FINDING HOPE IN EASTER

Risen Lord offers light in darkness

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Easter this year provides a special opportunity to connect our own circumstances with the events of that first Easter — the darkness of Jesus’ walk to Calvary, his death on a tree and disappointment and fear as we ask, “Where is he?”

But our shaking can turn to trembling with joy as we realize, just as the angel announced in St. Matthew’s Gospel: “He is not here; he has risen just as he said,” according to priests from the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

“What could be more encouraging than the faith that says death is not permanent? That is what the mystery of Easter tells us. Jesus’ resurrection teaches us to not flee from crosses with fear in our hearts, but to remain steadfast in the face of sacrifice, suffering and even death,” said Father Todd Lloyd, pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Lakeland.

Bishop’s message

“Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed!” I always begin my Easter Saturday homily with this traditional Easter greeting among Christians in the Eastern Rite Christian Churches. Unlike the greeting “Have a blessed Easter,” (the religious equivalent of “Have a Nice Day,”) “Christ is Risen!” is a PROCLAMATION of our faith that expresses a heartfelt Easter joy that cannot be contained.

“Christ is Risen!” (exclamation point required) invites a response of the other person who is greeted to share the common faith, “He is Risen indeed.” In that moment we are the Body of Christ proclaiming with one voice the Good News of Christ Risen.

I think all of us have found in years past a renewed inspiration and hope at Easter time. But...
Holy oils

In ancient times, oil was a sign of abundance and joy. In the Old Testament, in particular, kings, priests and, occasionally, prophets were anointed with oil, symbolizing that person’s goodness and healing presence in the community. Throughout Sacred Scripture the spiritual symbolism of oil is evident, perhaps nowhere as prominent as in well-known Psalm 23 “You anoint my head with oil,” which signified favor and strength from the Lord.

During those times, the oil signified sanctification, healing, strengthening, beautification, dedication, consecration and sacrifice. In those days to be anointed of the Lord indicated that one was receiving a special vocation from the Lord and was being empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill that vocation.

Even today, one of the more moving moments of the ordination Mass comes when the bishop consecrates the palms of each new priest with chrism oil. In the ordination of a new bishop, the presiding bishop or archbishop anoints the head of the ordained, also with chrism oil.

St. Bonaventure, in writing about the reverence of holy oils, said that the dispersion of holy oil should only be entrusted to priests in general. And that the oil should be “touched by none except consecrated hands.”

The use of holy oils for sacramental rituals dates to the early church. The “oil of catechumens” signifies cleansing and strengthening. The anointing of the sick with “oil of the sick” brings healing and comfort. And the use of sacred chrism for the post-baptismal anointing and at confirmation and ordination is a sign of consecration.

Oil is also used for certain blessings, such as the dedication of churches and altars.

Each of the three oils can be olive or vegetable oil.

Traditionally, the oils are blessed by the bishop during Holy Week at the Chrism Mass when he breathes on each of three jars. “Chrism” has balm mixed in with it.

After the Chrism Mass has ended, the oils are distributed to representatives of each church, who take them to their parish.

Typically, the oils are stored in three urns by the altar or near the baptismal font.

A lesser amount can be transferred to a smaller receptacle for use during the celebration of a sacrament. There was a time when the three oils were kept in an amby, a lock wall cupboard. Some older church buildings still have a little door in the sanctuary wall that’s marked “Olea Sancta” (Latin for “holy oils”).

Source: Encyclopedia of Catholic Devotions and Practices by Ann Ball

DID YOU KNOW

Bishop Michael G. Duca anoints the hands of Father Tim Grimes during the ordination Mass in May. Chrism oil is used during ordination. Photo by Richard Meek

The Catholic Commentator

Christ my hope is arisen

“Speak, Mary, declaring, what you saw, werving. ‘The tomb of Christ, who is liv -

ing, the glory of Jesus’ resurrection; bright

angels attesting, the shroud and napkin rest-
ing. Yes, Christ my hope is arisen…”

By Dina Dow

The powerful first stanza of the Easter Se-
quence is sung as we raise our eyes and hearts
to God with renewed hope and trust. Despite
the extreme Lenten path trodden, today we
sing from our homes, domestic monasteries of
a sort, and place our hope which rests in
the risen Christ. Jesus is seat-
ed at the right hand of the fa-
ther. Jesus destroyed death
and restored life. Jesus inter-
cedes for us. Jesus showers us
with divine mercy. Jesus loves us most.

