymnastics coach D-D Breaux, a member of St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge, said the gymnastics team has done numerous fundraising efforts to help Zaunbrecher’s family.

“It has been wonderful to see the unfial selfless love of the team to embrace Gracie and her family. It’s been inspiring to see them help her parents through the ups and downs they are experiencing. “

She said the student gathering was an “outreach of prayer for a child who needs a miracle.”

Zaunbrecher’s aunt, Tina LaHaye, a member of Our Lady of Mercy Church in Baton Rouge, said that while the trip to Lourdes falls on the one-year anniversary of Zaunbrecher’s diagnosis, they had planned it long ago, and it was providential that the two corresponded together.

“I think God worked it out that way,” said LaHaye.

Zaunbrecher comes from a large extended family, yet she has brought the family, and people from around the world, together in prayer, according to LaHaye.

“She’s a rock,” said LaHaye.

To help Zaunbrecher’s family, people can visit gofundme.com/graciez.
Budding friendship ‘nets’ a convert to Catholicism

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

The cry room at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs is where the puzzle pieces were put together to make a complete picture of faith and friendship for the families of Blake Taylor, who will enter the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil Mass on March 31, and his sponsor, Sammy Sabella.

While Taylor and Sabella have only known each other for less than a year, there are so many parallels in their lives when they interact one might think they are “old shoe” friends who have known each other for a long time.

Both converted to the faith, for example, and are investigators when it comes to the Catholic faith.

Taylor grew up in a Southern Baptist home. When he was in high school, he drifted away from his faith. After having some “paranormal” experiences, he became a paranormal investigator.

“I met with people who were having ‘troubles’ in their house to determine what was credible and what was not,” said Taylor. If credible, he would go throughout the house to determine if the spirits were violent, using a modified digital voice recorder asking questions of the spirits and often receiving an audible response in a voice format.

“Over the course of five years, things tend to follow you. My apartment was ‘haunted.’ I had visited,” said Taylor.

He started dating his now wife, Kristin, and when she would come over, she noticed the same unnatural activities.

During one visit, Kristin brought some blessed salt. They set the recorder on the table and Kristin sprinkled the salt around the house and recited the St. Michael the Archangel prayer. After finishing, they listened to the voice recorder, and they heard the voice of one of the three evil spirits who had identified themselves, streaming curse words as Kristin recited the prayer. And the spirits left.

“I realized that if I believed in demons, I had to believe in ‘the other side,’ angels and God,” said Blake. This started his interest in the Catholic faith and thinking, “there must be something to faith matters.

“My wife was the religious leader in the home,” said Blake. But in one of many converging points of Blake’s faith journey, Kristin met Sammy’s wife, Katie, in the ICC cry room as their children played together.

“My wife said, ‘She (Kristin) is there every Sunday. Something tells me to reach out to her,’” said Sammy, noting that his wife is not extroverted and had to step outside of her comfort zone.

“They got together for a play date while we were at work. When I got home I asked, ‘How did it go?’ and she said ‘She’s just like me, she’s a cradle Catholic.’ It was obvious a friendship had been struck,” he added.

Katie had mentioned to Katie that she would like her husband to come to church more often. The two also discovered their husbands had similar backgrounds, particularly, when it comes to investigating the faith. For Blake this meant finding out if the Catholic Church is where he would find answers to questions of faith, and for Sammy this meant a deeper investment of the faith he converted to at age 13 from the Assemblies of God denomination.

Katie proposed that they invite the Taylors over for dinner and that Sammy explain to Blake what drew him to the church and their destinations – which is the Catholic faith, said Sammy.

He told his wife, “I’ll answer some questions if I am asked. But I am not going to have someone over for friendship and hamburgers and immediately hit him with, ‘Let me tell you all these things about the Catholic faith,’” said Sammy.

The first dinner was a casual, get-to-know each better event. About two weeks later the Sabellas went to the Taylor’s home and Blake brought up to Sammy the topic of the Catholic faith. Blake said he didn’t have problems with Catholicism, but wondered what separates it from the other religious faiths.

“My answer was that the Catholic Church can trace its founding back to Christ. You can look at Peter and the early Apostles and see the apostolic succession going all the way down to Pope Francis,” said Sammy.

Pointing to John 8:30 “Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free,” and St. Paul’s letter to Timothy where he refers to the church as the “battress of truth,” Sammy said you can trace the Catholic Church’s history and see it is the source of truth founded by Christ.

Blake took the conversation as a “chance to be open minded.”

Sammy said, “Look, if you have these questions RCIA starts in a month. You can check it out. There’s an inquiry phase, there’s no commitment and you can ask all the questions you want.”

Blake then surprised him by saying, “I’ll go if you go” (and be his sponsor).

“I had never thought about (being a sponsor),” said Sammy. “It’s like you’re standing at the cliff. You’re right there and your eyes are closed, saying ‘I’m not taking any steps. This is where I need to be.’ But you want to be open-minded. You’re blind asking, ‘What should I do?’ Meanwhile, Blake is there saying, ‘Come to RCIA.’”

And it has been an inspirational journey for both men and their families. Blake said there are many things he is looking forward to after joining the church. He plans to join the Knights of Columbus, pray with a rosary group, attend a Cursillo weekend and be a eucharistic adorer.

“I don’t believe any human being could have designed a better path for me. I’m ready for it,” said Blake. “Even confession – I’m excited about it. I told (pastor) Father Frank (Uter) ‘I can’t wait.’ He pointed to a chair and said, ‘Do you want to go now?’”

Both Sammy and Blake credit their children, wives and people who prayed for them in starting the new journey of faith.

“Responding to God’s will can be as great as climbing up on the cross and dying for your sins or reaching out to another wife in a cry room,” said Sammy.

He added, “I keep hearing about ‘the new evangelization’ – that’s what we’re called to do. Christ called the Apostles to do it. He didn’t tell us to jab people. ‘Jab – here’s Catholicism.’ We throw out a net. If they’re out there swimming, they can either get caught up in the net of truth or swim away. New evangelization is not to jab people with points, but drop another net of truth.”

Pointing to Blake he said, “He’s already been evangelizing through his story. He’s already dropped a lot of nets.”

