Praying Act of Spiritual Communion unites Catholics with Christ in absence of Eucharist

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

As the coronavirus continues to bring a country to its knees, the physical and mental affects are immeasurable. But what about the spiritual effect, as the cancellation of Masses has left Catholics without the opportunity to receive the Eucharist, or even attend eucharistic adoration?

With Mass no longer an option and an increasing number of people quarantined, self-quarantining or living in a city such as Louisiana with “stay home” mandates, how does one’s spiritual life survive extraordinary and stressful times?

“Not being able to receive the holy Communion is a great sadness for the faithful because, receiving the holy Eucharist is the center and joy of their lives,” said Father Paul Yi, chancellor for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

“When we cannot unite with Christ in sacramental (physical) communion, saints of the church advise that we unite with Christ by making a spiritual communion.”

Father Yi said that in a spiritual communion a person asks Christ to come in the same way he would if that person was able to receive the sacrament. Father Yi added that a person can make a spiritual communion as often as one likes, informally using one’s own words by praying one of the traditional prayers.

He said the first step is a genuine longing for union with Christ. According to St. Thomas Aquinas a “complete spiritual communion can even take...”

KEEPING TRADITION ALIVE

St. Joseph’s Altar brings parish together

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

By 9 a.m. on Mondays and Thursdays during the month of February, the parish kitchen and hall of Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs is a flurry of activity.

Each station has an important job: measuring flour, sugar and butter; mixing the ingredients; forming the dough into the shape of cookies and lining them up on pans; and cooling the baked cookies and putting the finishing touches on them with either icing or powdered sugar. This cookie factory is part of the St. Joseph altar and an important part of the lives of the parishioners.

“It’s brought so many people together, you would be surprised,” said Mary Grizzardo, 94, who has volunteered for the altar since it began 27 years ago.

“She’s measuring flour for the recipes right now,” explained Rosie Moak, the St. Joseph altar chairperson. “They measure in increments and she had to finish her increment before she could (step away). I run it like a ship. You have to, to do that amount of cooking.”

Moak had been a volunteer only once when she was asked to take over five years ago.

“I said, ‘You’ve got to be kidding,’ ” she laughed, recalling how she was handed cookie recipes on slips of paper and the backs of envelopes.

Turns out, she was the perfect choice. She set about typing the recipes and organizing them in a large notebook. Each January, she books the parish kitchen and hall, makes a schedule of which cookies will be baked and when and sends a letter to volunteers based on the previous year’s list.

She also starts stockpiling donated ingredients, including 300 pounds of flour, 250 pounds of powdered sugar, 250 pounds of granulated sugar, 75 pounds of brown sugar, 50 pounds of butter and 100 pounds of Crisco, along with eggs, pecans and figs, many of which she picks herself in the summer and freezes.

“It’s heartwarming to bring the people together like we do and to work together,” said Moak.

SEE ALTAR PAGE 10

A table holds cakes in the shape of the rosary as part of the St. Joseph's Altar at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs. The altar was put together on March 13 and distributed to parishioners and guests on March 14. Photo by Bonny Van | The Catholic Commentator
Corona, a little known saint

Even in times of a worldwide pandemic, there appears to be a saint for every cause. But regarding the coronavirus, don’t believe everything you hear or read.

Although it is seemingly true that for every crisis, occupation, event or country, Catholic saints have got you covered, this one may best be categorized as myth.

Lost something? Pray for the intercession of St. Anthony, who is also the patron saint of Lisbon, Padua and other places in Portugal. Is it hurricane season? Check St. Martin's for you.

Of course, there is St. Joseph, the patron saint of the Universal Church, families, fathers, expectant mothers, travelers, immigrants, house sellers and buyers and more.

Now some are trying to add St. Corona as the patron saint of pandemics. Yes, she is the patron saint of treasure hunters and gamblers but not pandemics.

St. Corona is associated with St. Victor, states catholic.org. The website states when Victor, a soldier in Roman Syria, was discovered to be a Christian, other soldiers took him before a judge, Sebastian, who ordered Victor “to be bound to a pillar and whipped until his skin fell from his body.”

According to catholic.org, 16-year-old Corona decided to help the dying man and publicly announced she was also a Christian, then knelt next to Victor and prayed, “letting him know he was not alone.” Sebastian then ordered Corona imprisoned, tortured and killed.

It is believed the remains of the two saints are located in a basilica in Anzu, Italy. While aletia.org notes that devotion to St. Corona in reference to epidemics can be verified in various German-language sources, most commonly in Austria and Bavaria, other online sources state this information was not added until late 2019, as the coronavirus began to spread.

So who are the best saints to pray to during a pandemic? Try St. Sebastian, who survived an execution with a hand of arrows.

“St. Sebastian became a symbol for suffering humanity during recurring plagues, and his miraculous recovery gave those afflicted hope and consolation,” states an article by William Doiño Jr. in catholicherald.co.uk.

Doiño also mentions St. Rosalia and St. Roch as saints to pray to for intercessions.

So let us continue as usual to prepare our hearts and minds for the Mass readings and meditate with what we will hear during the Fifth Sunday in Lent and Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion. Providentially what we are presently experiencing has parallel analogies with respect to faith and hope in the Lord in times of suffering.
By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Cancellation of Masses, fairs and other church events are just a few of the many ways the Diocese of Baton Rouge is adjusting to the threat posed by the coronavirus.

In a statement released March 17, Bishop Michael G. Duca announced effective that day public Masses were to be suspended, although priests are allowed to celebrate the liturgy privately. The announcement came one week after the bishop announced he was suspending the Sunday Mass obligation for Catholics as long as the coronavirus threat persists.

Also in the March 17 statement, Bishop Duca announced that pastors were to cancel all unnecessary gatherings of parishioners for March and April, including “large social events like parish festivals, seated meals, processions and indeed any parish function where more than 10 people would be required to gather in a refined space.”

All communal penance services are cancelled, and regularly scheduled and advertised times of reconciliation should be suspended until further notice, the bishop said. Additionally, all holy water fonts should be drained until further notice.

Church parishes were asked to limit baptisms to private and small family celebrations, and that fresh water should be used for baptisms and drained immediately thereafter.

The statement also mandated that funerals are to be celebrated with immediate family (parents, spouses, siblings, children and grandchildren), clergy and funeral staff present. Additionally, funeral Masses and services in the church are not allowed.

The bishop also limited attendance at weddings, and that Mass should not be celebrated. He also set guidelines for clergy members for administering the anointing of the sick to individuals who are hospitalized.

“After Easter I will make a further determination regarding extending or retracting any of the above provisions based upon the current situation in our community with the coronavirus,” Bishop Duca said.

“I do not make these decisions lightly,” he added. “In consultations with leaders in our diocese and for the sake of the safety of those to whom we minister, precaution is necessary to slow the spread of this pandemic. Know that I remember all of you in prayer during this difficult time. We join our sacrifices to others throughout our country during these trying times.”

The bishop’s statement was released five days before Gov. John Bel Edwards issued a “stay home” statewide mandate that was scheduled to take effect March 23.

According to a University of Louisiana at Lafayette study, Louisiana has the fastest growth rate of coronavirus in the world and ranks third in per capita cases in the country.
COVID-19 forces changes at St. Vincent de Paul

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Potential health threats rising from the coronavirus pandemic have resulted in major changes at the homeless shelters and other facilities operated by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, according to president and CEO Michael Acaldo.

Included in the changes are a dramatic reduction in the number of volunteers the agency uses and implementing new requirements for when residents can enter and leave a shelter.

“Our goal is to keep every guest safe and reduce risk,” Acaldo said. “What worked yesterday may not work tomorrow. It’s not a fun place to be because there are a lot of unknowns. It’s challenging.”

