By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,” Jesus cried out in a loud voice before taking his last breath upon the cross at his crucifixion, according to the Gospel of Luke. As Catholics stand at the foot of the cross on Good Friday and gaze with sorrow upon the bruised, beaten and pierced body of Christ, who lovingly suffered execution at the hands of sinful humanity to redeem them, their desire to turn “die to self” and turn their life over to God may ignite.

How does one “surrender all” to God? What does it mean and how does one do that in daily life?

“Giving ourselves to God means everything we say and do has a basic purpose of sharing God’s love,” said Father Jerry Martin, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Church in Prairieville.

Prayer is a first step in helping people to understand what God is calling them to do, according to Father Martin.

“Prayer should not be telling God what we feel should be done, but rather prayer should help us to discern and commit to God’s will,” said Father Martin.

He said, additionally, the Scriptures, the Ten Commandments and the teachings of the church show people how to put God’s will into concrete actions in their lives.

A Scripture reading that is good to reflect upon when looking for the strength to give one’s all to God is the Gospel account of Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane before his passion and death.

“He prayed ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done,’ ” said Father Martin.

He pointed out that society often says that ease and freedom from difficulty are the best way to go, but in that passage Jesus, who is always speaking to the father, demonstrates something very different.

“Sometimes accepting the will of God also means accepting the difficulties that can come with it,” Father Martin said.

“The Passions show us that long before Jesus was
Promise giver, promise keeper

By Dina Dow

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

Let the celebration begin, as we rejoice in what is truly the epitome of faith in Jesus Christ. “The resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community; handed on as fundamental by tradition; established by the documents of the New Testament; and preached as an essential part of the Paschal mystery along with the cross. Christ is risen from the dead! Dying, he conquered death; To the dead, he has given life” (Catechism #698).

Recently in a homily a local priest referred to God as the “promise keeper.” There are promises we know to be true and kept through faith in Jesus. Many are understood in light of the resurrection.

Promise of forgiveness

“Save us your world, for by your cross and resurrection, you have set us free.” Three Gospel accounts are options for Easter Sunday Mass, yet all express what happened at the resurrection. Mary Magdalene went to the tomb just before dawn to anoint the body of Jesus, who was lying in a sealed tomb and guarded by the angel. She ran back to the upper room, gave an account of what she saw which made her encounter the same, yet see the burial clothes neatly rolled and placed to the side. Both were awestruck. Another Gospel tells of Mary’s encounter with a “young man clothed in a white robe” (possibly an angel) who announced the good news, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here” (Mk 16:7). Why does the resurrection promise forgiveness?

St. Peter, in the Acts of the Apostles, testifies to the crowds what Jesus did in his earthly ministry, how he died for our sake, that he was raised and seen by many. The first act Jesus does after the resurrection is to share his “peace,” just as the angels announced at the Incarnation. He then said, “As the father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” The institution of the sacrament of reconciliation resonates and is taken very seriously. The notion of forgiveness signifies that Jesus died and rose to free us from our sin. Thus, St. Peter’s testimony is two parts: first, the commission to preach and second, those who believe will be forgiven of their sins in Jesus’ name (Acts 10:43). The good news is Christ lived, suffered, died and rose to free us from what binds and keeps us from God, that being sin. This is the promise of forgiveness.

Further, the faithful are called to the same task, even if we have not “seen” him. St. Thomas struggled with the testimony of his fellow apostles until he was invited by Jesus to touch his wounds. The moment St. Thomas saw the risen Lord and placed his fingers into Jesus’ pierced hands and side he profoundly professed belief with these words, “My Lord, my God!” Can you imagine this moment? St. Thomas touched the very wound which poured forth an “ocean of mercy in blood and water” to cleanse, purify and redeem us from all sin. Save us Savior of the world … “Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed” (Jn 20:28-29).

Promise of victory and life

Some would say the cross is a sign of weakness. For Christians, the cross is a sign of victory. St. Paul said, “This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad!” (Psalm 118:22). Jesus said, “I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). This is the promise of victory.

Life Giving Faith

St. John Paul II declared a plenary indulgence would be granted to the faithful who take part in the prayers and devotions on that day. Additionally, the indulgence would be granted to those who in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament pray the Our Father and the Creed, along with a devout prayer to the Lord.

Although St. Faustina died in 1938, the devotion to the Divine Mercy had been becoming increasingly popular.

DID YOU KNOW

Divine Mercy Sunday

While still rejoicing in Christ’s resurrection, the following Sunday Mass continues the theme of redemption when Divine Mercy is celebrated.

The day is originally based on St. Faustina Kowalska’s devotion to the Divine Mercy. It was reported that part of her encounter with Jesus included special promises from Christ and indulgences issued by the church.

The Divine Mercy message is that God loves us all, and that he wants us to understand there exists no sins greater than his mercy. He encourages all to call upon him with trust, receive his mercy and let that mercy flow through to others, enabling everyone to share in his joy.

Perhaps most challenging of the Divine Mercy message is trusting in God and yielding one’s will to him. But God says the grace of mercy are dependant on trust and that the greater the trust the greater the mercy.

At the request of her spiritual director, St. Faustina, an uneducated Polish nun, wrote a diary of approximately 600 pages revealing the revelations she received from Christ. One of the revelations she wrote was a repeated request from Jesus that a feast day be celebrated on the Sunday after Easter.

That particular Sunday was devoted to the sacrament of penance. St. John Paul II granted the feast day to the universal church on April 30, 2000, the day St. Faustina was canonized, although the feast was already being celebrated in Poland. In a decree dated May 23, 2000, the congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments declared the Second Sunday of Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday.

The decree noted the day is an invitation to face, with confidence in divine benevolence, the difficulties and trials mankind will experience.

According to St. Faustina, Jesus said whoever approached the Fountain of Life on that day will be granted forgiveness of sins and punishment. Additionally, deeds of mercy must be performed on Divine Mercy Sunday.

To encourage the celebration of Divine Mercy, St. John Paul II declared a plenary indulgence would be granted to the faithful who take part in the prayers and devotions on that day. Additionally, the indulgence would be granted to those who in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament pray the Our Father and the Creed, along with a devout prayer to the Lord.

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Renovations shore up future of cathedral building

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

A renovation project scheduled to be completed in the next few weeks at St. Joseph Cathedral might not yield visible changes but has helped secure the stability of the venerable building.

St. Joseph pastor Father Paul Counce said that this past summer a team of architects, engineers and contractors performed a structural analysis of the cathedral building, which was constructed from 1853-1856. Included in the inspections were all of the beams in the ceiling, the lighting and wiring.

Overall, the building was found to be remarkably sound for its age, with a couple of notable exceptions.

Father Counce said shoring work in the basement underneath the sanctuary was recommended and has been completed.

More extensive work, however, was required on the drop ceilings in the Blessed Sacrament chapel, which is on the east side of the building, and the Mary chapel on the west side. Visual inspection appeared to show evidence of water damage and perhaps even termite damage in each ceiling, which are the only two drop ceilings in the cathedral.

“There was no way for us to inspect up there without taking out the (drop) ceilings,” Father Counce said. “We knew simply from touching the ceiling in a few places where it was soft there was some (water) from years and years ago.”

Once the drop ceilings were removed, repairs included updating the electrical wiring, which had not been updated since the 1920s, the fabrication of corrective structural beams and additional wiring to provide lighting on the Blessed Virgin in the Mary chapel and on the sanctuary and tabernacle in the Blessed Sacrament chapel.

Once the electrical and wiring work was completed, Father Counce said the drop ceilings were replaced with the added feature of trap doors to provide better accessibility for future inspections.

Overall, the work was delayed several months because of a back-log in the East Baton Rouge Parish inspections office caused by the 2016 flood. Scheduling the work so scaffolding would not be in place for Christmas and Easter was an additional challenge.

“It’s proven to be a much longer project,” Father Counce acknowledged, adding that work that began in July is expected to be wrapped up shortly after Easter.

At least for now, visitors will notice two colors of wood in the two side chapels, but that is temporary until the final staining and painting are complete, Father Counce said.