“It’s reusable,” laughed Blake.
Ashes for a Protestant?/ Early life of Jesus

Q My wife is Catholic and I am Methodist. We were married 35 years ago in a Catholic church, and we raised our children as Catholic, including Catholic schools. We attend our Catholic parish regularly. I respect the rules of the Catholic Church regarding my not being allowed to receive Communion as a non-Catholic. But we recently attended Ash Wednesday services at the parish, and I was wondering whether you had to be a Catholic to receive the ashes, or is the rule the same as for the sacraments? (Roanoke, Virginia)

A You are certainly welcome to receive ashes at a Catholic ceremony. The Roman Missal, in fact, instructs Catholic priests to place “ashes on the head of all those present who come to him.” Ashes serve as a sign of repentance for wrongdoing, a praiseworthy attitude common to all Christians, and increasingly Protestant churches of many denominations are offering ashes at their own services to begin the Lenten season.

You are correct, though, in making the distinction between ashes and the sacrament of holy Communion. Often in missalettes there are found guidelines from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that explain that “because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to holy Communion.”

Unlike the ashes, which are simply a sign of penance, the Eucharist signifies that the recipient is a member of the wider Catholic community, united with the bishop of the local church and with the pope. (In certain situations in which the non-Catholic shares the Catholic understanding of the meaning of the Eucharist and lacks access to a minister of his or her own faith tradition, a non-Catholic may, with a bishop’s permission, be admitted to holy Communion, but in most circumstances only Catholics receive the Eucharist.)

This may be more of a history question, but could you address the life of Jesus from birth until he was 30? Did he have a normal childhood? Did he always live at home until his public ministry began? How many people knew who he was throughout those earlier years? (We hear of the Magi being aware of Christ’s existence, and we read about his teaching in the Temple once as a young boy, but then nothing more until he was 30.) (Curious in Missouri)

A The period of Christ’s life that you ask about from infancy until he began his public ministry is sometimes referred to as the “hidden years” of Jesus. St. Matthew in his Gospel describes the birth of Jesus, the adoration of the Magi, the flight into Egypt, the slaughter of the innocents and the return to Nazareth. St. Luke adds the visit of the shepherds, the circumcision and the purification of Mary. Beyond that, the Scriptures are largely silent apart from the time Christ was found at the age of 12, to his parents’ consternation, speaking with the elders in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Apocryphal writings have tried mightily to fill in the gaps: the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (second century), Proto-Matthew (sixth to seventh century), the Arabic Infancy Gospel (probably sixth century). They are fanciful and largely incredible accounts of childhood exploits of Christ. One story tells of Jesus, at age 7, fashioning clay animals with his friends, then blowing on them to make them fly. The other boys tell this to their parents who warn them not to play with Jesus.

In answer to your question, I would say that Jesus did have a “normal childhood.” St. Luke says simply that “Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man” (Lk 2:52). Jesus would have spoken Aramaic (the common language of Palestine at the time) and probably some Greek (learned largely from regular pilgrimages with his family to the then-Hellenized city of Jerusalem).

He would have been educated in the Scriptures by Mary and St. Joseph, as well as at the synagogue in Nazareth although he evidently had no formal training in the higher rabbinic schools of his day. Remember how the Jews had voiced their surprise that the “carpenter’s son” could have spoken so knowledgeably at the Feast of Tabernacles? “How does he know Scripture without having studied?” (Jn 7:15).

The traditional Catholic teaching is that Mary was given to know the true identity of her son at the announcement (Lk 1), and St. Joseph (Mt 1:21) was told this by an angel in a dream. Beyond that, I would think that a belief in Christ’s divinity was very gradual in the minds of his contemporaries and did not fully blossom until after the resurrection.

To me, the “normal-ness” of the early life of Christ argues all the more strongly for the credibility of the Gospel; it is far from what one would expect in a biography of the Savior of the world.

FATHER DOYLE is a retired priest in the Diocese of Albany, New York. Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 30 Columbia Circle Dr., Albany, NY 12203.

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as well as your local church parish

NEW RIDE – The Price LeBlanc Family recently donated two vehicles (a 2017 Nissan Sentra and 2017 Nissan Frontier) to the Bishop’s Annual Appeal benefitting Catholic Charities Diocese of Baton Rouge. The vehicles will be used to transport Catholic Charities staff, clients and their families. Catholic Charities has recently expanded their adoption services to the entire state and these vehicles will be helpful in furthering their reach as well as carrying baby supplies, etc. Pictured from left are Tammy Abshire, director of Stewardship for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Nancy LeBlanc Bondy, Brent LeBlanc and CCDBR executive director David Aguillard. Photo provided by Tammy Abshire
Journey to the promised land full of twists and turns

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

When walking the Lenten desert journey, we, like Jesus, will face temptations or tests. Father Tom Clark SJ, pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Baton Rouge, presented a message of hope of a promised land waiting at the end of the journey at a meeting of Women in Spirit on Feb. 22 at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge.

Father Clark said a book that resonates with his Jesuit-rooted spirituality is “Flowers in the Desert: A Spirituality of the Bible” by Father Demetris Dumm OSB. Father Dumm wrote about the Passover ritual of shepherds leaving their winter encampment, and crossing harsh lands searching for fields where the sheep can graze. To mark transitions and movement into the unknown, they sacrificed a lamb and put blood on the door of their tents to ward off evil spirits. Abraham and the people of Israel used this ritual to mark leaving the slavery of Egypt and entering into the promised land by sacrificing a lamb and putting blood on the door post of their house.

“They left the relative comfort of Egypt, even though there was slavery, but were accustomed and familiar with, to set off into the desert and wander for 40 years,” said Father Clark.

He said their movement is a model for our life journey.

Father Dumm says in his book during the journey there are three tests as people make their “exodus” to a better life: living with emptiness, unfulfillment and restlessness; resisting the temptation to look back at the past with nostalgia; and believing God has a plan and there is a promised land at the end of the journey and God will bring good from all evil.

Father Dumm said everyone has an exodus moment when they sense God calling them to freedom and they have to leave something familiar, tested, tried and comfortable and set out to find the “unknown” or somewhere they believe God has called them to.

In Father Clark’s case, this was in 1981, when he served as a pastoral associate at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel of Church in Chicago. It was there he served with Father Tom Healy, now retired, who influenced his call as a priest. Father Healy was so well regarded that twice after he retired, the Archdiocese of Chicago asked him to go to church parishes experiencing difficulties, including divisions, and serve as a temporary pastor to bring peace and healing.

Father Clark asked him what those experiences were like, and he said they were good and that all the people needed was someone to listen to them and encourage dialogue.

“When I was at Mt. Carmel that’s when I decided that’s what I wanted to do for the rest of my life,” Father Clark said, adding he wanted to “step out” and be a parish priest.