Acaldo said the agency has curtailed activities for its corps of 1,500 volunteers, including 400 who regularly make home visits. Additionally, contributions are no longer being accepted at the main campus in Baton Rouge but clothing and similar items are being accepted at the thrift stores scattered throughout the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Although sanitation has always been a high priority, Acaldo said the staff has had to increase its sanitizing efforts, including wiping down doorknobs and other surfaces, to abide by new Center for Disease Control guidelines.

“Because of the hepatitis outbreaks (in 2018 and 2019) as well as the annual flu virus we are used to dealing with these types of infectious diseases,” Acaldo said.

“In my 31 years here, I’ve dealt with flu, NiHi (virus), hepatitis, but I think this one is a lot different.”

One major change is the popular dining room located in the men’s shelter has ceased serving meals in-house, where as many as a combined 500 needy people were served at three to four daily settings. Rather, “to go” meals are being distributed through a walkup window, with hot meals served Monday through Friday and sandwiches on the weekends.

“We made the determination that we were putting people at risk so we decided to use the walkby window, which was designed for just that purpose,” Acaldo said.

The window was implemented before Gov. John Bel Edwards ordered that all restaurants cease dine-in service but has allowed for pickup, delivery and to go windows. Consequently, Acaldo said serving meals through the window will continue.

“We are providing meals for the food challenged, the hungry and those in need,” he said, adding that at this point he does not anticipating closing any of the shelters.

“But it may come to a point if our work force becomes ill and unable to come into work it may leave us with no options,” he cautioned. “Hopefully that will not happen.”

Residents of the Bishop Stanley J. Ott Sweet Dreams Shelter and the men’s homeless shelter are also adjusting to what has become the new, albeit temporary, norm. Acaldo said residents are being asked to stay in the shelter through the day and will only be allowed to leave for essential purposes, such as a medical visit or reporting for work.

Those who elect to leave for non-essential reasons will not be allowed to return.

“We are taking a stern approach,” Acaldo said. “Any guest is free to come at any time but any guest putting somebody else in a position to expose others to the virus is something we have determined is not a safe approach. We would not know where they may have gone or what they were exposed to.”

“We are making sure our guests understand and (also) trying to make people follow social distancing,” he added. “For the most part they have been understanding.”

St. Vincent will soon be opening its new 36-bed facility adjacent to the Sweet Dreams Shelter. Once opened, some individuals and families from Sweet Dreams will be transferred, allowing for additional social distancing.

Acaldo said that as of March 23 no guest in any of the St. Vincent facilities, including the Plank Road men’s shelter, have been diagnosed with the coronavirus but staff members have been trained to recognize symptoms of the disease. Additionally, because the agency deals with a population that can often have a variety of underlying health conditions, the shelters are in a position to rapidly communicate with medical authorities.

If a resident or staff member would begin to display symptoms, Acaldo said the agency would direct that person to contact their health provider or, if authorized, St. Vincent staff members would contact that person’s doctor. The first direction from medical personnel, he said, would likely be for that person to self-quarantine inside the shelter and the staff to continue to monitor the individual’s health.

“Obviously, we have trained our guests if somebody has symptoms we will be quarantining them in their rooms,” Acaldo said. “We have a little more ability to do that (at Sweet Dreams) because many of our guests and families have separate rooms. Since we are not a health care facility we cannot force anyone to quarantine but if we believe someone is showing symptoms we can ask them. If they desire not to, we will ask them to leave because they are putting everyone else at risk.”

Acaldo admitted some of the changes are difficult for the staff, especially when they might be put in a position of turning someone away. He said in 2019 the shelters provided more than 38,000 guest nights.

“We embrace that open door philosophy,” he said. “Our desire is to keep operating as long as we are allowed to operate and as long as can operate.”

“Obviously we don’t want to be in a position where we are unable to serve people who depend on us. We are doing our best to keep those things going.”

Acaldo said finances are also a concern not only for St. Vincent but for other non-profit agencies as well, saying it’s “scary” to determine how to continue the operation without any kind of “financial positive contributions.”

“You do the best you can, do a lot of praying and know that God is with us,” he said.
Jesus led Charbonnet on a path of discovery

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Janice Charbonnet walked the road of skepticism about the Catholic Church for many years and particularly questioned its viewpoint of women. But, she said, Jesus walked alongside her on a path of discovery as she studied church documents that pointed to its support of women and later traveled the country evangelizing young people through National Evangelization Teams (NET) Ministries.

Charbonnet shared her story of faith renewal at a recent meeting of Magnificent ministry for Catholic Women.

Charbonnet grew up in “a beautiful Catholic family” in Canada. She attended Mount St. Vincent’s University in Nova Scotia, which had a large women’s student population. She studied public relations but women’s student population.

She said in 1996 God called her to quit her job and serve as a missionary with NET, traveling for the next year with a team of young adults across the country leading evangelization retreats for teenagers.

“One I made the decision to give my life to God and follow his plan, all the anxiety was gone,” said Charbonnet.

She was on the road with other young adults presented challenges, through which she learned about sacrificing, apologizing and forgiving. But she also found the year to be a gift in which she found “supernatural happiness.”

She said while she thought her team was evangelizing youth, they “turned it around” on her by evangelizing the team members with their keen insight on spiritual issues. She learned youth are looking for “credible witnesses” who live out the Gospel message in their lives.

She highlighted how Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said young people are holy evangelists.

It was also during her time with NET that she met her husband, Jean. They joined the NET ministries staff until they moved to Mandeville in 2008. They now minister to married couples and she serves on the women’s team of Catholic Charismatic Renewal of New Orleans.

Through her faith journey, Charbonnet also found clarity in her mission as a Catholic woman.

Charbonnet’s work for the Canadian government had included researching government policies and how they affected women, etc. She met with a variety of women’s groups.

“Through this I was learning the word on the street about how the Catholic Church was treating women,” Charbonnet said. “The complaint was that the church was marginalizing women and not appreciating their gifts by not giving them key positions of authority, etc.”

Though Charbonnet said she had given her life to the Lord in her early 20s and had experienced the beauty of the sacraments, Scriptures and other traditions of the church, “the sticking point” for her was women’s issues.

One day Charbonnet was on her knees in a church when she poured out her heart to the Lord about her misgivings and was met with silence.

With tears in her eyes, Charbonnet said God later led her to discover St. John Paul II’s “Letter to Women,” in which he highlighted the dignity of women and the “feminine genius.”

“He used such beautiful language than anyone could ever hope for,” said Charbonnet.

The document washed away her preconceived notions about the church taught about women. The document describes that during the liturgy, Jesus stands as the bridegroom and the church, the congregation, represents the bride and receives his love and life-giving salvation. The document holds up women as models for beings receivers of God’s love, Charbonnet said.

Her journey has led her to have a special heart and ministry for youth and women. She encourages people who God calls to ministry to not only see their value in God’s eyes, but to be open to what he is asking them to do.

“Give the Lord a chance, he will pay you back,” said Charbonnet. “God is always working. What may seem like a sacrifice at first, God can use and multiply and we grow so much more quickly.”

GOSPEL ▼

From page 2

or suffering of any kind, we are called to place our faith in new life promised by God and given by Jesus. Moreover, the resurrection is the cornerstone of our faith in Jesus Christ. This is our hope! This is our destiny! How do we know this? Jesus said this, and his words are transformative. “Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and whoever believes in him, even if he dies, will never die” (Jn 11:25-26).

Hope in the Passion of the Christ


Palm Sunday is the dawn of Holy Week. This is paradox week. Just when we think all is well, life turns upside down. Lent ends, as the Triduum season begins at sundown on Holy Thursday. Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem is the total opposite of his journey out of Jerusalem. He rides in on a donkey, embraced as a victorious leader welcomed by cheering crowds waving palms with honor and joy. He is led out days later beating him, carrying a wooden cross, with jeers from onlookers filled with dishonor and contempt. Accepted then rejected.