The original drop ceilings date to the 1980s but had been updated to include ductwork for air conditioning and electricity.

Father Counce said it’s possible the most recent overall structural analysis was performed in the 1920s so “this was important.” The most recent major renovation of the cathedral was in the 1960s when the sanctuary was updated following Vatican II.

“For a building of this age, you have to get under the skin of the building to really know if it really healthy or is about to collapse,” he said. “It’s a relief to know it is structurally sound.

“(The work) needed to be done.”

Father Counce said there has been some talk in recent years among he and Bishop Robert W. Muench regarding additional decorative and practical work during the next five to 10 years. Among the potential upgrades are a new lighting system throughout the church and a state of the art sound system.

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invites you to join us for breakfast on Saturday, April 14 from 9 a.m. – noon at Oak Lodge Reception Center, 2834 South Sherwood Forest Blvd., Baton Rouge.

Our speaker will be Sheila Fonseca, wife of Deacon Rodrigo Fonseca. Once a homeless mother with 2 children, hear her story of how the Lord has carried her through extreme hardships to become the beautiful and faithful servant she is today.

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Father Matt Dupré resigns as pastor at St. Patrick Church

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Father Matt Dupré has resigned as pastor at St. Patrick Church in Baton Rouge because of health reasons but will soon return to active ministry, he told parishioners in a letter that was recently read at weekend Masses.

Bishop Robert W. Muench has appointed Father Trey Nelson, pastor at St. Jude the Apostle Church in Baton Rouge, as administrator at St. Patrick.

Father Dupré, who has been away from the parish while addressing and receiving treatment for health issues, told parishioners in a letter that was recently read at weekend Masses, “I will never be able to thank you enough, and I am once again reminded of how wonderful the staff and people of St. Patrick are, not only to me, but to the church as a whole. It has sustained me,” he wrote in the letter.

He also thanked members of the St. Patrick staff, calling them a “dedicated, fun-loving, faith-filled, professional and committed group people” that he was fortunate to work with. He also expressed gratitude to his fellow priests for filling in at St. Patrick in his absence, celebrating Masses and addressing other pastoral needs.

“The priests of the Diocese of Baton Rouge are extremely generous and their fraternal love and support has been a great gift to me,” he said.

Father Dupré said he hopes to be able to return to St. Patrick later in the spring to celebrate Mass and say goodbye in a more personal way.

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REFUGEE ▼

From page 1

have held them together while enduring unspeakable tragedies. Originally from Iraq, the family, which includes six children, was forced to leave because of the rising persecution of Christians.

The family spent nearly seven years in Syria and while there began the resettlement interview process with the United Nations. In August 2013, tragedy struck on one fatal afternoon when Shamon’s wife left to go shopping and never returned – the victim of a car bombing that has become all too common in the war-torn country.

“It was devastating,” Rita Elias said. “We witnessed some things no one should see.”

“We have faith in God and faith that things will go well,” she added. “We (have to) forget all what happened in the past and move forward.”

The grieving family then found refuge in Turkey and after a vetting process was assigned to come to the United States.

Each year many refugees are assigned to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which sends them to various parts of the country.

The Elias sisters and their father were connected with the Refugee Resettlement program at Catholic Charities Diocese of Baton Rouge in early 2017 and by April of that year, Rita, Lara, and their sisters Rina and Maha touched down in Baton Rouge. Shamon stayed behind for nearly a year because of health issues, including diabetes, hypertension and a stroke that has affected his tongue and limits his ability to speak.

They also have a sister, who had previously resettled in Miami with her two children and husband. She came to Baton Rouge three days after her dad arrived, introducing him to his grandchildren.

But even in their joy, there was sadness, as they await the arrival of their brother, who remains in Turkey. He is still waiting for his final security clearance, a process that could take up to a year.

“It was so hard to leave my son,” Shamon said. “Without my son I am worth nothing. It was the hardest moment for me in my life.”

“I have my faith and I know my son will be with me one day.”

Rina Elias admitted that being separated from their father has been difficult because she and her sisters were alone in a foreign country, adjusting to a new culture, language and way of life. The sisters have been able to secure housekeeping jobs at a hotel on the LSU campus and have been taking English classes offered through CCDBR’s resettlement program.

“It was an ordeal to come here by ourselves,” Rina. “It’s been so hard.”

But as the family gathered in the apartment after an emotional first night that included a traditional Middle Eastern dinner and much storytelling, there was only laughter, joy and yes, even a few more tears. Conversation focused on the immediate future, with the Elias sisters eagerly making plans to introduce their dad to the unique Cajun cuisine, Baton Rouge’s amenities, the Mississippi River and the shopping centers.

A visit to their place of work is also planned, as their bosses are eager to meet the man they have heard so much about.

“I cannot believe (Shamon) is back with us,” Rita said. “I could not sleep or anything because our father was away from us. We are enjoying his company.”

“We feel much more secure, more settled here,” she added. “With the help from Catholic Charities, we have a way better way of life. Life is enjoyable.”

Added Shamon: “I cannot believe we are all together. Their welcoming me at the airport made me feel like I am home, like I am really home.”

The Elias sisters await the arrival of their father, Sameer Elias Shamon, at the Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport. The family, originally from Iraq, had been separated for nearly one year. Pictured from left, are Rita, Lara, Rima and Maha. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator
A once proud icon of Baton Rouge sports has been steadily marching into decline, echoes of generations of young voices muzzled by overgrown weeds, leaning light poles and buildings in disrepair.

Soon, however, the final touches of a massive renovation will be completed, restoring glamour to the grand old lady. “This is not about just redoing a ball field, this is Baton Rouge,” said Deacon David Dawson, deacon assistant at Sacred Heart and who at the request of pastor Father Miles Walsh spearheaded the project. “Sacred Heart field is in the heart of every male adult and child in Baton Rouge. If you played baseball, at some point you played on this ball field.”

“This means so much to so many people in a historical sense,” he added. “This is part of Baton Rouge history.”

Nearly two years ago, shortly after renovations were complet- ed on the parish community center, Father Walsh mentioned to Deacon Dawson that several people had been inquiring about restoring the baseball field. After an absence of many years, Sacred Heart was in its second year of reinstituting its baseball programs on the elementary level, but home games were out of the question because of the deplorable condition of the field.

Deacon Dawson said he embraced the opportunity to restore such an important sliver of Capital City history.

“I told (Father Walsh) I would love to do it,” said Deacon Dawson, who was ordained in 2013 and is planning on entering the seminary to become a priest in August. “I love baseball, and I played it my entire life.”

Deacon Dawson said he initially gathered a group of about 14 people that included coaches to discuss ideas. The group con- ferred that the project needed to be more than just patchwork, so a six-phase plan was developed.

The fundraising campaign was launched, which Deacon Dawson admitted was off to a sluggish start until the annual blessing of the pets commemorating the feast day of St. Francis. During the blessing, which Deacon Dawson considered missing because he had lost a 16-year-old dog two days earlier, a donor inquired about the progressed field. When Deacon Dawson explained the difficulties, the donor replied he would stop by the parish office the following week and write a check for the difference.

“This was a blessing,” Deacon Dawson said. “That really got the ball rolling.”

With the assistance of volunteer Phil Schmitt and Sacred Heart fourth-grade baseball coach Rob Jones, the project began in earnest.

The work has included razing and replanting the field with Cel- ebration Bermuda grass, which is the same as at Alex Box; re- moving old light poles, some of which were leaning over 22nd Street; refurbishing the conces- sion stand, adding new lights, replacing the grandstand and adding a family bathroom to compliment the existing two bathrooms.

“We’ve all put sweat, blood and tears into this project,” Dea- con Dawson said.

But it’s also a project that has galvanized the Sacred Heart community, even serving as an evangelization tool. Jones said he has noticed that since construction began, many families have returned to Mass, and some families who are not Catholic but have students in the school are also in attendance.