In Jesus we proclaim a witness of our hope.

Because of Christmas, we have Easter.
Because of Easter, we have Christmas. New life
in the hope of what is to come and renewed
hope for what was and ever shall be.

A messenger of death to life

Mary of Magdala stood by the cross of Je-
sus on that Good Friday. She witnessed Je-

sus’ final words, the final beat of his heart, his
last breath and death after hours of profound
torture. Mary helped others wrap Jesus’ body
in burial cloth anointed with 100 pounds of
myrrh and aloes. She accompanied others as
they placed Jesus’ body in the tomb. She wit-
nessed the placement of a large stone which
sealed the tomb.

She was one of the first to see Jesus’ heart
stop, Jesus die and buried. This perhaps was

the moment for her when time stood still.

She believed in the hope of salvation in
Christ Jesus. She believed in God’s prom-
ise of life in creation, “In the beginning, God
created … let there be light …” (Gn 1:1-22);

the covenant with Abraham, “I will bless
you and multiply your descendants as num-
sable as the stars of the sky and the
sands of the seashore …” (Gn 22:1-18); the
freedom from slavery through Moses, “Then
Moses and the Israelites sang this song to
the LORD: I will sing to the LORD, for he is
gloriously triumphant; horse and chariot
he has cast into the sea …” (Ex 14:15 – 15:1); the
prophecies of Isaiah, “Though the mountains
leave their place and the hills be shaken, my
love shall never leave you nor my covenant of
peace be shaken, says the LORD, who has
mercy on you …” (Is 54:5-14); and Baruch, “Hear, O Israel, the commandments of life:
listen, and know prudence…” (Bar 3:9-15); as
well as Ezekiel, “I will give you a new heart
and place a new spirit within you, taking from
your bodies your stony hearts and giving you
natural hearts…” (Ez 36:16-28).

Mary of Magdala believed in the promises
of hope and thus placed her hope in Jesus,
Lord and Messiah. So blessed was she to have
been an eyewitness to his death and the first eyewitness of his resurrection, according to the
Gospel of St. Matthew (28:1-10).

Can you imagine her reaction when she
recognized Jesus and that he was alive? Place this in your deepest prayer. What would it have been like for me?

Hope in the resurrection

What does this mean for us? Pope Fran-
cis tells us, “Now that, like the two women,
we have visited the tomb, I ask you to go back
with them to the city. Let us retrace our steps
and change the look on our faces. Let us go
back to tell them the good news. In all the
places where the grave seems to have the final
word … let us go back to proclaim, to share, to
reveal that it is true: The Lord is alive! He is
living and he wants to rise again in all those
faces that have buried hope … Let us allow
ourselves to be surprised by this new dawn
and by the newness that only Christ can
give. May we allow the beating of his heart to
quicken our faintness of heart” (Easter Vigil
on the Holy Night of Easter, Homily by Pope
Francis, April 15, 2017).

Hope in the mercy of God

As I write this article (several days before publication) I hear the bells from my local parish church ring the noon hour. Despite the fact it is 1.3 miles up the road, the wind is such the sound travels through the air and
into my open back patio door on this precious
spring day. A sense of comfort pours into my
heart, as I am reminded that the real pres-
ence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament re-
mains in the tabernacle of the church build-
ing, as the Holy Spirit dwells in the tabernacle
of our bodies. This is truly a moment of hope

SEE GOSPEL PAGE 9
Virtual confessions not allowed by church doctrine

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

An Italian priest recently created a buzz when he said that because of the coronavirus temporarily shuttering Catholic churches in countries worldwide, including the United States, Pope Francis has the authority to allow confession to be heard via the Internet or even the telephone.

Father Giorgio Giovanelli, a professor of canon law at Rome’s Pontifical Lateran University and pastor at St. Maria Goretti Parish in Fano, about 180 miles outside of Rome, said in a March interview that because of the pandemic, he should be able to hear confessions of Rome, said in a March interview that because of the COVID-19 buzz when he said that because of the pandemic, he should be able to hear confessions of Rome, said in a March interview that because of the COVID-19

He admitted non face-to-face absolution would require Pope Francis’ authorization because church law requires “in-person” administering of the sacraments.

He added he is not “looking for a change in the sacramental practice” to respond to the current situation.