What just happened? He enters Jerusalem full of life. He leaves on the verge of death, to his death. Alive then dead. He had shared a powerful Passover meal with his closest friends. The very next day all but one abandoned him. Where did they go? He holds the first Eucharist in his hands, hands that performed miracles, hands that offered love, comfort, reassurance, teachings, truth. The next day, those same hands are pierced by long iron nails which pinned him to the cross. He had washed the feet of the apostles, the showing of the humble path of sacrifice for others. The next day, his feet trod the path to the cross... the ultimate sacrifice. He is placed on trial, judged by bribed testimony, trapped in a web of lies, falsely accused, the convicted, sentenced, crucified, pierced, died, buried. Life to death.

This is a sudden interruption of life as we know it. Where did this come from? I cannot control this. Where is the light? Where is the joy? Where is the healing? Why am I afraid, nervous, anxious, on the verge of panic? Why do I thirst? Why do I think I am alone when all whom I love is nearby? I am in the Upper Room. How long, Lord, how long will I be in this tomb-like moment? What can calm my sense of helplessness? Where can I find comfort? What am I longing for?

The hope in the Passion of Christ is heard and seen in Jesus’ words and actions, transformative and life giving! We lean on our faith to believe. Our hope is in the Lord.

“Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me.” And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth” (Jn 11:41-44).

“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). Act of Hope: O my God, relying on your almighty power and infinite mercy and promises, I hope to obtain pardon of my sins, the help of your grace and life everlasting, through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and redeemer. Amen.

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Church’s stance on organ donation/Endorsing candidates

Q What is the Catholic Church’s position on donating body parts for medical science? (Northampton, Pennsylvania)

A Let’s divide the answer into two parts: post-mortem transplants and those from living donors.

Gifts from a donor who has clearly died either to a living recipient or to scientific research is the easier part. Gifts from living donors’ bone marrow, say, or a kidney, this is morally permissible so long as it is not life-threatening to the recipient and provided that the anticipated benefit to the donor of an essential bodily function and provided that the anticipated benefit to the recipient is proportionate to the donor of an essential bodily function and provided that the anticipated benefit to the recipient is proportionate to the donor of an essential bodily function. The Church teaches that the remains, after organ donation, the donor of an essential bodily function (technically 501(c)(3) organizations, which includes charities and churches) from engaging in any political campaign activity. (In 2000, in a case called Branch Ministries v. Rossetti, the U.S. Court of Appeals upheld the legality of that ban.)

Q Why are Catholic churches muzzled while Protestant churches freely exercise political speech through endorsements, hosting candidates, etc.? This does not seem equitable. (Hilliard, Ohio)

A The laws are the same for all churches. The ban on political campaign activity by charities and churches has been in effect for more than half a century.

It was created in 1954 when Congress approved an amendment proposed by Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson that prohibited tax-exempt entities (technically 501(c)(3) organizations, which includes charities and churches) from engaging in any political campaign activity. (In 2000, in a case called Branch Ministries v. Rossetti, the U.S. Court of Appeals upheld the legality of that ban.)

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops periodically reminds churches and church leaders of the implications of that ban. In a website article called “Do’s and Don’t’s Guidelines During Election Season,” the USCCB lists among activities to avoid: “Do not endorse or oppose candidates, political parties or groups of candidates, or take any action that could reasonably be construed as endorsement or opposition.” The bishops’ conference also warns parishes that they should not “invite only selected candidates to address your church-sponsored group.”

While churches are prohibited from endorsing candidates, this does not prevent them from speaking out on moral issues, even if these happen to be interwoven with political topics – issues like care for the poor, religious freedom, human life and migration.

At times, I have seen certain religious leaders try to differentiate, claiming that in endorsing a particular candidate, they were simply expressing a personal preference and not speaking as a church representative. But that, in my mind, is dangerous turf and could well be “reasonably construed” as institutional endorsement.

What our letter writer mentions does in fact happen, and I believe that it may be due in part, at least to the fact that Protestant and evangelical churches sometimes lack the central oversight that guides Catholic parishes. I also believe that a distancing from political endorsements is preferred by over 50 percent of Catholics and that this has been documented in a 2014 study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. And interestingly, Canon 287 of the church’s Code of Canon Law says that clerics “are always to foster the peace and harmony based on justice” but “are not to have an active part in political parties.”

Q Is a Catholic required to have a Catholic burial ceremony in a church with a Mass? I am thinking of having just a graveside service instead with a priest, of course, but just a private ceremony. (I mean no disrespect to the church, but I think this might be easier for the family.) (Indianapolis)

A Technically, a funeral Mass is not mandated by the church when a Catholic dies. But it is certainly strongly encouraged. In fact, the Order of Christian Funerals says: “The Mass, the memorial of Christ’s death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral” (No. 5).

It pleases me that you do want a priest involved in your burial service but the Mass is the most powerful prayer that the church has, so why deprive yourself of that benefit? The celebration of the Eucharist commends the deceased to the mercy and compassion of the Lord, and it reminds those in attendance that death has been overcome by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

So it is also educational and can thus serve to bring comfort and peace to those in attendance. It bores me that sometimes, these days, certain funeral homes seem to discourage the family of the bereaved from celebrating a funeral Mass, citing the extra cost of transporting the body to a church. But for me, I would surely want the strongest help that the church can offer at the time of my passing and that is the Eucharist.

It needn’t, though, be a public event. You can have as many or as few people at the Mass as you like; that all depends on whether you decide to publish in advance the details of the ceremony. At the very least, if you decide to mark your burial without a Eucharist, you would want to arrange a Mass at a later date.

Father Kenneth 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.
Feast of Divine Mercy led Flood back to church

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

During times of crisis, such as the current coronavirus pandemic, is when people drop to their knees in prayer.

And while in prayer God's mercy floods them with hope and revived faith, according to Lisa Flood, who actively spreads such messages after the feast of Divine Mercy touched her own family.

Flood is a cradle Catholic but in the face of the clergy sexual abuse scandal she and her husband, Herb, who had young children, left the Catholic Church with no intentions of returning. They were among three generations of their family to leave the church.

Their trust in the church was broken.

“For my husband and I, we loved Jesus, we just didn’t love the Catholic Church,” said Flood.

Facing other difficulties, Flood said a non-denominational church gave the family the fellowship they needed, and they became actively involved.

But Jesus eventually called Flood and her family back to the church on the Feast of Divine Mercy.

Flood said her brother heard the Blessed Mother call him to make a 10-day pilgrimage to Medjugorje for the Feast of Divine Mercy. He went with Flood’s father and three other men and said his faith was “on fire” when he returned.

“He kept saying ‘I know God is calling you back to the church’ but I didn’t want to hear it,” said Flood.

She said one day her brother called and said, “I’m not asking you to come back to the church, but I want to ask you to do one thing. Visit an adoration chapel and ask Jesus what he wants for your family.”

She visited the adoration chapel twice and felt peaceful but didn’t hear anything from Jesus.

Before getting out of her car on the third visit, she told Jesus, “I’m here for the last time. If you have something to say please be clear with me.”

When she knelt before the Blessed Sacrament, she said Jesus told her, “My daughter, it’s time for you to return to me in the sacrament of reconciliation.”

According to Flood, Jesus directed her to tell the priest her story and gave her the words to do so.

The priest was overjoyed and an appointment was made for her to talk with him.

Flood said this is the first of the three basics (“ABCs”) of Divine Mercy for her: Ask for mercy.