“This is what it is about,” Dea- con Dawson agreed, while relating a story about a man who had strayed from his faith has since become involved in the parish’s men’s club and is planning to have his two children baptized in April. “The ball field is a ma- terial, physical thing. It is a tool that allowed that moment (with the gentleman) to occur which would not have occurred without the field.

“That’s the most important part about this field. It gets people excited and brings them back into their faith and into their church.”

The field also bears some his- torical significance, according to Sacred Heart historian Mary Lee Eggart. She said the field was the site where Confederate forces pushed back the Union forces advancing through the Magnolia Cemetery.

During the renovation, a Civil War bullet was unearthed, which has been there for more than 150 years.

During the 1920s, Eggart said the field was used by the Afri- can-American population, many of whom lived in the nearby neighborhood. At that time, the field was not part of the city lim- its.

The field will be officially re- dedicated April 8 during Family Day activities following the 11 a.m. Mass.
Beatitudes and DACA/ Cremation and relics/ Auctioning off pews

Q Recently I read an article in a Catholic magazine that suggested that, in addition to the Ten Commandments, we should use the beatitudes when examining our conscience before going to confession. This sent me into a tailspin, and I had to go and review the beatitudes to see if I even remembered them all.

I’m afraid that I am in violation of several of the beatitudes because of my views on DACA the call to be merciful, for example, or to “hunger and thirst for justice.” I feel that it is wrong when immigrants come here illegally and take jobs that could be held by valid U.S. citizens. But now I don’t know whether I can hold that position and still be a good Catholic. (West Long Branch, New Jersey)

A Using the beatitudes (from the Gospel of Matthew 5:3-10) to help examine one’s conscience is a suggestion often made by Catholic teachers and preachers. The website of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops says that, prior to the sacrament of penance, one should reflect prayerfully on his or her thoughts, words and actions and suggests that this examination “should be rooted in Scripture, particularly the Ten Commandments and the beatitudes.”

While the Ten Commandments are expressed mainly as prohibitions (don’t steal, kill, lie, etc.) they have always seemed to me to constitute the minimum of what a Christian is expected to do. The beatitudes, on the other hand, express in an affirmative way, what is required of a follower of Jesus: being poor in spirit (not coveting riches), showing mercy, acting as a peacemaker, etc.

I do not think that a Catholic is obliged to support the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) policy as an article of faith; like many pieces of legislation, it seeks to integrate Christian attitudes with what is politically feasible and practically wise – and in so doing admits of differing views. Clearly, though, the sympathies of Catholic leaders are on the side of welcoming immigrants.

Here are some things that have been said. In his Christmas Eve remarks in 2017, Pope Francis likened the Bethlehem journey of Mary and St. Joseph to the migration of millions of people today who are forced to leave their homelands for a better life or just for survival. Three months earlier, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops had criticized the planned suspension of DACA, suggesting that the deportation of those who had come to America as minors would not reflect who we are as Americans.

As to the letter writer’s concerns about “taking jobs from Americans,” most of the research suggests that DACA has in fact benefited the U.S. economy – with no adverse impact on employment opportunities for those who are native-born.

A In a recent article regarding cremation, you explained the church’s position that the cremated remains should be kept together and buried not scattered or divided among family members (for example, in lockets). But I can recall a priest showing us some years ago, a relic that was a small bone chip of a saint (whose name I have since forgotten).

How can we have such relics, albeit of a saint, when the church precludes the separation of cremains? Isn’t that inconsistent? (Betendorf, Iowa)

A Relics of the saints have been venerated in the church for nearly 2,000 years – certainly since the martyrdom of Polycarp in the middle of the second century; and commonly, bones of a saint were divided up with a noble purpose, so that more people could be reminded of the heroic virtue that saint had displayed.

The church’s oversight of relics, though, is much more active today than it was in earlier centuries; now, for example, the Vatican no longer grants first-class relics to private individuals, as it once did, but only to churches and oratories for public veneration.

To answer your question directly, one might argue that there is a difference between a saint and an ordinary individual, between the public veneration of relics for the edification of the faithful and the private custody of cremains by family members in lockets. But part of the answer, too, is that the fragmentation of a saint’s remains that marked the church’s earlier history would normally not be allowed today.

In December 2017, the Vatican released a new instruction on authenticating and protecting relics that noted that the “dismemberment of the body is not permitted” unless the bishop has received permission from the Congregation for Saints’ Causes.

A Our parish has the practice of auctioning off (for the benefit of our school) selected pews at the Mass celebrated on Christmas Eve. This Mass is overcrowded, and seating is at a premium. Most parishioners arrive 30 to 45 minutes early. The successful bidders usually wait in just before Mass begins, leaving standing those who did not (or could not) make a winning bid.

In the Vatican’s “Instruction on Implementing the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy,” issued in 1964, we were told that pastors should ensure that, especially in the celebration of the Mass, “the equality of the faithful is clearly apparent and that any suggestion of moneymaking is avoided” (No. 35). Doesn’t this practice violate that directive? (Columbia, Missouri)

A Your question hits home for me in a personal way. In the parish from which I recently retired (after 24 years as pastor), there was a long-standing practice of doing exactly what you describe.

At our parish school’s annual fund-raiser, a pew for Christmas Eve Mass would be auctioned off – usually, with a winning bid of around a thousand dollars. That Mass was, of course, the best attended of the year – with twice as many people as seats.

I confess that, although I was never comfortable with this particular stratagem, I did not have the backbone to step in and end it. I just didn’t want to dampen the initiative of the committees that ran the dinner – some of whom enjoyed this auction item in particular and would battle one another in the bidding. (I did, though, blow the whistle when it was suggested one year to auction off two pews instead of one!)

Like you, I always felt bad for the standees who had to watch the “winning family” file in – sometimes, as you said, at the last minute. Now, blessed with the objectivity (and the safe impunity) of retirement, I agree that it was not a good practice.

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.
Immaculee Ilibagiza to lead retreat at OLOM

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

A survivor of the horrors of the Rwandan genocide, Immaculee Ilibagiza, will help people see that the light of love and prayer can illuminate the darkest circumstances with hope and healing at a retreat April 20-21 at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Baton Rouge.

Ilibagiza was born in a small village in Rwanda, Africa. She had a peaceful childhood with her close-knit family. Education was important in her family, so she did well in school and went onto the National University of Rwanda to study engineering. While she was at home from school on Easter break in 1994, her life changed dramatically.

On April 6 of that year, the president's plane had been shot down over the capital city of Kigali. His assassination led to the Hutu-led government massacring Tutsi tribe members throughout the country, including Ilibagiza's village. Government forces recruited and pressured Hutu civilians to arm themselves with machetes, clubs, blunt objects and other weapons to rape, maim and kill their Tutsi neighbors and to destroy or steal their property.

To protect his only daughter from rape and murder, Ilibagiza's father, a devout Catholic, told her to run to a local pastor's house for protection and gave her a set of rosary beads. For the next 91 days, Ilibagiza and seven other women hid in a 3 x 4 foot bathroom in the pastor's house. She heard and had an occasional peak as the violence raged outside. Because of her father's activities planning a civil war and helping the resistance to the government, she faced the fear of nearly being discovered twice when the Hutus came to the pastor's house looking for her. Anger and resentment were destroying Ilibagiza's mind, body and spirit while she was hiding. It was there she turned to prayer by praying her father's rosary, which drowned out the anger inside of her and the evil outside the house. She credits the prayer in turning her heart towards God and away from hate.

While in hiding, Ilibagiza, who spoke Kinyarwandan and French, taught herself English with the help of a Bible and French-English dictionary. Ilibagiza weighed 65 pounds when she was liberated from her hiding place. She discovered that during the 100-day massacre, her entire family was brutally murdered, with the exception of one brother who was studying abroad, and that nearly one million of her extended family, friends and fellow Rwandans were massacred. As many as 70 percent of the Tutsi population was killed, as well as 30 percent of the Pygmy Batwa population. Ilibagiza's home had also been burned down.

After the genocide, Ilibagiza came face-to-face with the man who killed her mother and one of her brothers. Because of her devotion to prayer, she was able to forgive the man.