“That could be the creativity Pope Francis asked for from priests in responding to the pandemic,” he said. “This isn’t theoretical but pastoral.”

But Father Paul Counce, judicial vicar for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, warned Catholics not to rush to their video screens or telephones just yet. He said “every other canon lawyer” is saying Pope Francis cannot allow confession to be heard other than in person.

“It’s simply a principle of doctrine more than (canon) law,” Father Counce said. “We are an incarnational church, and we demand presence for the administration of sacraments. You have to be present enough to one personally to be able to communicate.”

He said a telephone line or an audio-assisted device in a confessional can be used to help those hard of hearing, but both the priest and the penitent must be present. He said a person can even write down their sins in confession, the priest can read those sins and give absolution in writing.

“You have to be there together; it doesn’t really matter how you communicate,” he said.

Father Counce said the ordinary means of having sins forgiven is the sacrament of confession, but admitted that is more difficult with people being at home during these unusual times. He did say sins can be forgiven in another way, without a priest being present, through a “perfect contrition.”

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a person can ask God for forgiveness as long as it is motivated by a perfect contrition, “the kind of love by which God is loved above all else.”

“I think most Catholics are not in the state of moral sin,” Father Counce said. “Therefore, the reason we confess our sins to be forgiven is if we die, we are in the state of grace. If we are not in the state of perfect grace, which would mean no sins at all, just in a state of venial sin, we would be able to at least get to heaven with (as little time in) purgatory as possible.”

He added the point of being in a state of grace makes salvation possible.

“If we accidentally are in a state of mortal sin, that’s the same as telling God, ‘God, I don’t want to go to heaven. I want to live forever without you.’ Because he can’t overrule our free will, he would basically say ‘I wish you would not do that.’ ”

He advised those who are guilty of any sins to say an Act of Contrition, Our Father, Hail Mary or Glory Be. But he added the caveat that if “you are convinced you committed a mortal sin, if you deliberately told God you do not want to go to heaven, change your mind, first of all, realize how wrong that is, make an act of perfect contrition and ask God to forgive you.”

“That is how you get sins forgiven.”

Rosaryville Spirit-Life Center closes

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Rosaryville Spirit-Life Center located in Ponchatoula recently shuttered its doors and intends to sell the property, but will place the wetlands of the tree-lined property in conservation.

An email sent to The Catholic Commentator April 4 by Rosaryville director Suzette Callais and the Leadership Team of the Dominican Sisters of Peace, said a decision had been made to close the center Dec. 31. But upon Callais’ recommendation, the team decided to end all programs immediately.

“This is in response to the growing COVID-19 pandemic that threatens the health and well-being of all those who were planning to come to the retreat center, as well as to our staff,” the email said.

Plans include selling the high grounds and buildings of the retreat center and the public cemetery, the continued maintenance and perpetual care for the private cemeteries that contain the remains of the Dominican Sisters and Friars and preserving the wetlands.

The private cemeteries will remain in their current locations.

The email said the Leadership Team continues “to be deeply grateful to Suzette and the board of directors for their honesty in embracing a difficult reality and in facing the future with courage. Aware that the coronavirus poses an unprecedented threat to human life, we believe you can see the wisdom of this action to close all our programming now. Our prayers are with everyone in Ponchatoula and around the world.”

Anyone who made a deposit for a program or Camp Kateri will receive a refund within two weeks. Questions should be directed to Callais at 504-382-6284.

Anyone interested about the sale of the property or the cemetery should contact Joe Scott, finance director for the Dominican Sisters of Peace, at 614-416-1064.

Friends of the Rosaryville Spirit-Life Center were notified of the closing in an email April 2.
St. Gerard students, parishioners face struggles

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

On a recent afternoon, with the streets eerily quiet as residents nestled in the safety of their homes, Father Tat Hoang CSsR was sweeping near St. Gerard Majella Church in Baton Rouge when he was approached by a family of six.

The parents and four children were in the church yard of where Father Hoang is pastor and asked if he had any food to spare. He responded that he had clothing to share but no food.

They asked again and quoted from Scripture, to which Father Hoang’s face brightened and said, “you know the Bible so much.”

“They really needed some food,” Father Hoang said, saying it was uncertain as to how recently the family had eaten.

For one week, the neighborhood was served through the Grab and Go program administered by the Office of Child Nutrition for the Diocese of Baton Rouge but a change in federal regulations shuttered it, leaving the hundreds of people who were able to be fed scrambling to find anything to eat.