The priest told Flood “welcome home” and that day was the first day of tremendous growth for her marriage and her family, leading her to eventually speak to people about God’s mercy and how he moved in her life.

It would be a couple of more years before her husband returned to the church. He respected that she thought she was doing the right thing, but he didn’t feel the same way.

This is when the second basic of Divine Mercy intervened: Be merciful to others. She said Jesus challenged her to stop asking her husband to return to the church and simply love him.

This came during an important step in Flood’s healing process – Ignatian prayer. She became involved with the “Lord, Teach Me to Pray” series and as her prayer life intensified people wondered what was changing her.

When Flood was halfway through the series, her husband came home from work and searched her eyes.

“He asked, ‘Who are you and what have you done with my wife? I feel loved by you now in a way that I never did.’” Flood said. “I was starting to cry and he said, ‘And I know it is only because of your relationship with Jesus that I see that love in you.’”

As her husband made his own steps back to the church Lisa practiced the third Divine Mercy basic: Complete trust in Jesus.

“My husband told me ‘Thank you for loving me to the truth and to the Catholic Church,’” Flood said.

“True to the priest’s words during the appointment which ushered her back into the church, Flood is an evangelizer of God’s love and the message of divine mercy. She has served in Catholic media for the past 10 years as a host of Focus Catholic TV and as a co-host of Catch the Fire on Catholic Community Radio.

“I think the Lord allowed us to learn about his mercy so I could come back strong,” said Flood.

She, along with Jamie McWilliams; Allie Dazzio, parish administrator at Christ the King Church and Student Center at LSU; and CTK pastor Father Andrew Merrick have been instrumental in introducing Our Lady’s Fighting Tigers at LSU, a group of parents, family and friends of students and staff of Christ the King. The intercessory group gathers to pray for the intentions of CTK’s student ministry.

“There is a spiritual presence in the church. People drop to their knees in prayer. You can feel God’s mercy and power. And while in prayer God’s mercy floods them with hope and revived faith,” said Flood.

And at the heart of every conversion story there was someone praying for them. A praying mom, dad, grandparent, godparent. And I am certain that our prayers matter, especially when it comes for people to know that God loves them,” said Flood.

Pictured are Flood family members, from left, Christopher, Herb, Lisa, Ryan and Trevor.

Photo provided by Lisa Flood
Men’s annual conference deepens faith

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

The scene at first seemed surreal. Light from the early morning sun filled the vestibule of St. George Church in Baton Rouge where dozens of men, most kneeling on the hard tile floor, had their eyes fixed on the monitors showing the holy Eucharistic in a monstrance on the altar.

Inside the church, the scene was the same but instead of a few dozen men there were hundreds. And the church was quiet with reverence, reflection and prayer.

Such was the scene at the Men of the Immaculata Catholic Men’s Conference on Feb. 29 where 1,000 men gathered for the annual event, this year titled “Quid est Veritas? What Is Truth?” based on the question posed by Pilot to Jesus in John 18:38.

“Wow! What a great group!” said guest speaker Father Wade Menezes CPM, following benediction. “You all should be very, very proud of yourselves, not in a prideful way but in a virtuous way. Bishop (Michael G.) Duca and I commend you on a great group today.”

Father Menezes, a member of the Fathers of Mercy in Auburn, Kentucky, writes regularly for several Catholic publications and has hosted several series for EWTN. He noted “the pursuit of revealed truth,” which is the truth Catholics follow.

Father Menezes gave a history of scandals that have rocked the church throughout the centuries, leading up to the most recent “heresies of secular humanism, relativism, the clerical abuse scandals and the lay scandals.”

“Make no bones about it, scandal can destroy the faith of already weak and lukewarm soldiers,” he said. “So it is that scandal can cause the very loss of souls if they despair.”

Father Menezes added scandals destroy the image of the church and the image of priests and makes evangelization difficult. He compared the scandal to the neutron bomb, a weapon that produces a minimal blast but releases large amounts of radiation, similar to the “deadly contamination of the church, both inside and out.”

“The devil’s after priests. Why? I’ll tell you why,” said Father Menezes to a rapt audience. “No priests, no Mass. No Mass, no Eucharist. No Eucharist, no Jesus truly present. No Jesus truly present, no church, which is his bride. No church, which is his bride, no vehicle of salvation.

No vehicle of salvation, no salvation. No salvation means only one thing, damnation.”

He then referred to “lay scandals,” based on surveys from the Pew Research Center, including 39 percent of Catholics regularly attend for Sunday Mass; 82 percent of Catholics view contraceptives as morally acceptable; 50 percent of couples, where one of them is Catholic, cohabitate before marriage; and, 67 percent of Catholics approve of gay marriage.

He noted truth is “a divine person, specifically the second person in the most holy Trinity, the revealed God-man, Jesus Christ,” and this revealed truth from him is safe-guarded through his bride, the church, and presented in articles through the teaching office of the church which is rooted or grounded in the Apostolic College of the original 12 apostles, he said.

Father Menezes said religion has become a “one hour a week commitment” for too many Catholics. He said their faith may touch their hearts but doesn’t attitudes should become our attitudes. His judgments on things, like social and pressing issues today, should become our judgments. His concern for others, our concern for others.”

For Ethan Cagnolatti, a parishioner of St. John the Evangelist Church in Plaquemine, the talk hit the right note. Cagnolatti, a cradle Catholic, drifted away from the church and religion until several years ago when he watched a TV series on the life of Jesus. After a stage of Protestantism, his wife LeAnne invited him to attend Mass.

“I did that, and my personality, I thought, ‘I’m going to find where things start, then go from there’ and when that happened it brought me back (to the church). Now I’m in for life,” said Cagnolatti, who, with his wife, has three young children. “His speech was amazing and he just opened me up for another challenge. Where I’m at now, it’s still low from where I need to be. So I need to go higher. It’s never going to stop.”

Mark Harmann, director of the Men’s Conference, said with so many activities in the Baton Rouge area for men to discover the richness of their faith, they are looking for opportunities to join others in a sense of fellowship. He added the conference helps bring together Catholic men from other church parishes throughout the diocese.

“It’s such a blessing to come in and see so many guys that are excited to be here,” said Harmann. “The joy that’s in their faces, it’s like Christmas morning.

“This is not anything they’re obligated to do. They come here with their own free will to improve their relationship with Christ and they can do it with 1,000 other men.”
CCDBR staff working remotely; remains committed to serving the needy

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge closed its building because of the outbreak of the coronavirus but executive director David Aguillard said the agency’s commitment to the people being served will not be interrupted.

The building was shut down March 19, but Aguillard emphasized staff members are working remotely to continue to answer the call of the needy.

“Although (the) building is closed, we are still open, not just our services but our hearts and minds as we continue to figure out creative ways to protect our staff and clients while still providing the services our community has come to depend on, especially in times of disaster,” Aguillard said.

He told staff members to continue to stress that critical message through their words and care, whether it’s talking on the telephone or via the internet.

He is asking the staff to be charitable and express personal concern to their clients; be kind and be reassuring.

Aguillard called the CCDBR staff the “hands and feet” of Christ, reminding members in times of crisis and emergency to help clients identify actions they can take, however small, to address their concerns.

The agency has cancelled its popular Good Friday Way of the Cross, Aguillard said.

Before closing the building, several precautionary measures were already in place, including asking visitors a set of questions gauging any possible exposure to the virus before they were allowed to enter.

Aguillard said some of their work can continue via phone, such as services to refugees and immigrants, and that for residential programs such as the Sanctuary for Life, caseworkers are taking additional safety precautions such as monitoring temperatures daily. The agency is drawing from its technology bank, and even has the ability to offer secure tele-counseling via the web.

“This is a real-life test, not a training exercise,” he said.