In 1998, Ilibagiza migrated to the United States, where she continued to work for peace through the United Nations. As she shared her story with co-workers and friends, they insisted that she write it down. That led to the publishing of her first book, “Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust.” She has also written a book about Our Lady of Kibeho, the name given to Marian apparitions given to several adolescents in the 1960s in Kibeho, southwestern Rwanda, which ended just prior to the Rwandan genocide. Among the other books she has written includes one on the rosary.

For cost, more information and to register, visit immaculee.com.

BLACK CATHOLIC CELEBRATION – St. James Church in St. James recently celebrated Black History Month. Pastor Father Matthew McCaughhey’s stated in his homily on the past, present and future of Black Catholics, “You do not have to lose your blackness to be Catholic.” Youth also participated in the Mass as readers under the direction of choir member Cynthia Lewis. Members of the Knights of St. Peter Claver and Ladies Auxiliary were, bottom row from left, Lydia Small, Milton Cayette, Helen Nelson, Susan Bailey, Florida Grow, Judith Gaudia, Mercedes Chopin, Adriane Octave, Valarie Whittington, Diane Winchester, Mary Nelson; middle row, Sandra Lewis, Yolanda Winchester, Celestine Miller, Sharon Levigne, Deborah Favorite, Ann Landry, Judy Harrison, Monica Jasmin, Audrey Oubre, JoAnn Judson, Brittanee Owrey, Cynthia Lewis, Alinda Johnson, Lisa Weber, Lottie Mitchell; and top row, choir director Rod Steib, Junius Julien, Kevin Gordon, Father McCaughhey, Rodney Johnson, Alfred Grant, Warren Parker and Gerald Gaudia. Not pictured were Leon Walker, Anthony Cooper, Donald Nelson, Gustavia Forté, Cynthia Parker and Monica Schexnayder. Photo by Nadine Nelson.
Popular CD helping fund Metanoia Manor

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

Something from the past is helping to create a better future for young girls rescued from human trafficking. Metanoia Manor, which houses up to 16 adolescent girls, was the brainchild of Father Jeff Bayhi, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Church in Zachary. But, his vision for a safe haven to aid victims has been greatly funded by a spiritual recording he made 22 years ago, with the help of popular singer Aaron Neville.

In 1993, Father Bayhi was invited to conduct a retreat for a permanent deaconate class for the Archdiocese of Denver. His focus was a talk on the Stations of the Cross. On a two-and-a-half hour non-stop flight from New Orleans to Denver, what was on his mind tumbled out onto paper. “There it was,” he recalled. “I mean, I’d begun to trust in my life that the Holy Spirit hijacks me quite often.”

After working on the wording for a couple of years, Father Bayhi decided to put the text to music for a recording. After a couple of failed attempts to set the right tone, a connection led him to Neville and the two teamed up in the studio of another Neville family member, Aaron’s brother Art. It took just an hour and 15-minute minutes to lay down 47 minutes of track, a feat that normally takes the professional singer five days to complete.

“We both looked at each other and said, ‘It’s a God thing,’” said Father Bayhi. “I mean, when God wants something to happen, the Holy Spirit takes care of the details.”

The recording features Neville’s distinctive high voice singing verses of “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?” while Father Bayhi leads the Stations of the Cross, with a narrative of how each station reflects events in our own lives. When Jesus falls the first time, Father Bayhi compares the scene to our own weaknesses that make us fall, but having the grace, like Jesus, to get up and continue on. Another fall by Jesus and Father Bayhi points to our own repeated failures and our desire to give up, but Jesus got up again and walked on, carrying the cross. Father Bayhi completes the Stations of the Cross with the death and resurrection of Jesus and how we, too, can be resurrected by letting go of our own crosses, our own pain and starting anew.

“I just think the Stations of the Cross are a reminder of the stages of life,” said Father Bayhi. “We all have unjust condemnations, we all have falls in our life, we all disappoint people in our life, we all have tripped at one time or another in our life. You know, we all go through pains and losses and if we keep faith, we all come to a new life that we didn’t know existed. I just think the Stations of the Cross are the process of life. When people say why does God let things happen to me? And I’m thinking, what do you think Mary was saying about her son? ‘This isn’t fair, he doesn’t deserve this.’ It’s just life.”

All sales from the CD “Doing It Their Own Way,” a 1996 recording of the Stations of the Cross by Father Jeff Bayhi, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Church in Zachary, and singer Aaron Neville go to Metanoia Manor in Baton Rouge, a shelter for young girls who are victims of human trafficking. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator
With only word of mouth advertising, the first 10,000 copies of the CD sold within 3 months of its release, with copies shipped as far away as England and Australia. It was also used by Protestant churches across the country for Good Friday services. Decades later, Father Bayhi is still in touch with Neville. The singer lost everything in Hurricane Katrina and his wife died one year later. Neville remarried in 2010 and now resides in New York City. Father Bayhi said both he and Neville have been touched by the impact of the CD.

“There’s been a lot of mail during the years about what that’s meant, and how it’s changed people’s lives and how some people decided not to commit suicide after hearing it. And different things that are very, very emotional to both of us,” said Father Bayhi. “And, he (Neville) is a very tender hearted, sensitive good man. I don’t think this made Aaron a spiritual man. He was already spiritual. It added to it.”

There have been plenty of times over the years that reflections on the Stations of the Cross have related to Father Bayhi’s own life.

“I’m a little bit thick-headed but eventually God breaks through. This recent deal with the Seal of Confession, that’s eight-and-a-half years of holding on, waiting. It’s happened in so many different ways. It’s been a real blessing,” he said, referring to a lawsuit against him and the Catholic Church alleging lack of action on a sexual harassment accusation made during confession.

When the CD was made in 1996, Father Bayhi had already set up a fund for Metanoia Manor. After paying for production costs and royalties, Father Bayhi kept the rights to the recording, leaving a substantial profit, all of which has gone to the shelter.

“The beautiful thing about this is, it continues to console people after great suffering and obviously those who have been trafficked had great suffering,” said Father Bayhi. “This continues to live on by helping these children. I do the Stations of the Cross every Friday morning and Friday evening during Lent, but the lessons of the text are always with me.”

GOODBYE
A FINAL

Driving onto the prison grounds at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, one is struck by the immensity of the scene and the mission. It was a bright cloudy day in early March, with green grass and one could see, along with Hope Easter yard signs, complete with a smiling bunny and pastel-colored eggs. The reason for the trip was Bishop Robert W. Muench’s last official visit as bishop of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, to death row.

Past a timer on the six times or halfways of death row left the air with a thick and steamy smell of soap. There are 22 to 33 men on each tier. Some were busy folding laundry. Others simply sat back on their beds, waiting. Most, though, stood close to the bars after it was announced visitors were on the floor. The entourage included, besides the bishop, Linda Fjeldsjo, coordinator of prison ministry for Catholic Charities of the Baton Rouge diocese, and Rob Tasman, executive director of the Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The group was there to distribute 200 pounds of bananas, washing tablets and packs of washcloths and bars of soap. The small gifts were a way to connect with the men, handing them something they could use, but Bishop Muench connected with the men in a different way, on a different level.

“Hello there! Boys, the Saints could use your on their team! Did you play football or about events since my last visit. The past 16 years, when he was first appointed bishop of the Diocese of Baton Rouge. He was at ease in his conversation with the inmates, finding common ground "It’s personal, it’s relational and it’s ministerial,” said Bishop Muench of the prison visit. “They appreciate the visit, the courtesy and what I will not the affirmation of not to treat about them except that I am there to support them.”

Bishop Muench said he takes his cues from the men on whether they want to visit, with some remaining reserved “by the fact they don’t get up.” But, most of the men did get up and opened for him to reach their cell. The bishop said that each individual conversation was guided by the prisoner, whether it was 30 seconds long or a few minutes. He noted that those who have expressed an interest in the faith or faith development usually want more time to talk.

He said those prisoners at Angola who are able to participate in the high school entrance for confirmation candidates make a definite impact on the students. And, while parents may be shocked that the treatments take place at a maximum security prison, the bishop said they do come to realize that “some of these people who get off to a bad start, corrected themselves and now are living a deeper spiritual life than some of their peers who never got off the rails in the same way they did.”