“Closing for the poor people in this area, that’s a big deal,” Father Hoang said. “A lot of them are poor and they can’t depend on the government. The sad thing is we don’t have food for the people in this area.”

Father Hoang mentioned the family to his homily during his daily Mass, which is live-streamed on the parish website. One woman was so moved that she went to a local grocery store and bought food for the entire family.

They were so happy,” he said. “I had exactly what they wanted for the kids and themselves.”

“It’s a broken heart story but that is just one family,” he added. “And I have over 200 students.”

The incident is a snapshot of the many adults and students struggling in St. Gerard Parish. Father Hoang agonizes with the reality that many St. Gerard School students are not having their nutritional needs met on a daily basis, and neither are their parents.

For one week, the neighborhood was served through the Grab and Go cafeteria was serving meals, many nearby residents began driving through.

“(Closing) was disappointing because it helped so many,” Domino said. “It makes you concerned; it may result in (students) eating chips and all of that junk they don’t need.”

Domino and Father Hoang are also concerned about students keeping up academically with schools shuttered. While many Catholic schools and students are flourishing through online classes, a lack of adequate technology just at the school level harnesses the ability of staff and students to keep up with their peers.

“We don’t even have nearly enough computers in the school for them to read and to do exams,” Father Hoang said. “We don’t have computers for them to study at home. The only thing they can do is (homework on paper).”

Domino credits her staff for being creative in how to reach students. She said many students in grades third through eighth have at least some accessibility to the internet, either through a computer or their smartphones, so teachers emailed those students assignments.

Teachers are using IXL, Gizmo and other educational websites designed for students and educators. The websites offer education in such areas as math, language arts, science and social studies.

“Students can practice and if they get confused it provides a tutorial for them,” Domino said.

But even in those grades, not all families have access to the internet – Domino related one story how a mother had the internet but financial hardships forced her to cancel the service. She said staff were aware of the families without technology and packets of assigned work were mailed to each family.

Also, first and second graders were all mailed packets with lessons for three weeks.

With the younger ones, I stood in the post office and mailed each packet,” Domino said with a laugh. “It took $250 (which Father Hoang said is not sustainable in the long term) but I made sure it was mailed.”

Although early in the process, she said the system seems to be working well. The school’s computer instructor is able to monitor how much time students are spending on the various educational websites.

“They are doing it, which is excellent,” she said.

As often happens, hope arises in the darkest of times. A day after feeding the family, Father Hoang mentioned the encounter in his homily during his daily Mass, which is live-streamed on the parish website. One woman was so moved that she went to a local grocery and bought food for the entire family.

“They were so appreciative,” Father Hoang said of the family’s reaction.

“All I can do is pray, as with all of us,” Domiano said.

Anyone wishing to contact Father Hoang to help with donations should contact him at 225-355-2553, email him at thoang@diobr.org or visit the parish website at stgerardmajellachurch.org.

Father Hoang is also available on Facebook.

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Students making transition from classroom to homes

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

From textbooks to Chromebooks, iPads and laptops, education in the Diocese of Baton Rouge has shifted easily from campus to home for the majority of Catholic school students during the COVID-19 health crisis.

Kelly Broussard, a middle school teacher at Sacred Heart School in Baton Rouge, is one of many teachers with children at home and said there is much shifting between roles with distance learning. With a master's degree in educational technology, Broussard is also providing technical support to fellow teachers, adding even more dimensions to an already full day.

“I think I was a little more prepared than most because of my master’s but I’ve never had to actually distance teach. It has its moments,” said Broussard, who teaches 7th middle school students. “While it’s a lot of work, it’s been really rewarding to support the teachers in this.”

Google Classroom, IXL, Mathletics, Gizmos, Zoom, YouTube, GoGuardian and Facebook are just a few of the tools used in a virtual classroom. According to Broussard, Google Classroom was already implemented for Sacred Heart students in third grade through eighth grade so the transition to home school after schools were closed was a smooth one.

She said teachers are also recording videos and posting them on YouTube for their students and assigning digital worksheets. Zoom allows Broussard to meet and connect with students online.

“In a Zoom meeting, it’s all of them interacting together,” Broussard explained. “And we’re using social media tools for the classroom like Flipgrid, where I can post a question or a video of me asking a question, and each kid can post their responses and they can also respond to those responses. It’s all private and contained within that classroom.”