Yet, because there was not a parish available for him to go to, his first pastoral assignment was at Boston City Hospital, which was a public hospital for the poor. He was part of an interdisciplinary team providing pastoral care for families of patients suffering from injuries caused by traumatic events and creating a safe place to keep the flow of information between doctors, medical staff and the families, and that was the first time he was in a hospital as a chaplain.

“He was there I learned the value of presence. You don’t always have the words, but your presence means something, to be with them as they stand at the foot of their cross,” said Father Clark.

He said, “But I still wanted to go to a parish.”

Through a few twists and turns, Father Clark ended up in a church in the center of an African-American community in Boston.

“That began 25 years and counting of ministry in predominately African-American communities,” said Father Clark.

He was in a neighborhood with predominately public housing.

“Although we were the smallest parish in the Archdiocese of Boston, we were the most vibrant. But it was also poor. I always said repair and renovation of the church meant (using) duct tape. If I had a roll of duct tape I can do anything,” mused Father Clark.

While he was there, Boston became the epicenter of the clergy sexual abuse scandal in 2002.

“I had a vivid memory of getting up in the morning, going to the front door of the rectory, pickup up the newspaper and looking to see what the morning headline was. Usually it was about another priest abuse, another failure of the archdiocese to report the abuse,” he said.

In 2004, the archdiocese said it would undergo major reorganization with a goal of closing about 80 parishes.

“We were divided up into regional clusters. Each cluster had to come up with a plan saying which parishes would stay open which ones would close. You can imagine the meetings. It was like blood on the wall. I was coming home with a headache and waking up with a headache,” said Clark.

His parish was closed and merged with a neighboring parish. This was Father Clark’s second testing: Do you believe there is a promised land?

The priest asked his superior for time off to heal.

“It was August 2005, and I remember sitting in front of the television watching coverage of Hurricane Katrina. I sat there and saw the devastating photos of people in the Superdome and shelters. There was an ad on TV from the Red Cross asking for volunteers. I had a job. New responsibilities.”

Father Clark became a chaplain at shelter in Houston. He then went to Shreveport to minister to the Sisters of the Holy Family who had evacuated from New Orleans.

“When I was with the Sisters of the Holy Family, my provincial called and said he had a call from the provincial in New Orleans looking for a pastor for an African-American parish called Immaculate Conception in Baton Rouge, and would I go to Baton Rouge,” Father Clark said.

Baton Rouge? he pondered.

“I was excited, but still feeling, ‘Man, I don’t know if I want to go back to being a pastor’ said Father Clark. “After the whole experience in Boston, I didn’t know if I wanted to go through that again.

“On New Years Eve, I was returning home to Boston. The leader of the congregation, Sister Sylvia Thibodeaux, gave me a ride to the airport. As we pulled into the airport parking lot, she stopped the car, turned to me and said, ‘You take that pasto-ship. There’s a lot of Black Catho-olics from New Orleans who will be journeying there that will need good parishes. You can do that,’” said Father Clark.

“Yes sister,” he replied. “That was his third testing: not looking back with nostalgia or familiarity, to the past.

He has not looked back and said it’s been a beautiful journey as he bonds with parishioners and works with the diocesan Racial Harmony Commission. He said he has found a promised land on Earth along the way to the great promised land of heaven.

“I shared my journey to help you think about your journey,” said Father Clark. “To think about your exodus moment and how you have faced the three tests and to encourage you that there is a promised land.”

NEW STM PASTOR – Bishop Robert W. Muench, right, hugs Father Michael Allelo after installing him as pastor of St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge on March 10. St. Louis King of France Church in Baton Rouge was amalgated with St. Thomas More, and Father Allelo served as administrator of STM before being named pastor. Photo by Debbie Shelley The Catholic Commentator
Rosary a powerful weapon in God’s arsenal

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

In perhaps one of the more iconic biblical stories, David, a young shepherd answering God’s call, slew the Philistine giant Goliath with a sling and a single stone, heralding the triumph of good over evil.

Today, Christians are awash in the waters of a spiritual flood, engaged in a war against a spiritual Goliath that encompasses such secular evils as the sexual revolution, the re-definition of marriage, pornography, the blasphemy of Jesus’ name in public and new norms of conduct.

Rather than stones, however, God has given the faithful the spiritual weapon of the rosary, according to Father Miles Walsh, pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baton Rouge.

“He sends us forth with a mighty sword, that is what the rosary is, a powerful spiritual weapon in the arsenal of God,” Father Walsh said during his gripping homily during Mass at the Men of the Immaculata conference on Feb. 17 at St. George Church in Baton Rouge.

“The iron of five Our Fathers, and the carbon of 50 Hail Mary’s, forged together into a steel sword set ablaze by the word of God in the mysteries of the rosary,” Father Walsh said in his homily. “The weapon, to be effective, must be constantly honed and used and sharpened by prayer.”

“Today, I hold in my hand the sling of David,” he added while holding up a rosary.

The daylong conference drew 1,000 men in its second year, up by nearly 200 from its inaugural year in 2017, which was held at Sacred Heart. The lineup included an impressive list of speakers, highlighted by well known Catholic author Dr. Scott Hahn.

Also featured were Father Mitch Pacwa SJ, the popular host of “EWTN Live” and “Threshold of Hope” on EWTN as well as a biblical scholar and best-selling author; Matt Fradd, the founder of The Porn Effect, a site dedicated to exposing the reality behind the fantasy of pornography and offering help to those who seek sexual freedom; and popular Baton Rouge chef John Folse, who also provided lunch.

Bishop Robert W. Muench celebrated the Mass which came at the midpoint of the conference. But it was Father Walsh who upstaged the featured speakers with his stunning homily that was one of inspiration, a deep sense of spirituality and a definitive call to action.

“We are awash in the waters of a spiritual flood, a rising tide of spiritual weakness in our nation, in our church and in our homes,” Father Walsh said. “Spiritual walls that were built to protect us have grown weak from the unrelenting pressure of moral confusion and widespread lack of faith, and water from the flood is pouring in.”

He noted that since 2000, an estimated 14 million Catholics in the United States have left the faith, infant baptisms have declined 28 percent and sacramental marriages have declined 40 percent.

He said the damage wrought by the “so call sexual revolution” has weakened the institution, and what he called the very indissolubility of marriage. He offered that marriage has been redefined.

“We live in a world where gender is fluid, commitment weak, sex is no longer intrinsically tied to procreation, abortion now practiced in loving relationships, opioids have become our solace and self-sacrifice is a forgotten word,” he said.

He said that Sunday is no longer considered the Lord’s day but one of recreation and sport, without God being the center. He said religion has been replaced by spirituality, the seven sacraments are no longer the ordinary means of salvation, sanctifying grace no longer needed for salvation, atheism and unbelief the new creed.