“Once some of those in prison get a taste of spirituality, they kind of see a road back on get a taste of spirituality, they kind of see a road back. They may be shocked that the treatment does not get up on their bed. They may be shocked that the treatment does not get up on their bed. They may be shocked that the treatment does not get up on their bed.”

The bishop also noted the positive vibe of the pod known as death row. He credited the uplifted spirits with some expanded programs that include allowing the inmates to socialize face-to-face and more time outside of the cell, in a recreation area.

"'I sense from hearing some of the other programs that they have been adding, like giving them a little bit more controlled excise time and that kind of thing, that they have used it appropriately and it has helped their esprit de corps,” said Bishop Muench.

This visit was full of emotional moments with one inmate crying a tear during an intense private conversation with the bishop. After the visit, there was marked difference in the young man’s demeanor.

“I told him never give up on yourself, never give up on God and never give up on your life,” said Bishop Muench. “I felt we had a good conversation together.”

Many of the men knew of the bishop’s impending retirement and thanked him for “caring over all these years,” something that touched the bishop’s heart.

“The warmth of the moment with each of the inmates, the expressed gratitude and respect that they demonstrated to me that I’ve always tried to demonstrate to them,” said the bishop of his final visit. “And, it was, of all the years I’ve been there, I found it the most enjoyable visit. Part of that dynamic was that many of them knew that I was retiring. And, I told some of them, I said, ‘I do not expect that I will have the privilege of seeing you again in this world, but I hope and pray that we will see one another in the next.’”

Bishop Robert W. Muench

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Bishop Robert W. Muench
Special Ed has new home

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

In May, special education teacher Casey Petitto will pack up her classroom at St. Louis King of France School in Baton Rouge for the summer break for the last time. But she won’t be traveling far with her boxes of teaching materials. That’s because St. Thomas More School in Baton Rouge will be offering special education for students in grades K – fourth.

“I think it’ll be a good change for the kids to be at another welcoming school,” said Petitto, who will get a chance to see her new classroom over the summer. “I think it’s awesome of them to open their school to us. We’re all pretty excited about it.”

Just weeks after the announcement that St. Louis King of France Church in Baton Rouge would close and the parish would be absorbed into St. Thomas More Church, located less than two miles away, the Diocese of Baton Rouge announced that SLKF School would close after the current school year.

SLKF is one of nine schools that offer the Blessed Margaret of Castello REACH (Religious Education for All Children) Program. The closure of the school meant Petitto and her five students would have to relocate and possibly separate. That’s when Bethany Robichaux, director of special education for the Catholic Schools Office, said the schools office approached the community (of STM) and based on the geographic needs of our families, it seemed liked a natural move for us.”

“I kind of describe it to people as a Mary Poppins situation, like we’re just literally lifting the classroom and moving it,” Robichaux laughed. “Obviously, our families who are currently there are excited that we didn’t have to move them to another welcoming” and parents have been very positive about the new program being offered.

“I think this lets everyone know that we are welcoming, we are looking forward to this,” she said.

Lemoine, said the illness and chemotherapy affected her son’s learning ability so he was moved to the special education classes at Our Lady of Mercy School in Baton Rouge.

But, the commute has put a strain on the family’s schedule. The Lemoine’s live near STM and have two other children at the school, Jojo, 12, and Anne Marie, 8. Patrice Lemoine said her husband, Joseph, sometimes works out of town so she had to coordinate a pick-up schedule with her mother. Now, four of the five Lemoine children, including 3-year-old Ella, will be attending STM in the fall (oldest daughter Haley is 24).

“I think it’s going to make my life a lot easier,” she said. “Hopefully, he will be able to ride the bus because right now, Jojo and Anne Marie ride the bus.”

“I’m excited about going to see my friends and my teacher,” said Rex. “I really miss my friends a lot.”

Lemoine said his siblings are also excited that Rex will be joining them in the fall.

“They were really excited when I told them,” she said. “They’ll see each other through the day and they’ll call each other a little wave and acknowledge each other so I think they’re going to love Rex being there and seeing him at school.”

According to Robichaux, geography plays a large part for families making decisions concerning special education.

And, the families overall, when we contacted them and said this is where we’re going to be, just got great feedback from our current families,” she said. “We have two families who couldn’t attend because the drive was just going to be too much, who now say that St. Thomas More could work with their commute. So, we anticipate six to eight kids there. Currently, we’re at five.”
SHAKING IT UP – First-graders at St. Peter Chanel School in Paulina work on a unit on investigating matter. Throughout the unit, students participated in various experiments such as predicting whether an object would float or sink or if oil will dissolve in water. Photo provided by Paula Poche | St. Peter Chanel School

ARISE – Youth from around the Diocese of Baton Rouge attended Abbey Youth Festival on March 17, the feast of St. Patrick, at St. Joseph Abbey and Seminary College in St. Benedict. The theme of the event, “Arise,” was inspired by the St. Patrick’s Breastplate prayer, also called “The Cry of the Deer,” which is attributed to St. Patrick. Photo by Rozalyn Duplantis

PRAYING THE ROSARY – Students in the Rosary Club at Mater Dolorosa School in Independence spent time after school to make rosaries for students who participated in a St. Joseph’s altar on March 18. Pictured, from left on bottom row, are Rebecca Thiell, Kaelynn Coslan, Emily Brouillette, Isabella Lamarca and Ava Peco; middle row, Logan Matherne, Emily Vosbein, Elizabeth Brouillette, Tanner Matherne and Kori Johnson; back row, Gage DiVittorio, Blayne Husser, Anthony Vosbein, Brady Mendez, Joshua Thiell, Brett Angelette and Dane Divittorio. Photo provided by Erin Mendez | Mater Dolorosa School

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MOVIE REVIEWS

USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting

A Wrinkle in Time

Disney

New Age-style bromides dominate the script of this often eye-pleasing adaptation of Madeleine L’Engle’s 1962 novel for young adults. Four years after the unexplained disappearance of her father (Chris Pine), a NASA scientist who, together with his physicist wife (Gugu Mbatha-Raw), had developed an unorthodox method of time and space travel, a middle-school student (Storm Reid) is still devastating by his absence. She gets help in searching for Dad from an unlikely source: a trio of celestial guides (Oprah Winfrey, Reese Witherspoon and Mindy Kaling) who mysteriously manifest themselves to her, her younger brother (Deric McCabe), a prodigy, and to her supportive would-be boyfriend (Levi Miller). With the women magi’s assistance, the kids set off on a cosmic quest to track pop down and bring him home. The ultimate message of Ava DuVernay’s film, that we should love ourselves even while acknowledging our faults, can be seen as promoting the Christian virtue of humility. And the youthful romance is a model of innocence and positive, if not always convincing, emotional interaction. But the uneasy combination of secularism and magical thinking that characterizes the underlying worldview of Jennifer Lee and Jeff Stockwell’s screenplay makes this inappropriate for very young viewers or for teens who are not well grounded in their faith. Occasional peril, possible momentary off-screen immodesty. A-II; PG

Batman: Gotham by Gaslight

Warner Home Video

An adequate, if not outstanding, superhero tale, this direct-to-video animated film transports Batman (voice of Bruce Greenwood) and his supporting characters to a Victorian-era version of their home town. There, the Caped Crusader takes on Jack the Ripper, who is murdering prostitutes, just as his real-life counterpart did in London. Offended by the work of a nun (voice of Grey DeLisle) who runs an orphanage that also aids ladies of the night – and anyone else in need – Jack sets out to stop her. In response to the evil he embodies, she offers not violent resistance, but forgiveness. Though this moment of grace is edifying, and will appeal especially to Catholic viewers, other considerations indicate this title is best for an audience of grownups. Bloody scenes of murder, sexually suggestive situations involving prostitution, two instances of crude language. A-II; R