Broussard is also on the receiving end of technology with lessons for her 4-year-old daughter Jackie, who is in kindergarten. For younger students, hands-on activities are the norm so teachers have to be more creative in their lesson planning.

“My daughter’s teacher gave step-by-step instructions on how to make a caterpillar from an egg carton, so she had her hands on activity and the teacher did an activity with the kids where my daughter had to trace letters and make match capital ‘A’ to lower case ‘a’ so even the little bitties are using technology,” said Broussard.

At Ascension Catholic High School in Donaldsonville, computer science teacher Rebecca Wild uses Screencast-O-Matic to record lessons. Screencast-O-Matic records her computer screen and voice so students can hear her teach the lesson that is displayed on her computer screen.

Principal Sandy Pizzolato believes students have adapted well to the change.

“Admittedly, this way of learning is not ideal but we’ve made the adjustment to keep our students and community safe, and I’m proud of the way our teachers and students have responded,” said Pizzolato.

Dodi Schexnayder, who has five of her seven children enrolled at Ascension Catholic, ranging from kindergarten to 10th grade, said the new schedule and learning platforms have been manageable.

“It’s been great for my elementary school kids,” said Schexnayder, who is a school nurse for the Ascension Catholic Parish School Board. “My two high schoolers work independently so it’s going well. The teachers have been very understanding.”

Schexnayder said teachers have been utilizing FaceTime to help explain math concepts and video conferencing to check on progress.

Dr. Melanie Palmisano, superintendent of Catholic schools for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, said many schools have reported students have been able to use school issued laptops and devices in order to complete the work. Some schools have even been able to provide internet hotspots, or access, to those who do not have the capability at home.

Palmisano added the Catholic Schools Office has been providing information from online business partners to assist school leaders and teachers “in learning how to remotely access programs and seeing how the programs can be integrated in lessons for activating student understanding.”

“She has been amazed at the level of work her students have been submitting. As for the future, when the world is able to go back to normal and students return to the classroom, Broussard said she thinks everyone will be a little more conscientious about washing their hands a few more seconds than normal.

“I think once we get back to school, there’s going to be the occasional high-five and things like that but we all have to be a little more cautious, I think. But personal space means nothing to a 4-year-old,” Broussard laughed. “We’re doing the best with what we’ve got and I think we’re kind of making lemonade with these lemons.”

FranU donates needed supplies to OLOL

Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University donated 150 boxes of exam gloves, 200 procedure masks and several procedure gowns to Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Hospital on March 24 to help bolster supplies, which are low because of COVID-19.

Donations came from the School of Nursing skills lab, School of Arts and Sciences Biology Department and Chemistry Department and School of Health Professions Medical Lab Science Program.

“This is a clear example of how each member of the Franciscan family steps up to advance the mission,” FranU president, Dr. Tina Holland said. “We are grateful for the opportunity to do whatever we can to support the great work of our healthcare.”
Why did Jesus weep?/ Funeral Mass if no burial?

Q I have always been attracted to the verse in John’s Gospel (11:35) that says that, learning of the death of Lazarus, “Jesus wept.” It shows, I think, how much Christ loved Lazarus and all of humanity. But reflecting further on that passage, I’m wondering just why Jesus wept. Do you think it was because Jesus was actually grieving over the death of his friend? Or do you think that he wept tears of joy, knowing that Lazarus was not suffering from his illness anymore, that Lazarus was perhaps getting a taste of heaven and that Christ was going to use the occasion to show forth the power of God? (Waipahu, Hawaii)

A That short and simple verse from the Gospel reflects a complex truth, a truth that prompts your excellent question and makes the answer difficult. Jesus had two natures: He was truly human and truly divine, and this is “Yes.” Jesus was truly grieving over Lazarus’ passing and the pain it was causing Martha and Mary, but just as surely he knew that the situation would serve ultimately to glorify God. The mystery of that duality will only lift fully when we, one day, rest in God’s house; but meanwhile it may help to think that, right now, we ourselves struggle to balance those twin feelings. When someone we love dies, our faith promises the joy of reunion; yet, even so, we feel deeply the sting of loss. We believe in eternal life, but that doesn’t stop our tears.