He said remote operations have been in the planning for four weeks and added that his staff is “phenomenal at changing directions on short notice.”

Contingency operation plans with specifically assigned team members have also been developed.

“I’m sure our leaders will learn as we go, adjust and get better, as they always do,” Aguillard said.

CCDBR’s annual meeting that traditionally includes the presentation of awards originally scheduled for March 19 was postponed, although some critical business items, such as seating new board officers, will be completed via email.

Aguillard is anticipating a portion of CCDBR’s clients will be in need of financial assistance because people will be out of work, creating difficulties for the poor to pay the rent, utilities and other needs. Also anticipated are requests to assist with health care costs and even funerals.

“For us, working in a Gospel-based, mission-driven organization, let’s pray for our community and for each other, for our health and ability to maintain services at time of great need under trying circumstances,” he said. “Some of our clients are dependent on us for their daily needs. Let’s align our hearts and activities with Christ, to be of service to one another and our community especially when doing so is difficult.”
Henry Pulizzano, who has also volunteered since the altar’s inception, organizes the cooking, from stuffed artichokes and fried cabbage to spaghetti and sauce. Casseroles from parishioners help round out the menu to feed 750 people, who offer donations when they come to eat.

“It’s good,” said Pulizzano. “Our altar is like a traditional altar. We give the money to St. Vincent de Paul, the youth of our church and Knights of Columbus, for using their facility for the week to cook.”

Putting the altar together involves the work of another longtime volunteer, Mary Toler, and a team of several people. Toler, a former drapery seamstress, said after the color theme is chosen, the process begins of setting up. This year was purple, recycling a massive curtain from the two previous years.

“People always jump in and help,” said Toler. “We put down the foundation, then we decorate it as it goes along. It’s very rewarding. And there’s so many people working together, it’s good for your soul.”

Two hundred volunteers and 5,000 cookies later, the altar is ready to be celebrated. However, Moak always makes sure to set aside bags of cookies for Father Frank Uter, pastor of Immaculate Conception, to pass out to the sick.

“Just to see the cookies is a treat; it lifts them up, whether they can eat them or not,” said Father Uter. “It’s a good reminder that others are thinking about them, about the days they were involved.”

Volunteers cut Italian fig cookies to be baked. The altar features approximately 5,000 cookies.

The recipes of all the cookies baked are kept in a notebook.

Vegetable frittatas are prepared for the altar.

Volunteers work in the kitchen at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs measuring ingredients for cookies for the St. Joseph Altar. Photos by Bonny Van | The Catholic Commentator

Rosie Moak, organizer of the St. Joseph Altar, checks out the schedule for making cookies.

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Lemons are offered as part of the altar. Moak said many female parishioners wishing to conceive will take a lemon from the altar to eat later. “We have many lemon babies,” said Moak.

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Pre-school children take a look at the St. Joseph Altar at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs. Casseroles, spaghetti and other items would also be included to feed a crowd of 750 people.

ALTAR

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Serving People of All Faiths
Notre Dame Hospice is a Catholic Healthcare Ministry. Our team of trained, caring professionals works with our patients, caregivers and families to promote and enhance the quality of life through emotional and spiritual support; oversight of pain management; and symptom control.

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D.A.R.E GRADUATION – Students in fifth grade at St. Elizabeth School in Paincourtville participated in the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program at the Assumption Community Center in Napoleonville in February. Students who participated in the program are: Braelyn Davis, Jeslyn Free, Ella Hahn, Andee Zimmerman, John-Michael Boudreaux, Samuel Blanchard, Tal'aizh Schonberg, Morrigan Henry, Hadleigh Hebert, Allie Thériot, Campbell Rowland, Ander- son Paine, Kenneth Jenkins, Kaelan Thomas, Talon Torres, Lecta Loland and Shawn Dages. Photo provided by Sister Alphonse Maria CMC | St. Elizabeth School

PENNIES FOR PATIENTS – Kaitlyn Dugas, pictured left, and Madison Folse, seniors at Catholic High School of Pointe Coupee in New Roads, organized a service project called Pennies for Patients for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. The students organized collections during homeroom for theme dress days along with “Pie a Teacher” for a donation. The students raised $833.59. Photo provided by Meghan Girlinghouse | Catholic Elementary School of Pointe Coupee

MARCH FOR LIFE – Holy Ghost School in Hammond chose “March for Life” as their March stewardship. In addition to donning green shirts and accessories, students also participated in a “mini-March” around the block. Student Layla Hook shows her support during the march. Students donated nearly $1,600. Photo provided by Cindy Wagner | Holy Ghost School

OUTSTANDING STUDENT – Maddie Wilson, an eighth-grader at St. George School in Baton Rouge, has been selected as a finalist in the Louisiana Students of the Year Program. She has demonstrated outstanding leadership skills and community involvement while maintaining high academic scores and participating in numerous extra-curricular activities. Wilson and six other finalists for her grade level will compete for top honors during a daylong program on Wednesday, April 1, at the Department of Education in Baton Rouge. Pictured, from left, are Jack Nelson, St. George principal, Wilson and Angele Fontenot, St. George assistant principal. Photo provided by Ashley Fabre | St. George School

SUBMIT YOUR SCHOOL NEWS TO BONNY VAN AT BVAN@DIOBR.ORG
Brahms: The Boy II

STX

After being traumatized by a violent home invasion, a British businessman (Owain Yeoman), his American wife (Katie Holmes) and their young son (Christopher Convery) temporarily relocate from London to a house in the English countryside where the lad unearths an antique doll that turns out to be more terrorist than toy. Returning director William Brent Bell’s follow-up to his 2016 film alternates between the occasional good jolt and long periods of tedium, with the silliness of the premise never out of the frame. While there’s little to object to in a horror flick that most teens can likely handle, there’s not much entertainment value to the proceedings either. Occult themes, some stylized violence, a few gruesome images, veiled references to marital sexuality in a nonsexual contest, an illegitimate revenge theme, much harsh but bloodless violence. A-II. Not rated by the Motion Picture Association of America.

Emma

Focus

Delightful screen version of Jane Austen’s classic novel in which the young British gentlewoman of the title (Anya Taylor-Joy) tries her hand at matchmaking on behalf of a fortuneless friend (Mia Goth) while flirting with a visitor (Callum Turner) to her small country town and repeatedly locking horns with an old friend (Johnny Flynn). Director Autumn de Wilde’s feature debut captures perfectly Austen’s droll insights into human nature, from the medical paranoia of Emma’s father (Bill Nighy), with his perpetual fear of drafts, to the good-hearted dullness of a trivialities-spouting neighbor (Miranda Hart). Only the momentary introduction of a bit of visual earthiness, presumably meant to balance off the overall painterly elegance of the picture, need give parents pause. Possibly acceptable for older teens. Fleeting rear male and partial female nudity in a nonsexual contest, an illegitimate revenge theme, one mild oath. A-III; PG

I Am Patrick

CBN

Written and directed by Jarrod Ander- son, this docudrama, subtitled “The Patron Saint of Ireland,” seeks to debunk a few believable performances as well. An upbeat tale, though one permeated with off-color dialogue. Mature themes, including alcoholism, a few instances of profanity, frequent crude and crass language, a vulgar sexual reference. A-III; R

Bloodshot

Columbia

Vin Diesel plays a Marine whose macho dreams come true when a doctor (Guy Pearce) uses nanotechnology to bring him back from the dead and ends him with superhuman fighting abilities in the process. He employs his new powers to track down and slay the crazed assassin (Toby Kebbell) who killed both his beloved wife (Talulah Riley) and him. But, as the fellow patient (Eiza Gonzalez) for whom the widower rapidly falls, knows all is not as it seems. Director David S.F. Wilson’s passable Valiant Comics adaptation mostly avoids gore but the warrior’s drive for revenge is only partially made less problematic by twisty plot developments. A vengeance theme, much harsh but bloodless violence, a few gruesome images, a marital bedroom scene with partial nudity and some sensuality, about a dozen uses of profanity, one milder oath, a single rough term, considerable crude and crass language. A-III; PG-13