The Hurricane Heist

Entertainment Studios

Serviceable mash-up of the apocalyptic weather event and crime caper genres in which two estranged brothers, one a meteorologist (Toby Kebbell), the other a mechanic (Ryan Kwanten), join forces with an ATP agent (Maggie Grace) to foil the crime of the title, an inside job (led by Ralph Ineson) designed to take advantage of the compulsory evacuation of Gulfport, Alabama, to rob the local branch of the U.S. Treasury. Though the film’s feeble attempts to establish human interest fail entirely, viewers seeking nothing more than fast-paced action will find what they’re looking for in director Rob Cohen’s busy B movie. The closest thing to any moral dimension comes through the Afghan War vet repairman’s refusal to leave a comrade behind and the federal officer’s unswerving dedication to duty. Frequent stylized violence, about a half-dozen uses of profanity, a few milder oaths, a stifled rough term, about a half-dozen crude words. A-III; PG-13

I Can Only Imagine

Liongate

Dennis Quaid brings his formidable talent to bear in this faith-driven drama, playing an abusive father whose conversion to evangelical Christianity inspired his son (John Michael Finley) to write the eponymous 2001 song, an unprecedented chart-topper that became popular even with nonbelievers. Essentially a biography of Finley’s real-life counterpart, Bart Millard, directors and brothers Jon and Andrew Erwin’s film, which Jon Erwin co-wrote with Brent McCorkle, also tracess his on-again, off-again romance with a friend (from the(requested) church, Madeline Carroll) and his struggle to achieve musical success under the guidance of his group’s dedicated manager (Trace Adkins). While its primary appeal will be to religious pop fans who, like the protagonist, would be star-struck on meeting genre icons Amy Grant (Nicole DuPort) and Michael W. Smith (Jake B. Miller), the movie offers uplifting entertainment that parents and teens can share without worry. Mature themes, including marital discord and the physical abuse of a child. A-II; PG

Love, Simon

Fox

Good-hearted but morally misguided romantic comedy in which a closeted gay teen (Nick Robinson) strikes up a pseudonymous email exchange with a fellow student from his high school who is in the same situation, and gradually falls for his unidentified correspondent. When a callous classmate (Logan Miller) discovers his secret, and uses it to blackmail him, hoping to build up a romantic relationship with one (Alexandra Shipp) of the lad’s trio of best friends (rounded out by Katherine Langford and Jorge Lendeberg Jr.), it further complicates his furtive life. In adapting Becky Albertalli’s 2012 novel for young adults, “Simon vs The Homo Sapiens Agenda,” director Greg Berlanti succeeds in delivering some enjoyable humor and moments of genuine pathos. But, as scripted by Elizabeth Berger and Isaac Aptaker, his film predictably fails to distinguish between the dignity to which everyone, of whatever inclination, is entitled and the acceptability of acting on urges that fall outside God’s revealed plan for human sexuality. A benign view of homosexual relationships, same-sex kissing, numerous references to sexuality, several uses of profanity, at least one rough term, considerable crude and crass language. O; PG-13

Tomb Raider

Warner Bros.

Murry video-game adaptation in which, seven years after the disappearance of her business tycoon–turned-archeologist father (Dominic West), an heiress (Alicia Vikander), who prefers life as a London bicycle courier to enjoying her riches, follows clues he left behind to tack him to an almost uncharted island off the coast of Japan where an evil goddess lies buried, and must remain entombed for the welfare of the world. The resourceful lass gets help on her quest, and in her fight against the shadowy organization trying to locate and exploit the deity (served by Walton Goggins), from a hard-drinking Hong Kong sea captain (Daniel Wu). Director Roar Uthaug’s original story features the film’s capable star, at least one rough term, considerable crude and crass language. A-III; PG-13
Bishop Robert W. Muench’s
2018 SPRING
CONFIRMATION SCHEDULE

THURSDAY, APRIL 5 | 7:00 p.m.
St. John, Zachary
St. John, Zachary
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, St. Francisville

TUESDAY, APRIL 10 | 7:00 p.m.
St. Jean Vianney, Baton Rouge

THURSDAY, APRIL 12 | 7:00 p.m.
Hispanic Apostolate, Baton Rouge

SATURDAY, APRIL 14 | 4:00 p.m.
St. Anthony of Padua and Le Van Phung, Baton Rouge

MONDAY, APRIL 16 | 7:00 p.m.
St. Isidore the Farmer, Baton Rouge

TUESDAY, APRIL 17 | 7:00 p.m.
St. Anne, Napoleonville
St. Philomena, Labadieville,
St. Anne, Napoleonville,
Assumption, Plattenville

THURSDAY, APRIL 19 | 7:00 p.m.
St. Alphonsus Ligouri,
Greenwell Springs

SUNDAY, APRIL 22 | 3:00 p.m.
St. Joseph Cathedral, Baton Rouge
Holy Family, Port Allen,
St. Gabriel, St. Gabriel
St. Joseph Cathedral, Baton Rouge

TUESDAY, APRIL 24 | 7:00 p.m.
St. Joseph the Worker, Pierre Part
St. Joseph the Worker, Pierre Part,
St. Jules, Belle Rose,
St. Elizabeth, Paincourtville,

THURSDAY, APRIL 26 | 7:00 p.m.
Our Lady of the Holy Rosary,
St. Amant

FRIDAY, APRIL 27 | 7:00 p.m.
Holy Ghost, Hammond
St. Margaret, Albany
St. Helena, Amite
Mater Dolorosa, Independence
St. Joseph, Ponchatoula
Our Lady of Pompeii, Tickfaw
Holy Ghost, Hammond

SUNDAY, APRIL 29 | 11:00 a.m.
St. Ann, Morganza

THURSDAY, MAY 3 | 7:00 p.m.
St. Francis Xavier, Baton Rouge
St. Paul, Immaculate Conception,
St. Francis Xavier

MONDAY, MAY 7 | 7:00 p.m.
St. George, Baton Rouge

SUNDAY, MAY 20 | Noon
ADULT CONFIRMATION
St. Joseph Cathedral, Baton Rouge

GOSPEL ▼
From page 2

of epic failure. Our faith tells us Jesus’ crucifixion is victorious! After the resurrection and appearances of Jesus, the community of believers united in worship, belongings and faith. All of the apostles witnessed with such fervor that many came to believe, were baptized and called children of God. Sound familiar? This is still happening after 2000 years have passed since our Lord’s resurrection. This is victory, indeed, for death is no more since those who believe have been given new life in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. For always, until the second coming, Jesus mediates for believers, sitting at the right hand of God, in his glorified, resurrected body. The role of the faithful is to continue to grow in a life of holiness. We are the people of God, the church. Holiness grows as love increases. Our love is rooted in God, shown to us by Jesus and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. We show our love by living the commandments, not as burdens but as actual ways of responding in the very love that made us. It is our faith in Jesus Christ, our belief in the resurrection, that by this love we conquer the world in charity, goodness and joy, with patience, mercy and forgiveness.

As we begin the Easter season, let us be Easter people, “giving thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting” (Ps 6:118), testifying to the love of God in our lives, and showing the same mercy that poured from his side for us. Come all ye faithful, let us adore Christ the Lord, because he did this for many and he did it for you!
The Gospel of St. John states, “But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name” (Jn 20:31). We thank God for life in Jesus Christ. May we, during this Easter season, come to know him more fully and participate in the Eucharist as we profoundly proclaim, “My Lord, my God.” Alleluia! Alleluia! Happy Easter!
Dow is the director of Evangelization and Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.
Suffering’s answer is on the cross

Human suffering is always a mystery. We fear it. We do what we can to prevent it. We pray to avoid it. But we never completely escape it. This Lent has been filled with it. School killings, acts of terrorism, threats of war, an increase of murders, even an increase of funerals of people we loved, some in old age, but others long before we expected to lose them. We have this natural, God-given, holy desire to live. Yet so many die before their time. We are left asking God, “Why God, why him or her?”

They were good people whom we loved and needed, and whose lives blessed ours.