Q I have a friend whose father-in-law died recently. The man wanted to be cremated. The family called the church, and the pastor asked where the burial plot was located. When they said that they didn’t have one, they were informed that there would not be a funeral Mass. So my question is: Do you have to show proof of a burial spot to have a funeral Mass celebrated? (Bettendorf, Iowa)

A Since 1963, the Catholic Church has permitted the practice of cremation – although the church’s preference is still for burying the body, since this expresses more clearly the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. When cremation does take place, the church has specific guidelines as to the final disposition of the cremains.

The appendix to the Order of Christian Funerals states: “The cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air or on the ground or keeping cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the church requires” (No. 417).

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That teaching was reaffirmed by the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in an instruction issued in 2016. This instruction explains that “the reservation of the ashes of the deceased in a sacred place ensures that they are not excluded from the prayers and remembrance of their family or the Christian community.”

Still though, I am not aware of any universal mandate for proof of a burial spot prior to scheduling a funeral Mass. My own inclination would be to explain to the family of the deceased the rationale behind the church’s rule on cremains but not to prohibit a funeral Mass.

Q My family have been dedicated Catholics for generations. Recently, a nephew of mine announced that he is planning to get married in a civil ceremony. (I believe that neither he nor his fiancee is dedicated to a religion. He is a “fallen-away Catholic” millennial.) As the eldest in the family, I am saddened by this turn of events and have researched the stand of my religion relative to my participation in this union. To be honest, the guidance I’m finding is not very direct as to the church’s stance. Can you provide me some clarity?

A As a Catholic, can I attend? (My current decision is to not attend, and this is causing great angst in the family, a family that I treasure.) (City of origin withheld)

I am not surprised that you are finding varying guidance in your dilemma. It is basically a “strategy question” with no hard and fast “rule.” You are trying to strike a balance between fidelity to the church’s teaching and your legitimate desire to maintain family harmony, and different people will have different ideas as to how to do that.

Here would be my suggestion: Go to the wedding, but first sit down and talk with your nephew. Tell him that you feel a certain awkwardness in attending, since he is not being married in a religious ceremony. Explain to him what the Catholic faith has meant to you, how it has sustained you over the years, offering comfort and guidance.

Tell him how much he means to you and that your deepest hope and prayer is that, one day, he might return to the practice of the faith he grew up with and seek the church’s blessing on his marriage.

If you do that, he will not see your attendance as an “endorsement” by the church, you will not risk a family rupture that could be permanent, and you keep open the possibility of his return to Catholic practice through your prayer and gentle example.

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 Columbus Circle Dr., Albany, NY 12203.

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Intercessory prayer leads missionary on path to conversion

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Intercessory prayer is the most powerful way of praying for others because God responds and infuses light and healing for others because God responds most powerful way of praying and infuses light and healing. When McCall talked about life-changing experiences as his prayer life evolved during a March 11 meeting of Our Lady's Fighting Tigers at Christ the King Church and Catholic Center in Baton Rouge.

McCall grew up in a Baptist home in a “two traffic-light town” nestled in the Appalachian Mountains of western North Carolina. He “had given his life to Jesus,” and after still being repeatedly told to do so, he thought, “Okay, now what?”

“I thought, ‘I am a Christian; I want to own this for myself,’” said McCall.

He prayed with a heart to know God, starting with revisiting the “Now I lay Me Down To Sleep” childhood prayer.

“I (also) thought, ‘I am Christian maybe I should read the Bible,’” McCall wryly said.

Starting with the Book of Genesis and the Gospel of St. Matthew, McCall read the Old and New Testaments simultaneously. He quickly read through several translations of the Bible.

Eventually McCall learned about praying in the Spirit, intercessory prayer and spiritual warfare.

The audience listened with rapt attention as McCall talked about the time the Holy Spirit brought to his mind a German industrial rock band, one that allegedly influenced Eric Harris, then 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17, who launched the deadly assault at Columbine High School in 1999. McCall prayed for the conversion of the band members, and several months later the Holy Spirit alerted him that the band was performing a concert at Madison Square Garden in New York. He said he was directed to attend the event and to pray for the people there.

On a leap of faith and little money for the 200-mile trip, McCall asked his prayer group network to pray for him because he was “going into the pit of hell.” He prayed with tears during the frenzied event.

A week after he returned a person on his prayer network said the boyfriend of her friend’s sister had returned from the concert and confessed that he had belonged to a satanic cult and wanted to give his life to Jesus.