I Still Believe

Liongate

Fact-based romantic drama tells the love story of future Christian music star Jeremy Camp (KJ Apa) and the fellow college student (Britt Robertson) for whom he fell at first sight. Their relationship is initially hindered by the fact that his friend and professional mentor, an already established singer (Nathan Dean), also loves the young lady. But a much greater challenge arises later when she is diagnosed with cancer. Directors and brothers Jon and Andrew Erwin’s winning film, which the former co-wrote with Jon Gunn, also features Gary Sinise and Shania Twain as Camp’s parents. In keeping with the song and book from which the movie takes its title, non-denominational affirmations of faith permeate the ups and downs of the tale as well as the musical interludes by which it’s paced, making this congenial fare for Christians of various stripes while the absence of objectionable elements renders it suitable for all but the youngest moviegoers. Mature themes, brief medical gore, a couple of marital bedroom scenes. A-III; PG-13
Al Clero, Religiosos y Laicos Creyentes de la Diócesis de Baton Rouge

Como ya es evidente de los continuos cierres por todo nuestro país y el estado, el Coronavirus continúa propagándose con extrema rapidez por muchas de nuestras comunidades. Varios obispos de los Estados Unidos y de la Ciudad de Nueva Orleans han dado el difícil paso para ofrecer a los fieles una dispensa de su obligación de asistir a la misa dominical.

Los líderes locales, incluido el Gobernador Edwards, siguen anunciando medidas agresivas para prevenir la propagación del virus. Estas incluyen limitar el tamaño de las reuniones públicas y el cierre de lugares, como restaurantes y teatros, para ampliar significativamente los esfuerzos de mitigación para disminuir el progreso de una mayor propagación a la comunidad. Ahora se deben tomar medidas para proteger a nuestras comunidades.

Conscientes de estos nuevos acontecimientos, hemos reunido en cuenta el deseo de los fieles de recibir los sacramentos, las misas, así como de seguir nuestras tradiciones. Además, como se anunció anteriormente, las misas públicas se suspenderán a partir del martes de 17 de marzo de 2020.

La obligación de la Misa Dominical continúa dispensada para todos los católicos durante estas semanas. Sin embargo, nuestra atención va a nuestras comunidades. En este tiempo difícil, debemos celebrar en privado.

Siempre que sea posible, y a discreción del Pastor, se permite que la Iglesia Parroquial permanezca abierta durante algún tiempo durante las horas del día para orar hasta nuevo aviso. Si se abre, los horarios serán anunciados por el Pastor. Todas las capillas de adoración deben estar cerradas hasta que se indiquen lo contrario. Cualquier función parroquial donde se celebran misas, deberán suspenderse hasta nuevo aviso.

Los sacrificios a los Santos que presentan síntomas, debe usar una máscara y guantes, lavarse las manos adecuadamente, no quedarse, y usar una bañera para cubrir su ropa. Si se le pide a un sacerdote que anija a alguien que ha sido diagnosticado con Coronavirus o que tiene sus síntomas, comuníquese con la Cancillería. Cualquier ministro que tenga contacto cercano sin protección con alguien con el virus debe someterse a cuarentena por un mínimo de dos semanas.

Los ministros pueden encontrar situaciones en las que se le rija el acceso a los pacientes. En tales situaciones, se recomienda que el sacerdote llame a la persona y ore con ellos por teléfono. Los fieles deben ser conscientes de que, debido a las regulaciones de los centros de enfermería y los hospitales, los sacerdotes no pueden estar en ningún caso unir se a un paciente, incluso en peligro de muerte.

La sacerdotes y las parroquias, así como las diócesis de Baton Rouge, pueden realizar la mayor cantidad posible de negocios parroquiales o diocesanos por teléfono o correo electrónico. Esta disposición está sujeta a cambios en espera de futuras directivas.

Después de Pascua, hará una determinación adicional con respecto a extender o retrasar cualquier disposición para con el Coronavirus.

No tomo estas decisiones a la ligera. En consultas con los líderes de nuestra Diócesis, y por el bien de la seguridad de aquellos a quienes ministramos, es necesario tomar precauciones para frenar la propagación de esta pandemia. Sepan que los recuerdos a todos en oración durante este momento difícil. Nuestros sacrificios a otros en todo nuestro país durante estos tiempos difíciles.

En Cristo Nuestra Esperanza, Reverendísimo Miguel Gerardo Duca
Obispo de Baton Rouge
Dado en la cancillería de Baton Rouge
17 de marzo del 2020
It’s Friday but Sunday is coming!

These are extraordinary times! Each day brings another change in our routine that shakes our security whether financially, psychologically, medically or maybe all three. And if that is not already too much, now our Sunday Mass, the one place each week we might go to hear the hopeful proclamation of the Gospel and to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion, has been suspended. These are more than extraordinary times; these are times that cause us to look deep into our hearts to find spiritual solid ground that will give us the firm footing to meet the immediate challenges before us in this extraordinary time.

Lent is an extraordinary time. Every year we commit to 40 days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. We make sacrificial Lenten commitments to change those routines, pleasures and attachments that keep us from fully embracing our call to be disciples of Jesus Christ. We confront the sins of our lives and ask for forgiveness and the grace that we might become more alive in Jesus Christ and, as a result, faithful members of the body of Christ, the Church. Lent is supposed to disrupt our routine so we create a space in our lives where God can help us create a new normal in our lives.

If we take our concern to God in prayer we may discover in these moments of uncertainty, fear, general feeling of dread or worry, that what we need is to find “The Hope” that does not disappoint. As Christians we can find that hope in our Lenten meditation on the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

I once heard a story about a wise old pastor who delivered a sermon of just one phrase. He arose, walked to the pulpit and proclaimed first softly, and then over and over a little louder each time, “It’s Friday, but Sunday’s Comin’?” In just a few minutes he conveyed the message that we are surrounded by a sense of hope in the midst of the fear and opportunity to begin anew. We have the chance every day of this Lenten journey to begin anew.

Where have you met Jesus in your Lenten journey?

Lent is a journey into the presence of Jesus. When we were children we thought of Lent as a time of penance. The big decision was, “What do I give up for Lent?” I don’t know about your penance; mine was always candy and movies. Lent then ended at noon on Holy Saturday. After a drought of 40 days, the 2:30 p.m. Holy Saturday movie with candy in one hand and popcorn in the other was the biggest Saturday movie with candy in one hand into the presence of Jesus. When we were children we thought of Lent as a time of fasting. Fasting is good for the soul. It reminds us to clear away the clutter and the frivolous in our lives so that we don’t miss Jesus when he calls. How distracting our world is today. Its reality is the ever-changing cell phone or iPad virtual reality. We communicate a lot, but not so often with the presence of the person we are talking to.

Lent is a journey deeper and deeper into the presence of Jesus. In the Mass we celebrate the real presence of Jesus to us under the appearances of bread and wine which he chose to signify his body and blood which would be offered up for us in his crucifixion. In the other sacraments we celebrate the words and actions of Jesus which continue through his Spirit to bless and consecrate our lives. The vows of marriage, the anointing of the sick, the words of sorrow for sin and of forgiveness given through his Spirit in reconciliation, these are real and communicate Jesus’ spirit to ours.