Worst of all, he said, children are being trained according to this new way, “while we stand silent and afraid. We are a nation in need of God.”

He acknowledged some might believe the clock cannot be turned back but to answer that question he illustrated the story of David and Goliath.

“I hold in my hand today the sling of David and his five smooth stones,” Father Walsh said. “After lunch today, we, the sons of Mary, Men of the Immaculata, will take out this sling of David and pray upon these five stones, and we will call out full-throated and unsparring to the Lord.

“What would happen if 1,000 men went forth from this conference and got down on their knees and prayed the holy rosary daily with all of their hearts, and gave their wives and their children, their families and friends, an example of sacrifice and trust in the Lord?”

“What is the Goliath holding you back from going forward in faith?” he said. “God is calling you to go forward in faith. Will you answer God’s call?”

Hahn blended his own conversion story with his uncanny humor in his address to those gathered. He said it’s important for the father to be the spiritual head of his family.

“That’s challenging,” he admitted, adding that “we are called to be sons (of God).”

Hahn said men must be soldiers on the battlefield of spiritual warfare and that each person must be willing to repent. He said not repenting for sins is-up setting to God.

“We come up with excuses,” he said, adding that even some of the Bible’s greatest figures, including Noah, Abraham and the first family were broken by sin.

“When we commit mortal sin, you commit spiritual suicide,” Hahn said. “Through suffering we are going to bring ourselves back to our Lord. We must learn to hate sin.”

He urged the men to tap into their potential and recognize the gifts they have been given.

“We have more than we can measure; that is why we are Catholic,” Hahn said.
An air of uncertainty loomed over the regular session of the Louisiana Legislature when it convened March 12.

Overshadowing the policy-only gathering is a special session that will be required to close a nearly $1 billion budget shortfall before the July 1 start of the 2018-19 fiscal year. A recent special session that produced little more than bruised egos and heightened tensions among lawmakers adjourned early with no resolution.

Exacerbating the issue is that regular sessions during even number years, as required by an amendment to the state constitution in 1993, are exclusive for policy issues with revenue-raising measures, such as tax hikes, prohibited, thus requiring special sessions when necessary.

“I think it definitely changes the dynamics,” Rob Tasman, executive director of the Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops, said. “When you enter a regular session and know that there will be a second special session on the horizon I tend to think that sucks all of the energy out of the air for the legislators to focus on true policy issues that they would otherwise have time to focus on.

“While they can’t come up with a solution for the deficit during the regular session there is no doubt they will be having the conversations.”

One of his concerns is that because the attention of the legislators will likely be centered elsewhere, primarily on discussions to resolve the budget crisis, time will be taken away from committee hearings on critical pieces of legislation.

Tasman’s responsibilities will be sweeping, as he stays updated with developments of the regular session as well as potential budget cuts being proposed for the special session. HB1, which is Gov. John Bel Edwards’ proposed budget and could potentially be approved during the regular session, slashes nearly $15 million in funding for the child nutrition program and required services for all nonpublic schools.

Tasman said he is sensing little desire among lawmakers to pass Edwards’ bill intact, which calls for nearly $1 billion in budget cuts. However, as has happened in the past, HB1 could be approved during the regular session and a supplemental budget approved in the special session.

“You can imagine different entities are more impacted by the timeline than we are,” he said. “Certainly we are very anxious about the streams of funding not funded but dealing with folks in the university and hospital world must know (budget numbers) for their own budget planning. Are they going to have what they need? They don’t know what to expect.”

Bills that would repeal the death penalty, tighten restrictions on baby broker ing, ban abortions after the 15th week of pregnancy and assuring no weakening of several criminal justice reform packages adopted last year are just a few of the issues Tasman will be tracking.

He expressed optimism the death penalty will finally be repealed. Two legislators are introducing bills to that effect, and Tasman said he is hopeful that efforts to educate legislators a year ago, which included New Roads native Bishop Shelton J. Fabre of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux testifying before a legislative committee, will make a difference.

“I think people are starting to understand the issue more than before,” he said. “Part of our effort last year was to educate and really help legislators know the implications of it.”

He said one component that seems to be moving the needle is the fact that Louisiana has one of the highest exoneration rates in the country, leaving open the question of potentially executing innocent people.

Baton Rouge representative Rick Edmonds is introducing legislation that would cap the amount of living expenses an adoptive family can pay to a birth mother. There have been instances in the past where an adoptive family has an agreement with a birth mother to adopt her child once the baby is born only to have the birth mother void that agreement when someone makes a more lucrative offer, such as offering a car, or cash or other inducements.

Sen. John Milkovich of Shreveport is introducing legislation banning abortions after the 15th week of pregnancy. The support is likely there for passage, Tasman believes, and Gov. Edwards is a strong pro-life advocate.

Gun control legislation might also be introduced during a session that will likely be nothing but ordinary.

“It’s going to be a little bit more intense.”

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Expect the unexpected at legislative session

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

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By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

In one corner of the gym, a drone was flying near the ceiling. In an upstairs lab, a young scientist was mixing the ingredients to create a lava lamp. Another area was marked off with caution tape as two men in protective gear demonstrated the power of electricity.

For an hour-and-a-half, the Holy Family Church Parish Hall in Port Allen was turned into one giant laboratory featuring activities related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Annie Cagle, technology coordinator and instructor at Holy Family School, came up with the idea of making STEM Night a community event so that others could see how science and math apply to day-to-day life.

"STEM is my passion and I wanted kids to explore what careers were available to them," said Cagle. "And, I wanted them to see the practical purposes in how STEM might be applied in real life. We can tell them they need algebra but this shows them why.

Twenty-three businesses and organizations set up booths for students, parents and visitors to see, experience and interact with science, math and technology. Cagle said she wanted to include the community in the event as well, spreading word of the event through announcements at Mass, the church bulletin, online, newspaper ads and "a lot of word of mouth."

"I think it’s exciting," said Kerika Lily, whose son Jaylin is a second-grader at Holy Family. "He (Jaylin) made us leave the house early so we could be here.

"I think it’s pretty awesome," said Ory Gulotta, who visited each of the stations with his son Carter, a kindergartner at the school.

"It was great to see such a diverse group of companies and organizations represented at STEM Night, there truly was something of interest for everyone," said Mike Comeau, Holy Family principal.