Pope Francis seems to share our experiences and thoughts. I read recently in the online Catholic newsletter Crux that the pope make a special trip to the small Italian town of Pietrelcina down in the boot of Italy to honor its most famous Catholic, the Carthusian monk, Padre Pio, who died not too many years ago in 1968. He was a simple man, gruff, but known for his compassion for the poor and as a confessor with apparently psychic gifts. If you really wanted to see your soul in a mirror, you could go to him for confession.

Padre Pio’s compassion for the suffering of others he founded one of the largest hospitals in southern Italy, may have come from having borne the wounds of Christ on his own body for 50 years. He was a stigmatic. The first person to have ever suffered this phenomenon was St. Paul. We read in his letter to the Galatians 6:17, “I bear on my body the marks of Christ” (in Greek, “marks” is “stigmata”). The next person we know of to have been a stigmatic was St. Francis of Assisi in the 13th century. However, since then about 400 people have experienced authentic cases of stigmata. St. Catherine of Sienna, a nun who convinced Pope Gregory XI to move back to Rome in 1377, was found after her death to have had the marks of the stigmata. In the 1500s a Spaniard called St. John of God had the stigmata, which he said motivated him to found many hospitals. After his death, he was named the patron of hospitals. And in modern times there was also another stigmatic, St. Therese Neuman, a German woman who lived from 1926 to 1962. For many years, while bedridden, she survived without any food or water except the bread and wine of the Eucharist. She was examined by German doctors who were unable to provide any explanation for these phenomena.

All that we can say is that God’s grace and power can be seen in the lives and suffering of some holy people. But the alleviation of suffering is also a sign of God’s grace and care for his creation. Again, Pope Francis illustrates this truth by holding up some persons for our appreciation and imitation. One such is an American nun, Sister Norma Pimentel M.J. Called “Pope Francis’ favorite nun,” Sister Norma is this year’s recipient of the highest honor in the American Catholic Church, Notre Dame University’s Laetare Medal. She is the executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. The award cites her for being one of our nation’s strongest champions of immigrants.

Having to flee one’s country because of violence is today’s greatest cause of suffering. It once drove the infant Jesus from Nazareth to Egypt. And what began with the suffering of that exile was completed on the cross.

God is infinite. We humans can never completely understand what he is doing or why. That is why suffering will always be something of a mystery to us. As Jesus said, “God’s ways are not man’s ways.” We want our material good and comfort now. God wants our eternal good. That is our greatest gift, our greatest grace. Jesus’ life and death on the cross show us that there is no cheap grace. It always comes with a price. God does not always take away our suffering. Rather, through Jesus, he chose to participate with us in our suffering. And he will always be with us in our suffering. This is his covenant with us, his promise. As we pray in every Mass, “This is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant which will be poured out for you...”

The cross, however, is not the end of the story. Jesus had to die for the story to end as it did. He died the cruciate of deaths to show us that no one, no matter the suffering of his life or death, is beyond the grace and power of God’s mercy. We just have to want that mercy and trust in it. Then, Jesus’ resurrection will be ours also.

“The one who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of earthly things. But the one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard...”

Whoever accepts his testimony certifies that God is trustworthy. For the one whom God sent speaks the words of God. He does not ration his gift of the Spirit. The father loves the son and has given everything over to him. Whoever believes in the son has eternal life” (Jn 3:31-36).

Happy feast of the resurrection, Happy Easter!

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 johnnycarville@gmail.com.

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Hearing through the phone

Pope Francis deplores the use of cell phones during Mass. However I ask his reconsideration in this respect.

The Mass is certainly not a place for photography. But what about cell phones that have become “Smart Phones” and are aids to hearing? Today, for the cost of about $50, the parish church can be equipped to allow a hearing disabled person such as myself to “read” the sound system audio of the Mass on their smart phone or tablet. This absolutely new advancement is a God-send to those with hearing loss.

I have been using this advancement for about two years and pray for the day when churches and other assembly areas adapt. The first event use of this advancement was introduced in Baton Rouge one month ago. For more information, contact me at mail@gfusa.net.

Sam Gallo
Baton Rouge

### Mission Statement

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.

### Letters to the Editor

**Letters to the Editor should be typed and limited to 350 words and should contain the name and address of the writer, though the address will not be printed. We reserve the right to edit all letters.**

Send to: Letters to the Editor, The Catholic Commentator, P.O. Box 3316, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-3316, or to tcc@diobr.org.

### PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US

Please pray for the priests, deacons and religious women and men in the Baton Rouge Diocese.

| Apr. 5 | +Bishop Robert E. Tracy Dcn. Thomas M. Robinson Br. Ramon Daunis SC |
| Apr. 6 | +Bishop Joseph V. Sullivan Dcn. Maurice Salazar OP Sr. Joan Hartlaub CSJ |
| Apr. 8 | Bishop Robert W. Muench Dcn. Mario (Sam) Sammartino Sr. Mary Anne Hebert CSJ |
| Apr. 10 | Rev. Donatus Ajoko Dcn. Rudolph W. Stahl Sr. Anna Hoang ICM |
| Apr. 14 | Rev. JoeY F. Angeles Dcn. J. Peter Walsh Sr. Anija Jacob CMC |
| Apr. 16 | Rev. Frank B. Bass Dcn. P. Chauvin Wilkinson Jr. Sr. Julie Kraemer CSJ |
Our need to pray

“Unless you somehow have a foot outside of your culture, the culture will swallow you whole.”

Daniel Berrigan wrote that and it’s true too in this sense: Unless you can drink in strength from a source outside yourself, your natural proclivities for paranoia, bitterness and hatred will invariably swallow you whole.

The disciples in St. Luke’s Gospel understood this. They approached Jesus and asked him to teach them how to pray because they saw him doing things that they did not see anyone else doing. He was able to meet hatred with love, to genuinely forgive others, to endure mis-

Amidst all the darkness, hatred, bitterness, injustice and misunderstanding that surrounded him, amidst everything that stood unfairly against him and was antithetical to his person and message, Jesus struggled mightily to cling to a source that could give him the strength to resist the hatred and violence around him, that could give him the heart to forgive his enemies, that could give him the graciousness to forgive the good chief, and that could give him the inner strength to turn the keys of life over to God. Let’s face it, he knows the road of life much better than we, and only he can guide us to our glorious and final destination. Happy Easter, and don’t let the joke be on you this Easter Sunday.
Sacred Heart Events – Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, 2250 Main St., Baton Rouge, is hosting two upcoming events. The relics of St. Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio) will be on display at Sacred Heart on Friday, April 6, 11 a.m. – 8 p.m. There will be a Mass at noon and the sacrament of reconciliation will be available throughout the day. On Sunday, April 15 – Wednesday, April 18, Father Matthew Bonk CShR will present a parish mission, “A Call to Conversion,” 6:30 p.m. – 7:45 p.m. For more information, call 225-387-6671.

St. Francis Xavier Events – St. Francis Xavier Church, 1120 Myrtle Walk St., Baton Rouge, is hosting two upcoming events. On Friday, April 6 it will have a Zydeco dance, with free lessons from 7:30 – 8 p.m., and see EVENTS PAGE 19.

Classifieds

For help placing your classified ad, call 225-387-0983. All classified ads are prepaid. Credit cards are now accepted.

ST. MICHAEL HIGH SCHOOL
is accepting applications for the full-time position of registrar. Previous experience and knowledge of Administrator’s Plus/Rediker software are beneficial. Also accepting applications for full-time administrative assistant.

Send resume to: Principal, P.O. Box 86110, Baton Rouge, LA 70879-6110 or email lgraham@smhsbr.org

ST. THOMAS MORE Catholic School
NOW HIRING
2 Middle School Teachers:
*Religion
*English Language Arts
Must meet state certification

Please send resume to: 11400 Sherbrook Drive Baton Rouge, LA 70815 or armstrongj@stmbr.org
March 30, 2018

The Catholic Commentator

EVENTS ▼

From page 18

the dance from 8 p.m. – midnight. Tickets are $20 and can be purchased at eventbrite.com. The church will also have its parish fair Saturday, April 7 – Sunday, April 8, with food, live entertainment and games. On April 7, there will be cash bingo from 6:30 p.m., and on April 8, there will be barbecue chicken dinners starting at 9:30 a.m., and the Southern University Pep Band will perform after the 11 a.m. Mass. For more information, call 225-383-3479.