Some of us, whose work schedule and family obligations allow it, attend daily Mass in Lent. (Because of the coronavirus pandemic, attending either daily or Sunday Mass is not an option during Lent this year but there are several outlets to either view or listen to Mass.) Of prayer intensify their prayer time during Lent. These are excellent ways to keep a holy season focused on God who is always active in our lives, but to whom we do not always pay attention.

The readings of Lent are often about the encounters of key figures in the religious history of humankind with God. Abraham is called to found a new people; Moses is called to lead this people, then enslaved, back to Palestine, the holy land he gave them, and to teach them the laws of holiness God reveals to him on the mountaintop amidst fire and thunder. His face is transfigured in brightness as will be Jesus’ on Mount Tabor. Elijah, the other hand, is a prophet of God’s mercy to the people struggling in the desert of life. The readings of Lent are often about the key figures of the Bible and the prophets in the transfiguration scene of a Lenten Sunday Gospel. Peter, James and John who are with Jesus begin to understand that they are in the presence of someone uniquely holy.

These encounters with God experienced by the key characters of the Old Testament and by Jesus’ disciples before and after his resurrection are lessons for us just as they were for Peter, James and John in the transfiguration scene. We are called to reflect on our encounters with God. In the silence of prayer God whispers into our hearts to find those encounters with God that do not disappoint.

As Christians we can have on others if we act on the inspiration we see from Abraham, Moses, Elijah and Jesus’ disciples the impact our lives can have on others if we act on the inspiration we receive from God in our prayer. Consider St. Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, Sister Helen Prejean. We don’t have to be a saint to be used by God to continue Jesus’ work in God’s earthly kingdom.

But we have to discipline ourselves to pray so that we do not miss God’s inspirations. The Jesuits at Manresa teach the Ignatian method of meditation which asks us to place ourselves in the persons of the Gospel stories. How can we do today what God then asked of them?

Father John 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 johnny.carville@gmail.com.

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

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**From the Bishop**

Bishop Michael G. Duca

**Another Perspective**

Father John Carville

**Where have you met Jesus in your Lenten journey?**

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An alternate expression of love and trust

M ore tortuous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it?"

The prophet Jeremiah wrote those words more than 2,500 years ago and anyone who struggles with the complexities of love and human relationships will soon enough know of what he speaks.

Who indeed can understand the human heart, given some of the curious and cruel ways we sometimes have of expressing love. For instance, Nadia Bolz-Weber shares something we all have a propensity for: "Inevitably, when I can’t harm the people who harmed me, I just end up harming the people who love me." How true. When we’ve been hurt most every instinct in us screams for retaliation; but, most times, it’s not possible, nor safe, to retaliate against the persons who hurt us. Or, perhaps we aren’t even clear as to who hurt us. So, needing to lash out at someone, we lash out where it’s safe to do so, namely, at those whom we trust will absorb it, at those who believe we feel secure enough to do this. We lash out at them because we know they won’t retaliate. Simply put, sometimes we need to be really angry at someone and since we are unable to vent that anger on the person or persons responsible for it we vent on someone with whom we unconsciously trust will safely accept it.

If you’re a loving parent, a faithful spouse, a trusted friend, a true counselor, a good minister or even just someone with integrity officially represents a moral agency or a church it can be good to know this. Otherwise it’s too easy to now to blame the anger and retribution that will come your way and take it too-personally and not for what it really is. When someone whom you’ve loved is angry at you it’s hard to recognize and accept that you’re probably the object of that anger even though you aren’t the cause of it, but rather are the one safe place where this person can lash out without fear of retaliation and have his or her bitterness absorbed. If you don’t grasp the peculiar dynamics of love that are at play here you will inevitably take this too-personally, be torn up inside, lament its injustice, struggle to carry it with the love that’s unconscious being asked for.

But this can be very hard to accept, even when we understand why it’s happening. This kind of love demands an almost inhuman strength. For example, as Christians we have a special admiration for Jesus’ mother as we imagine what she must have felt as she stood beneath the cross, watching her son, goodness and innocence itself, suffer a brute, violent injustice. Not to lessen in any way the pain that she would have been feeling then, standing helplessly as she watched for Jesus’ last words were beautifully, “Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit.”

This confidence in the loving care of His Father was the foundation of Jesus’ life and it was greater than any human difficulty or even spiritual danger. This means for us that our greatest strength as Catholics, as men and women of faith, is to trust that, “It may be Friday, but Sunday is coming.” Our hope is in the Lord and this hope is the firm foundation that allows us to not just endure the difficulties of our new reality but maybe even do so with renewed joy and optimism. This hope in the Lord gives us an unshakeable foundation that frees us to look beyond our own needs so that we can become an agent of hope and to even being a presence of God’s love to others in this difficult time.

It is said that St. John the Apostle, in his old age, gave only one sermon, “Little children, love one another.” One of the effects of losing Hope in the Lord is that we tend to only see what we are losing, our difficulties and sacrifices. If we can recover a new confidence that God is with us, then as we face the very real challenges that lay before us we will live this Friday time but always with ever present confidence that Sunday is coming. This renewed Hope frees us to trust and not just focus ever on our own needs, which may be great, but also to become aware of the needs of others and look for a way that you can help someone else. Just a faithful phone call each day to someone who lives alone will not only be a blessing to them but also help to break us out of our fear and act out of our hope in the Lord.

If you are financially able, we can further be of help by not forgetting about your church parish or charitable agencies like Catholic Charities or the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and other nonprofits still out there doing what they can to help the most vulnerable. Consider supporting, as you are able, local businesses. In these ways we remember the words of Jesus to “Love one another” and we find that Charity is a fruit of our Hope and also engenders Joy within us, especially in these extraordinary times.

In the Lenten weeks to come carry in your heart these two sermons, “It’s Friday but Sunday’s comin’!” and “Little children, love one another.”

Find your deepest spiritual foundation in Jesus, keep moving forward with the confidence that He is with us and HOPE IN THE LORD!

“...but we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body” (2Cor. 4:7-11).

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few minutes the congregation was cheering with the hope of the proclamation. Of course the Friday he was referring to was Good Friday when Jesus died on the cross. This is the path we are on in Lent, to follow Jesus and to accept his invitation to pick up our cross and follow him. There is no doubt that many of us are experiencing FRIDAY in our lives at this time. Like Jesus on the Way of the Cross, we have not just fallen, we feel as though we have been pushed down, we have been stripped of financial, medical and psychological security and the comfort of familiar routines of just a few weeks ago. These changes have required us to give up so many pleasures, meetings with loved ones and to make sacrifices that we might have considered unthinkable just a few weeks ago. But most of all we may feel that we are losing hope, we ask, “Where is this all going?” Here we find the deepest wisdom of the cross. It is impossible to know the mind and knowledge of Christ, but we believe that he was fully human and therefore truly experienced our highest joys but also our deepest darkness. As Jesus walked his Way of the Cross he experienced as a human being what it is like to walk forward, without seeing any possibility other than death on a cross. We feel this way when we just wonder with fear of our own end. We worry as we see the human institutions being overwhelmed and the safety nets disappearing. We keep moving forward but there is no visible hope in these moments, or at least the path forward feels unsure. In this moment we consider that Jesus continued forward not trusting what he saw of the foreboded but he trusted in the love of His Father, and if he remained in His will, Jesus was confident that His Father would not abandon Him. He may have humbly experienced this abandonment for a moment, like we may feel at times, but in the end, Jesus’ knowledge of the absolute care of His Father in heaven was stronger than Jesus’ last words were beautifully, “Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit.”