"I watched our kids grow in their understanding and application of science concepts and become excited at all of the things that are cool about science, technology, engineering and math. You could tell that all of the students felt seen, heard, and powerful due to the knowledge they were able to learn and share with their peers.”
St. Gerard students go marching in the ‘light of God’

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

From saints and religious figures to liturgical dancers and cheerleaders, the gym of Redemptorist St. Gerard School in Baton Rouge was filled with messages of faith, hope and history for its Black History program, entitled, “We’re Marching in the Light of God.” The theme, according to religion teacher Cassandra Will, was about the faith of those who were lead to march “in the light of God.” As part of the program, students learned about “black people from the Bible and black saints,” then dressed in costumes to represent those historical figures.

“They’ve been very interested in what they’re learning” said Will. “They really prepared hard, learning the saints’ bios and singing the songs. We have noticed many of them have really upped their game.”

“Sometimes you asked the students about ‘black people from the Bible and black saints,’” was about “black people from the Bible and black saints,” then dressed in costumes to represent those historical figures.

“Sisters from the St. Gerard Black History Program.”

They've been very interested in what they’re learning about “black people from the Bible and black saints,” then dressed in costumes to represent those historical figures.

Seventh-grader Damarquis London was dressed as Father Tolton, the first African-American priest in the United States.

“I learned that he had the calling from God to become a priest while he was a slave but no diocese or religious order would study with him,” said London. “He was ordained (in Rome) and came back to the United States to serve as a priest.”

The program included an introduction from Deacon Alfred Adams, director of the Office of Black Catholics for the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Deacon Adams said the theme of “Marching in the Light of God” truly resonated with him. In 1990, he became the first African American ordained a deacon in the diocese.

It was a journey that, at first, was filled with struggles.

“I always had Jesus by my side,” said Deacon Adams. “And, I approached it with a humble spirit.”

He said it’s important to continue teaching the youth about the history of African Americans and how much they contributed to the United States and to the church. He said there was no one to tell him about such important diverse historical figures so he had to learn about it on his own. But, he credits that research with helping him “to be the person that I am.”

“So, talking about these things to some of these kids and seeing some of us coming forward, that will give them a little more to make a connection on, ‘If they did this, I can do this,’” said Deacon Adams. “So, it’s kind of encouraging to them.”

The program also included a procession of saints from Africa, a procession of African-American church leaders, a procession of saints born during slavery and saints standing for equality.

“I feel our kids definitely need to know and understand black history and what happened and transpired before their time,” said New Roads Mayor Kenneth Daisy, guest speaker. “They just assume that everything is good and fine and was always like this, so this is very important.”

Sixth-grader Anthony Terregano, dressed as St. Martin de Porres, talked about the struggles of his chosen saint.

“He wanted to be a priest or a religious brother, but back then in South America, in that time of history, black men were not allowed to be ordained,” said Terregano. “Yet, he still served God as a healer and then he became a religious brother. I learned that you can do anything. All you have to do is follow God.”

Many of the students said that researching the historical figures opened their eyes not only to history, but also to the importance of having a strong faith in God.

Yoshi Thompson, a sixth-grader, was dressed as St. Perpetua, a 3rd century martyr from Carthage in Africa.

“She had a sister, Felicity, and we were condemned to death because we were Christians, so we had died, but before we died we yelled out, ‘You judge us but God will judge you,’” said Thompson. “I learned that no matter what, we always have the heart and the mind and think right and believe in God.”
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**BLOOD DRIVE** - Alexa Gaudet and Mikayla Lawrence, students of St. Michael the Archangel High School in Baton Rouge, were among more than 100 students who donated blood for Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center on Feb. 26. OLOL nurses and staff set up equipment in the school’s gym for the school day for students over the age of 16 to donate. Photo provided by Leighann King | St. Michael High School

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT** – Second-graders in Mrs. Sarah Theriot’s class at Holy Ghost Catholic School in Hammond use food to build four-digit numbers. Pictured from left, Reese Whittaker, Brighton Hameland, Ryleigh Vutera and Olivia Ruiz. Photo provided by Cindy Wagner | Holy Ghost School

**NOTHING BUT NET –** Liam Calkins, an eighth-grader at St. Thomas More School in Baton Rouge, made a full court shot in the final two seconds to win a Catholic School Athletic Association basketball game Feb. 22. When asked about the shot, Liam stated, “We had a fast opportunity to win the game and the only thought that I had was to catch the ball and shoot it. Then when the shot went in, I was mesmerized! The other team, St. Jean Vianney (in Baton Rouge), showed great sportsmanship by coming up after the game to congratulate me.” The score of the game was 25-24. Photo provided by Judy Armstrong, Ph.D. | St. Thomas More

**State Farm**

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and matter-of-fact dialogue ratcheting starts off promisingly, its understated tone in a trilogy of novels by Jeff VanderMeer, sci-fi and horror, adapted from the first.

Writer-director Alex Garland’s blend of discovering bizarre animal and plant mutation into the remote area he and his team had been dispatched to explore, which had been affected by an unexplained and ill, a soldier-turned-biologist (Natalie Portman) volunteers to join an expedition and falls mysteriously and critically. After her husband (Oscar Isaac) returns references, two obscene gestures. O; R
deadly affair, a Russian ballet star (Jennifer Beals) returns to unfold amid the entertainment. Though the film’s premise rests on an unlikely coincidence, and a couple of its sight gags are quite gory, those few gags for whom it makes suitable fare will note the portrayal of a strong marriage and a positive view of parenthood in Mark Perez’s script. Much sexual humor, more than a dozen uses of profanity and several milder oaths, pervasive rough and crude language. L; R

damning portrayal of Protestant Christianity, a benign view of homosexual acts, two off-screen pre-marital bedroom encounters, an adultery theme, a same-sex kiss, at least one use of profanity, several crude and crude terms. A-III; PG-13

Game Night

Family values and much enjoyable humor are offset by numerous distasteful jokes and an excess of vulgar language in this comedy from directors John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein. A competition-loving couple (Jason Bateman and Rachel McAdams) find their usually placid view of parenthood in Mark Perez’s script.