Beginning Experience Weekend – On Friday, April 6 – Sunday, April 8, Rosaryville Spirit Life Center, 39003 Rosaryville Road, Ponchatoula, will host a Beginning Experience Weekend for those suffering the loss of a love relationship through death, divorce or separation. For more information, call Toni at 985-789-8666 or Rose at 504-455-8920.

Magnificat Breakfast – Sheila Fonseca will speak at the Magnificat breakfast Saturday, April 14, 9 a.m. – noon, at Oak Lodge Reception Center, 2834 S. Sherwood Forest Blvd., Baton Rouge. Reservations are $22 each and can be made through Tuesday, April 10 by mailing a check made out to BR Magnificat to Kathy Simoneaux, 9650 Victory Lane, Denham Springs, LA 70726.

Discalced Carmelites – The Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites will meet Sunday, April 8, 1:30 p.m., at Our Lady of Mercy Parish Activity Center in St. Gabriel’s Room, 444 Marquette Ave., Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-343-381 or 225-803-3391, or email robertwhite456@att.net.

Festival of Two Rivers – St. Alphonsus Church, 14040 Greenwell Springs Road, Greenwell Springs, will host its Festival of Two Rivers, Friday, April 27 – Sunday, April 29. There will be food, games, crafts, rides and live entertainment. For more information, call 225-261-4650.

Catholic Radio Fundraiser – Catholic Community Radio is holding its annual Drivetime On-Air fundraiser Tuesday, April 10 – Thursday, April 12 to raise money for operating expenses. Listeners can tune in to 1830 AM or 690 AM from 7 a.m. – 6 p.m. to learn how donate.

Charismatic Mass – A monthly Charismatic Mass will be celebrated on Sunday, April 22, at St. Joseph Church, 15710 Hwy. 16, French Settlement. Praise and worship begins at 1:30 p.m., and Mass begins at 2 p.m. Prayer for individuals who desire it will be available after Mass. For more information, email guysignoring@icloud.com.

Pro-Life Mass – A monthly pro-life Mass will be celebrated Tuesday, April 10, 5:30 p.m., at St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge. All are invited to attend. For more information, call 225-383-4127.

Spaghetti Dinner – The Knights of Columbus of St. Jude Church, 9150 Highland Road, Baton Rouge, will host a spaghetti dinner fundraiser on Saturday, April 7 – Sunday, April 8, following all Masses at the parish hall. For more information, call 225-766-2431.

In sales employment advertisements, the advertiser must name the product or service to be sold. Ads must state how wages will be paid (salary, commissions, etc.) if money is mentioned. The ad must also state if there is an investment required.

Help Wanted

Classifieds

For Sale


For Sale


For Sale


Help Wanted

Seeks candidates for the following positions:

❖ Development Officer
❖ Communications Manager
❖ Administrative Assistant/Secretary
❖ Database Manager

For more information about one of these positions or to submit resume and letter of interest please contact President Brian Moscona via e-mail at bmoscona@cristoreybr.org.

For more information about the school visit our website at www.cristoreybr.org.

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Help Wanted

Classifieds

For Sale


For Sale


Two cemetery plots side by side at Resthaven Gardens of Memory. $2300 each. Call 512-850-7210.
arrested, he knew he would be killed if he continued to be loyal and obedient to his heavenly father. Yet each day – probably each moment – he recommitted himself to his father’s will. We need to deepen our commitment to the will of God each day of our lives as well,” said Father Martin.

Studying the lives of the saints can be a good way to learn more about what it means to surrender oneself, he said. The Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, whose feast day was recently celebrated, serve as excellent role models in obedience.

“When we look at Mary’s response to the angel Gabriel at the time of his appearance to her, we find a perfect example of giving over one’s life to the Lord,” said Father Martin.

He further noted that St. Joseph was relying on the Lord when he took Mary as his wife and endured the hardships that occurred on the way to Bethlehem and fleeing to Egypt with Mary and Jesus after Jesus’ birth.

Some may wonder what is the “cost” or level of commitment needed to be completely obedient to God? Will there be a list of “dos and don’ts?”

“This commitment could involve something large as avoiding mortal sin or can be as small as a pleasant smile or a nice hello to someone else,” Father Martin said.

He further recommended people do a regular examination of conscience.

Another question that may arise is “what about my freedom?”

If people define freedom as doing whatever they want, they are not living in true freedom, according to Father Martin. But if they define freedom as doing what is right and dedicating their life to God, they will have a life that is more fulfilling and satisfying.

“It enables us to focus on where our lives need to be, and that leads to fulfillment. As we continue, there is peace and sense of purpose and worth in life, as well as eternal life in the heavenly kingdom,” said Father Martin.

As people try to measure how much success they are making in their journey of holiness, they should not become discouraged if they “slip up,” according to Father Martin.

“Throughout Lent, especially on Good Friday, we reflect on the Stations of the Cross. Jesus fell three times on the way to Calvary, but he got up each one of those times. When we fail to do God’s will, we should get up again, just as Jesus did,” Father Martin said.

And there are rewards along the way in the struggle, Father Martin pointed out.

“The more we pray and the more we serve, it helps to deepen our commitment and we experience the joy of that commitment,” he said.

He emphasized that as people read the story of the agony in the garden, they should also reflect on the passion of Jesus’ resurrection at Easter.

“We should always connect Jesus’ death with his resurrection,” said Father Martin. “And we should always connect our obedience to God’s will, which is love, to eternal life.”

FAVORITE BEAN – Bishop Robert W. Muench was presented with the prestigious Crystal Bean award during the 28th annual What’s Good in Baton Rouge Spring Luncheon on March 29 at Drusilla Place. The award is given for singular accomplishments and for a lifetime of distinguished service. Presenting the award to Bishop Muench is Eddie Rispone. The annual banquet features many former LSU and Southern University athletes. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

Searching for Jesus

At this holiest time of year, people throughout the world are searching for Christ. At St. Vincent de Paul, we see His face every day in those we are blessed to serve.

Two thousand years ago, He told us to love and care for one another, and that’s more important today than ever before. Jesus was speaking across the ages to all of us when He said, “I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me.” In this simple statement, He told each of us where to find Him. It is in Christ – the image of the invisible God – that we were created, and if we look beyond appearance, clothes, or status, we’ll see His beautiful face.

At St. Vincent de Paul, we see every person as a child of God, and it’s a privilege to serve them on His behalf. The need is urgent, and the numbers are staggering. Last year, we provided 27,000 guest nights of shelter; served 267,072 meals; and filled prescriptions worth more than a million dollars. But we don’t care for numbers – we care for people. We never forget that every number represents an individual with a name and a story.

If you walked through our facilities, you might see a young mother rocking a baby at our Sweet Dreams Shelter. In our dining room, an elderly man eats a hot meal with hands that are trembling – whether from age or hunger, it’s hard to tell. At our pharmacy, a middle-aged woman opens a shabby purse and removes a prescription that should have been filled weeks ago. These are the people we serve. These are the faces of Christ.

To see the faces of the individuals who come to us – like those in the photos above – is to witness suffering and anxiety transformed into relief and joy. A nourishing meal; a warm bed and the safety of four walls; a life-sustaining medication; these are all prayers that Christ is answering through people like you.

When every day is a struggle just to survive, it would be easy to give up. But so often, in the darkest hour of need, someone extends a helping hand, shining the bright light of Christ into a life that is almost at the breaking point. Together, we can respond to Christ’s call to reach out to those in need. We hope you will support our efforts to be there for the poor and homeless by using the envelope in this publication to make an Easter donation, or give online at svdpbr.org.

Christ still speaks to us, and His message remains unchanged: “Love one another.” This Easter, we pray that you will be able to sense His presence in everyone and everything around you.

Help all God’s children by using the envelope in this publication to make a gift, or give online at svdpbr.org.