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Father Ron Rolheiser

In Exile

OBLATE FATHER RON ROLHEISER, theologian, teacher and award-winning author, is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. He can be contacted through his website ronrolheiser.com and facebook.com/ ronrolheiser.
Bethlehem family, on lockdown, prepares for Easter with films on saints

JERUSALEM (CNS) – Communal church life is an integral part of family life for George and Randa Sabat and their four children, but with a strictly enforced lockdown on the city and the two neighboring towns of Beit Jala and Beit Sahour, the family has been looking inward for spiritual support and a strengthening of their faith.

“Even though we already have a good relationship with the church, during this difficult time our connection has become even better,” George Sabat told Catholic News Service in a phone interview from his home, where he is under lockdown because of COVID-19. “We see more what God wants from us. We have not only been spiritually nourished by this time spent together as a family, but also we are socially nourished.”

George Sabat said between work and outside activities, including at St. Catherine Church in Bethlehem, he and his wife normally have little time to spend with their four sons, who range in age from 21 to 11. Now, he said, they have been given the opportunity to slow down and not only strengthen their relations with their children, but to be together as a couple.

The initial seven cases of COVID-19 confirmed in Bethlehem were linked to a group of Greek pilgrims who stayed at a hotel in Beit Jala. On March 6, the Palestinian Authority declared a state of emergency in a bid to contain the coronavirus, barring all foreign visitors into the Bethlehem governate and imposing a total lockdown of the area for a closure scheduled to extend at least 30 days. It also ordered all schools, universities, mosques and churches in the West Bank closed. People may leave their homes only for essential necessities such as food or medicine.

As Holy Week approaches, enveloped with uncertainty, every day the Sabats watch a film about the life of a saint to discuss how their lives can be an influence on their own lives, especially at this time.

George and Randa Sabat and their four children pray at home during the coronavirus lockdown of Bethlehem, West Bank, March 17, 2020. “Even though we already have a good relationship with the church, during this difficult time our connection has become even better,” George Sabat said. Photo by CNS

“Watching these films together is a good teaching example for our children. They see that their parents take the lives of the saints seriously, and we can each learn something from them,” said George Sabat.

Local church leaders have turned to social media and the internet to connect with their parishes and livestream prayers and processes.

“Even if the situation will continue like this we believe we can receive the grace of this feast (Easter) by spiritually internalizing this,” said George Sabat.

Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, apostolic administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, has urged faithful to pray at home, read the Bible, and continue to fast, “asking God for mercy and forgiveness.”

Father Rami Asakrieh of St. Catherine Parish said prayer is continuing at the church, with daily Mass and processions at the church, which is adjacent to the Church of the Nativity.

The first Station of the Cross was prayed ecumenically with a live online presentation, including music from the Melkite Catholic Church in Beit Sahour, he said. The second station was prayed at St. Catherine’s.

Father Asakrieh said he has remained in contact with his parishioners through phone calls and social media messages.
Evangelization class schedule updates

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Effects of the coronavirus pandemic have caused several changes to the Ministry and Theology classes offered by the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis.

All previously scheduled online MAT classes for the spring are proceeding as usual, with no cancellations, evangelization officials said.

However, some MAT I and MAT II courses for the spring have been postponed, including the MAT I Sacred Liturgy class originally scheduled for March 10, 17, 24 and 31 at St. Jude School in Baton Rouge. New dates will be determined at a later date.

The MAT II Luke/Acts class originally scheduled for March 28 and April 4 at the Catholic Life Center will be completely online via webinar. The class will be taught during the same time periods when the instructor would normally have been teaching the classes in person.

The MAT II Sacraments of Healing & Service class originally scheduled for March 28 and April 4 at the Catholic Life Center has been cancelled.

Also cancelled is the MAT II Pentateuch class, originally scheduled April 25 and May 2 at the Catholic Life Center.

Additionally, the Credible Catholic training opportunity originally scheduled for March 28 has been cancelled.

The Theology of the Body training set to take place April 25 is still open for registration. Adjustments will be made in the event of cancellation.

At this time, no changes have been made to the MAT summer schedule.

For more information, call 225-336-8760.

FEEDING OUR SOLDIERS – St. John the Evangelist Church in Plaquemine held its St. Joseph Altar on March 15 to a much-reduced attendance. Take-out was offered and volunteers also packaged and mailed 18 large boxes to soldiers primarily overseas and to those at various locations in the United States. Left over baking items and four large boxes of cookies were delivered to the Sisters of Mercy at St. Agnes Church in Baton Rouge for their soup kitchen. Pictured is Jacob Berthelot. Photo provided by Donna Carville

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Whether you need a question answered, a problem solved, or a claim reported, my job is to make it happen.
Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there. CALL ME TODAY.
by Father Yi.

Father Yi reflected on St. Charles Borromeo when famine, hunger, naked and sick, feeding more than 60,000 people in one day.

Father Yi noted that St. Charles organized the religious in the community and fed and cared for the hungry and sick, feeding more than 60,000 people in one day.

Father Yi also saw a great value of sacramental communions. In giving Christ himself.

Father Yi said.

Father Yi reflected on St. Charles Borromeo when famine and plague struck the city of Milan, Italy. St. Charles organized the religious in the community and fed and cared for the hungry and sick, feeding more than 60,000 people in one day.

Father Yi noted that St. Charles went into personal debt to cover the cost and also visited those suffering from the plague and "bathed them with compassion."

"While we may not be able to do what St. Charles did, perhaps we can reach out to those who are homebound by phone or offer to grocery shop for those who should not be in public," he said.

"(St.) Mother Teresa always said, 'It's not how much we give but how much love we put in giving.' "

"She also reminded us, 'Never let anything so fill you with sorrow as to make you forget the joy of the Risen Christ ... we have it in our power to be in heaven with God right now, by being happy with him at this very moment. It means loving as he loves, helping as he helps, giving as he gives, serving as he serves, rescuing as he rescues, being with him 24 hours a day, touching him in his distressing disguise in the poor and suffering.' "

"It's not how much we give but how much love we put in giving." 

(St.) Mother Teresa

"This is an opportunity to practice corporal works and spiritual works of mercy for our neighbors. Our Lord said if we reach out to those who are isolated, hungry, naked and sick, then we are touching and helping Christ himself."

"When you do not receive Communion and you do not attend Mass, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you." 

Father Yi flashed back to the days immediately following Hurricane Katrina and said he, along with so many others, spent hours watching the news and reading newspapers and the internet. He said while the news was initially helpful, it soon contributed to the feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness.

"I imagine that we will potentially face similar malaise as we 'hunker down' in our homes during this pandemic," he said. "Yet, it does not have to be this way."

"Be not afraid" appears in the Old and New Testaments over 360 times. From Genesis to the Book of Revelation, the message is clear: be not afraid, do not fear.

During this Coronavirus Pandemic, people throughout the world are searching for Christ. We need the bright light of Christ more than ever before. At the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, we see Him every day in the faces of every person we serve.

Jesus was speaking across the ages to 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. All we need to do is look around. We are all members of the body of Christ – including the poor, hungry, homeless and sick.

At St. Vincent de Paul, the number of people we feed and care for is staggering, but we don't care for numbers – we care for people. Every number has a name and a story. If you walked through our facilities, you might see a young mother rocking a baby to sleep at our Sweet Dreams Shelter. Outside our dining room, an elderly man receives a hot meal to-go with hands that are trembling – whether from age or hunger, it's hard to tell.

At our pharmacy, a woman has tears in her eyes as she explains that she can no longer afford her life-sustaining medications and is so happy that we can help. These are the people we serve. These are the faces of Christ.

Every member of the St. Vincent de Paul family is responding to Christ’s command and to the needs of the poor and homeless. We know that Christ resides in each of our guests, and in them we see His face.

We ask for your support as, together, we follow in Christ’s footsteps, serving the least of our brethren – the poor and homeless – during this challenging and difficult time. Please consider helping us by making a financial gift online at svdpbr.org.