Two opposing parent or adult guardian
takes over her normally self-absorbed and inattentive boyfriend (Justice Smith), transforming him into the kind of caring companion for which she naturally longs. Director Michael Stucky’s screen version of David Leavitt’s novel, which also features Owen Teague as the classmate the protagonist ought to be dating, sends the honorable, if less than original, message that relationships should be about more than surface attraction. But this theme entails a further subtext suggesting that gender differences are an insignificant factor where matters of the heart are concerned. Taken together with the script’s indication that physical interaction before marriage is a given, and that Christians are devil-fearing fools, that implicit agenda item makes the film unfit for its target audience of adolescents. A denigrating portrayal of Protestant Christianity, a benign view of homosexual acts, two off-screen pre-marital bedroom encounters, an adultery theme, a same-sex kiss, at least one use of profanity, several crude and crude terms. A-III; PG-13

The Strangers: Prey at Night

Sadistic horror flick in which a couple (Christina Hendricks and Martin Henderson), their rebellious teen daughter (Bailee Madison) and her more compliant older brother (Lewis Pullman) arrive at a lakeside trailer park to visit relatives but find the place eerily deserted. They are soon set upon by a trio of masked, marauding strangers (Damián Maffei, Emma Belomy and Lea Emshwiller) who get their own back, director Johannes Roberts’s sequel to 2008’s “The Strangers” wages gruesome and gory. And things only deteriorate morally once the victims start to fight back since the audience is invited to revel vicariously in their brutal revenge. Excessive bloody violence, including acts of vengeance, some profanity, frequent rough and crude language, some sexual references, two obscene gestures. O; R

Motion Picture Association of America ratings:
G – General audiences, all ages admitted
PG – Parental guidance suggested; some material may not be suitable for children
PG-13 – Parents are strongly cautioned to give special guidance for attendance of children under 13; some material may be inappropriate for young children
R – Restricted; under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian
NC-17 – No one under 17 admitted

GAME NIGHT

A-IV – Adults and adolescents
A-II – General patronage
A-I – Limited adult audience
O – Morally offensive

Every Day

Strange teen romance in which a high school student (Angourie Rice) falls for a spirit who inhabits the bodies of different people for a day at a time, originally encountering the androgynous sprite when it takes over her normally self-absorbed and inattentive boyfriend (Justice Smith), transforming him into the kind of caring companion for which she naturally longs. Director Michael Stucky’s screen version of David Leavitt’s novel, which also features Owen Teague as the classmate the protagonist ought to be dating, sends the honorable, if less than original, message that relationships should be about more than surface attraction. But this theme entails a further subtext suggesting that gender differences are an insignificant factor where matters of the heart are concerned. Taken together with the script’s indication that physical interaction before marriage is a given, and that Christians are devil-fearing fools, that implicit agenda item makes the film unfit for its target audience of adolescents. A denigrating portrayal of Protestant Christianity, a benign view of homosexual acts, two off-screen pre-marital bedroom encounters, an adultery theme, a same-sex kiss, at least one use of profanity, several crude and crude terms. A-III; PG-13

The Strangers: Prey at Night

Sadistic horror flick in which a couple (Christina Hendricks and Martin Henderson), their rebellious teen daughter (Bailee Madison) and her more compliant older brother (Lewis Pullman) arrive at a lakeside trailer park to visit relatives but find the place eerily deserted. They are soon set upon by a trio of masked, marauding strangers (Damián Maffei, Emma Belomy and Lea Emshwiller) who get their own back, director Johannes Roberts’s sequel to 2008’s “The Strangers” wages gruesome and gory. And things only deteriorate morally once the victims start to fight back since the audience is invited to revel vicariously in their brutal revenge. Excessive bloody violence, including acts of vengeance, some profanity, frequent rough and crude language, some sexual references, two obscene gestures. O; R

GAME NIGHT

A-IV – Adults and adolescents
A-II – General patronage
A-I – Limited adult audience
O – Morally offensive

Every Day

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Celebrating marriage

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Faith, patience, belief in one another sprinkled in with a sense of humor are key components to maintaining a joyful and lasting marriage.

That was the message Bishop Robert W. Muench delivered during an inspiring homily at the annual Anniversary Mass, sponsored by the Office of Marriage and Family Life for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, on Feb. 25 at St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge.

“What makes a marriage joyous?” Bishop Muench asked of the couples that during their setbacks, during the hard times, they stayed faithful to God and to one another, no matter the problems. That’s why he said the Mass was a time of a “real celebration, a renewal of commitment of love you made to one another. And a beautiful opportunity to come together with fellow members of the faith.”

“Another factor is a sense of humor,” he added, “putting up with another person’s idiosyncrasies.”

The bishop said marriage is not easy but the life of a married couple is beautiful. He stressed that a marriage cannot survive without God’s grace. “That is why we come to God’s house to celebrate this anniversary, to celebrate our faith and commitment to one another, to the Lord, to the church,” he said.

Bishop Muench praised the couples that during their 25th, 50th and 60-plus years of marriage, they have remained faithful to their marital commitment. “The church thanks them for being a beautiful witness to the power of God’s grace at work in the sacrament of marriage,” Ducote said. “At the same time, this ceremony means a great deal to the couples themselves since they feel honored and supported by the church.”

Bishop’s recipe for virtue

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

“What ingredients is he using this year?” is the question on most people’s mind at the annual St. Vincent de Paul Society’s Count Your Blessings Supper at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Baton Rouge. Chef John Folse addresses the crowds’ curiosity in his culinary comments about what he has included in the simple soup they are about to eat. This year, however, Bishop Robert W. Muench, who put on a hat and apron and joined Folse in dishing out the savory meal for the last time as bishop of Baton Rouge, shared his own special recipe.

Bishop Muench, who has been the bishop at 16 of the 23 Count Your Blessings Suppers, said, “I’m going to give you a recipe tonight. I’m not talking about the ‘holy trinity’ of cooking – onions, bell peppers and celery – and sometimes garlic, but that’s four. I want to talk about the virtues of faith, hope and love. These are the virtues about which so much of what we believe and practice.”

He said the virtues begin with faith.

“God is the reason everyone of us exists,” the bishop said. “God created each one of us, and I tell others that no matter the circumstances of your mother’s pregnancy and all the rest, you are one of us. Not one of us is a happenstance, no one is a mistake. “And we must thank God for the unique gift of life – for the challenges and obstacles and for the setbacks as well as the joys that sustain us.”

A second step of faith is to care for and serve one’s neighbor, noted the bishop. He said the meaning of the word “neighbor” is forever changing.

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Bishop Muench and Folse, who are both chefs, had prepared a simple soup that was a blend of ingredients that Bishop Muench said were the key components to marriage: faith, patience, belief in one another, and a sense of humor.

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The ‘Dreamers’ are a moral issue

The “Dreamers” have escaped deportation for the time being. However, they are still in legal limbo until Congress decides to legalize them by some law. That seems to be what President Donald Trump wants, provided he can leverage them to get funding to build the wall across our southern border that he promised his voter base when running for election. These kinds of issues we have become used to in the first year of the Trump presidency. But never, except perhaps on the abortion issue, has a political decision been so much also a moral one.

The fate of the Dreamers is not a question of how to pay off our national debt, raise taxes or cut taxes. Nor is it a strategy on how to make our schools safe, ban guns or arm teachers. Nor is it a plan to make America great again by increasing jobs through higher tariffs and less federal regulation as opposed to free trade and protection of the environment. Such questions divide Americans into Republicans and Democrats. Responses to them don’t make us good people or bad people, moral or immoral. They simply give us the opportunity, through our elected officials, to create a strong nation, one that provides us through our elected officials, to create a strong nation, one that provides us with decent laws according to Catholic teaching. Of course, not everyone agrees on the details and application of specific written laws. Christians often look to Scripture for enlightenment and the reminder that our laws should treat our neighbors, especially our poor, needy and suffering neighbors, as we would want to be treated.

The United Church of Christ did a survey of the Bible references in the Old Testament and the New Testament and found 54 references to immigrants and refugees. Here are just a few:

Genesis 12:10 “The call of Abram: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” And he becomes a stranger and an alien in the land of Canaan (Gen 15:13).

Exodus 22:21 Moses leads the Jews out of Egypt and slavery and gives them God’s law: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien; for you were aliens in the lands of Egypt.”

Deuteronomy 10:18-19 “For the Lord your God loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Jeremiah 7:5-7 “If you do not oppress the alien... then I will dwell with you in this place.”

Jeremiah 22:3-5 “Do no wrong or violence to the alien.”

Matthew 2:13-15 “Jesus and parents flee Herod’s search to kill the child.”

Matthew 25:31-46 “… I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” (our final judgment)

Romans 12:13 “Mark of the true Christian: … Extend hospitality to strangers…”

1 John 3:18 “… Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

On Feb. 27 we were asked through e-mails to contact our national legislators to urge them to pass a law guaranteeing Dreamers a place in our country. I called Senator Cassidy. A very pleasant young man said that he would pass on my message to the Senator. I hope that Sen. Cassidy remembers the passages from St. Matthew, St. Paul and St. John.

FATHER CARVILLE is a retired priest in the Diocese of Baton Rouge and writes on current topics for The Catholic Commentator. He can be reached at johnycarville@gmail.com.

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The mission of The Catholic Commentator is to provide news, information and commentary to the people of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Catholics and their neighbors alike. In doing so, The Catholic Commentator strives to further the wider mission of the Church: to evangelize, to communicate, to educate and to give the Catholic viewpoint on important issues of the present day.

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<tr>
<th>PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US</th>
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<td>Please pray for the priests, deacons and religious women and men in the Baton Rouge Diocese.</td>
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Mar. 20  Rev. Amitraj Raj IMS  Dcn. Larry J. Melancon  Br. Roger LeMoine SC
Br. Paul Montero SC
Mar. 21  Rev. Thomas C. Ranzino  Dcn. Timothy Messenger Sr.  Sr. June Engelbrecht OP
Dcn. Francis M. Minor  Br. Malcolm Melcher SC
Rev. Amal Raj Savarimuthu IMS  Dcn. James J. Morrissey
Mar. 24  Rev. Philip F. Spano  Dcn. Donald J. Musso  Sr. Dulce Maria Flores HMSS
Rev. Amal Raj Savarimuthu IMS  Dcn. James J. Morrissey
Mar. 26  Dcn. Angelo S. Nola  Sr. Janet Franklin CSJ
Mar. 27  Dcn. Ricky P. Obre  Br. James Burns SC
Mar. 28  Dcn. Stephen Paul Oursu  Sr. Carol Gonsoulin CSJ
Mar. 29  Dcn. Phong Hu  Br. William Cawley SC
Apr. 1  Sr. Mary Joel Gubler OP
Apr. 2  Dcn. Angelo S. Nola  Sr. Janet Franklin CSJ
Our ache for earthly immortality

W

We share the world with more than seven and a half billion people and each of us has the irreplaceable, innate sense that we are special and uniquely destined. This isn’t surprising since each one of us is indeed unique and special. But how does one feel special among seven and half billion others?

We try to stand out. Generally we don’t succeed, and so, as Allan Jones puts it, “We nurse within our hearts the hope that we are different, that we are special, that we are extraordinary. We long for the assurance that our birth was no accident, that a god had a hand in our coming to be, that we exist by divine fiat. We had a hand in our coming to be, birth was no accident, that a god has given each of us two great gifts: a life to live and a love to share. St. Paul wrote: “But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor13:13). To have a good Lent, we all need to focus on the desires of the heart. Do you have the right attitude toward others?

Think about your gifts and talents. How are you using them? Focus on the ways your gifts can bring a smile to a child’s face of a warm feeling to an elderly person in need of kindness.

Your talent for helping others should not become mere good intentions. Take action as best as you can. What are you good at? We all have talents that aren’t used as well as they should. If there is something you enjoy doing, do it soon for someone who needs your special touch.

There is still time to think of ways to share your talents with the people you love. Bake a cake, sing a song or just be there for someone who needs a little cheer.

Since God delights in loving us, we need to take delight in loving others. We do this best by sharing our gifts with them. Spread your love around. You can break out and bring joy to those who have no claim on your kindness.

God’s joy is contagious. Since you know that you are a carrier of divine love, why not figure out ways to help those near you? Think of ways to bring joy especially to those who may live in fear.

Fear is the enemy of joy. The reason God said to us in Isaiah 41:10, “Do not fear: I am with you; do not be anxious: I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you” is that he wanted us to enjoy our lives.

To begin doing that, we have to rid ourselves of needless worry. Immediately put on the will to bear discomfort and smile.

Some are better than others at shedding fear. I know this because I was born a worrier. I was born in 1931. My mother carried me in her womb for nine months during the Great Depression and my father was out of work. Her fears seeped into my genes.

Today I am free of all that because I made a concerted effort to trust God more and more. I no longer let anxiety get a foothold in my psyche. If fear does strike, I immediately

Letting love in during Lent

My love goes out to all of you this holy season of Lent. Now that I am an old man, I see more clearly that love is the only thing that really matters in life.

Things you have acquired, like fame, are not really important. Things you have acquired, like wealth or power or fame, are not really important. All that matters is how much of God’s love you’ve shared with those in need.

Every Lent we celebrate God’s gifts, especially the gift of eternal life. We aspire to attain heaven by striving for greater perfection. As we approach the joy of Easter, we are facing the challenge of using our gifts well.

In his loving wisdom, God has given each of us two great gifts: a life to live and a love to share. St. Paul wrote: “But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor13:13). To have a good Lent, we all need to focus on the desires of the heart. Do you have the right attitude toward others?

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Spirituality For Today

Father John Catoir think of it as a gift and a test to see how quickly I can show the Lord that I trust him implicitly. His loving protection covers us in all circumstances.
**Documentary Screening** – A screening of the film documentary “I Lived on Parker Avenue” will be held Sunday, March 18, 9 – 4:30 p.m., at the Bluebonnet branch of the East Baton Rouge Library, 9200 Bluebonnet Blvd., Baton Rouge. The film documents the journey of David Scotton to meet his birth parents. There will be a discussion with Scotton. Admission is free and donations are accepted. The event is sponsored by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, United Way and the Council on Accreditation.

**Reflection on Suffering** – Stephen Binz, Catholic scholar and author, will present a reflection on “Job, Blameless and Upright,” focusing on having patience, humility and steadfastness on Wednesday, March 14, 6:15 p.m., at St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge. Confessions will be heard at 5 p.m., followed by Mass at 5:30 p.m., and the praying of the Divine Mercy Chaplet at 6:15 p.m. For information, visit stagnerb.org.

**Women in Spirit** – Sarah Broome, principal of THRIVE academy, Baton Rouge, will speak at the next Women in Spirit meeting on Thursday, March 22, noon at St. Joseph Cathedral, Fourth and Main Streets, Baton Rouge. Women in spirit is an interfaith gathering for women to grow spiritually and network. To RSVP email wis@cathedralbr.org or call the cathedral office at 225-387-3928.

**Jeff Cavins Seminar** – Evangelist, author and biblical scholar Jeff Cavins will present a seminar, “Life of a Modern Day Disciple: Applying Faith to Your Life,” on Saturday, March 24 at the Cypress Spring Mercedarian Prayer Center, 17560 George Oneal Road, Baton Rouge. Check-in begins at 7:30 a.m., and the seminar is from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. The registration fee is $60 per person and includes a continental breakfast and lunch. Proceeds benefit the center. For more information and to register, call 225-752-8480.

**Fill Up the Truck** – St. Aloysius Church, 2025 Stuart Ave., Baton Rouge, will have its “Fill Up The Truck” event to support the St. Vincent de Paul Society on Saturday, March 24, 8 a.m. – 4 p.m., at the church parking lot by the football field. Items accepted include furniture, clothes, coats, pots, pans, dishes, small working appliances, etc. For more information, call 225-939-0602 or email kbueche@ptpnl.br.coxmail.com.
Diocese of Baton Rouge Catholic Schools Office
Principal Opening
2018-19 School Year
St. Thomas More School
Baton Rouge

St. Thomas More Catholic School, founded in 1960 and currently serving 619 students in Grades K – 8, seeks a principal with a strong Catholic identity, commitment to growth, collaborative spirit, and strategic vision. With approximately sixty professional staff members, St. Thomas More Catholic School has a strong community, committed to continuing a legacy of excellence in religious and academic education in a nurturing environment that fosters self-discipline.

The Diocese of Baton Rouge has thirty schools in eight civil parishes, with strong Catholic identity the focus in all schools. The district is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and standardized test scores are above state and national averages.

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge
Evangelize Hearts, Educate Minds, Encourage Talent and Embrace the Future

Applications are due by May 1, 2018.

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Oct. 1 through Sept. 30. This year CCDBR was projected to welcome about 70 refugees, thus the cut could also result in the loss of jobs, although Aguillard said it’s too early to project that number.

He did note that during the past three years the Refugee Resettlement Program has welcomed more than 100 refugees per year, but the threshold set by the State Department is only for 2017-2018.

The impact could be potentially devastating, according to those who work day to day with refugees.

“(The refugees) would be out there by themselves,” said Cecelia Perez, who has worked in the program for 26 years.

The Refugee Resettlement Program provides a number of basic services to incoming families, even before they take their first step on Baton Rouge soil. Once a family clears an intense national and international vetting process and is assigned to Baton Rouge, program employees begin to search for housing, and then go about preparing the housing with furniture, sheets, food, set up electricity and any other necessities.

“When the clients come here, they are ready to go to bed,” Perez said. “They get food and a hot meal for the first night.”

Refugees then go through an orientation process that includes introducing them to the south Louisiana culture, and helping with such basics as how to use a credit card, or make a transaction at a bank. They are also given some spending money to help them acclimate to their new life.

“We provide basic survival English and welcome them into our community consistent with our Catholic mission of love of human family,” Aguillard said. “The Catholic Church has historically been a champion of refugee rights. Catholic social teaching is the right to immigrate, protect our family, protect our life, support your family.”

Job training is also a critical component of the orientation process, as the goal is to have refugees self-sufficient in eight months, which is when the funding they receive from the program expires. Aguillard noted his agency has working relationships with several employers throughout the area who have previously hired refugees.

“(Employers) recognize their work ethic, their training and the skills that a lot of these refugees bring and see the benefit of hiring trained, committed, skilled people that refugees tend to be,” he said. “Many of them are doctors, lawyers and engineers in their previous countries. They are really tops.”

Many are individuals who have assisted our troops in wars or have otherwise been targeted or threatened with death threats or severe loss of human rights for political or religious lessons.”

Snjezana Dragovic, a 20-year employee of CCDBR and a refugee from Bosnia, said many of her clients are working on their reclassifications so they resume careers they once had in their homeland.

Dragovic said the program offers assistance even after the eight months are up. In fact, she said many stay in communication for several years, and often work with CCDBR to help bring family members who are still in refugee camps to Baton Rouge.

Aguillard said there is a hope that at least a portion of the program can be salvaged. Currently, CCDBR is classified as an affiliate site with the State Department, meaning the agency is guaranteed funding for an annual minimum of 75 refugees. Even if the number dips below 75 during a given year, the funding remains intact so the structure and staff can be maintained, Aguillard said.

He added that the agency is attempting to be identified as a remote site, where funding is available for refugee resettlement on a per arrival basis.

“That’s what we are hoping for and then we can continue to serve asylees and remain an option for people from overseas who might have immediate family members in our area and want to choose the Diocese of Baton Rouge area to settle.”

Perez said this is first time that such a shutdown has been threatened and added it is “scary for families and us too. It’s my job.”

She agreed with Dragovic that families often access the program for years, including helping with taxes and even seeking advice when they go to buy their first house.

“It’s ongoing,” Perez said. “When I go to the store, and clients know me, they will stop and talk and thank me for what we do for them.

“I see people graduate from LSU who I knew when they were babies. I feel like I’m making a difference,” she said.