McCall thought, “Thank you God if it was only one person.” But when he told the story a year later a person told him during that same time period as the concert, a drug dog was taken into McCall’s high school for the first time to sniff out drugs. The dog stopped in front of a locker and a gun was in it. The boy who brought the gun was counseled, and he and many students from that high school converted.

Intercessory prayer also led McCall to the Catholic faith. The Holy Spirit directed him to pray the rosary and to pray for Catholics. Praying for Catholics was “no problem” for McCall, since he grew up with the viewpoint Catholics are Christian, but “barely.”

He said the Holy Spirit surprised him by telling him to become Catholic. As McCall researched the Catholic faith he discovered the Scriptures support Catholic Church teachings, including Mary as the true queen of heaven. He joined the Catholic Church in 2012.

McCall walked away from a successful hair salon business and now serves as a domestic missionary, leading church missions, retreats and spiritual direction.

In his work, McCall teaches about the importance of intercessory prayers.

In looking at the atmosphere of fear connected with the coronavirus pandemic, McCall said this is a time to rally for the mercy of Christ and raise up the Catholic faith.

“Each generation is faced with challenges,” said McCall. “This is a time to shine and bring Christ to the world.”

He said fear is an acronym for “false evidence appearing real” that comes from an overload of information that may not be accurate and is something that should be dispelled. He encouraged people to take a faith-based stance instead.

“The word of Christ is more contagious than the virus,” McCall said.

For more information about McCall’s ministry, visit becomingbarnabas.org.

URBI ET ORBI – Pope Francis holds the monstrance as he delivers his extraordinary blessing “urbi et orbis” (to the city and the world) during a prayer service in the portico of St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican on March 27. The service was livestreamed in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. CNS photo
St. Helena brought to life in vibrant icons

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

St. Helena emerged from the vaults of Catholic history in an array of creative expressions through the power of prayer and paint in a five-day Byzantine icon workshop featuring the saint at the LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens in Baton Rouge on Feb. 10.

St. Helena was the mother of Constantine and empress of the Roman Empire. She visited the Holy Land and had churches constructed at sites considered the place of Jesus’ birth, ministry, passion and death. She is believed to have discovered several relics of Jesus, including the true cross and the nails used to crucify Jesus.

As they crafted their saintly portrait, students learned a traditional art form of prayer that dates back 2,000 years and is practiced by the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. St. Matthew was the first iconographer, according to Orthodox tradition.

Diana Wells, iconographer and member of the committee which hosted the workshop, credited Ginnie Bolin for first spearheading the first icon workshops in 2014, which are now held twice a year. The Friends of the Garden host the workshops, which benefit the Burden Museum and Gardens.

Students were provided the supplies and the paint colors were “auditioned” by the committee, according to Wells. Even before their initial paintbrush strokes, students prayed and followed instructions. They traced a pattern of the saint from an icon book onto an icon board. Then the students got to work painting.

They were aided in their endeavor through modern technology, said Mia Levert, the workshop’s technical director. Since students forgot some of the techniques, demonstrations were recorded.

“If you go around the room you see each one has its own personality.”

Pat Snow

As students intricatedly painted St. Helena’s facial features, the fold of her gown and other features, they produced many creative interpretations. “If you go around the room you see each one has its own personality,” said Pat Snow, who described her St. Helena as “pensive” but liked the nail she held in her hand.

Snow has studied iconography for the past 30 years under such master iconographers as Phillip Zimmerman, who gave month-long retreats in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

But she noted, “You don’t have to be an artist to do this, you just have to follow directions.”

This is welcomed news for first-time students, who may find the process daunting, but the instructors tell them “you can do it.”

“If you need to start over, you can; it’s a learning process,” said Wells. “Everything is fixable, that’s what we tell our students.”

Friends Regina Rispone and Ginger Cary “love St. Helena” and attended their first workshop to learn iconography together.

Cary said painting St. Helena’s face was challenging. “If first I thought ‘It looks bad,’ but later I stepped back and said ‘I did that,’” said Cary.

Rispone was also pleased with her first icon. “I prayed while I was doing it, that’s why it turned out the way it did,” she said.

Rispone said she related to St. Helena because, like her, she has a good relationship with her adult son and has visited the Holy Land.

Kristen Thompson, who has attended the workshops since 2014, said, “I pray to the saint (featured in the icon) or St. Luke. It’s amazing, and I don’t know how I did it.”

“She does beautiful work,” Wells chimed in.

Dee Cavalier, attending her sixth workshop, said “Every time I do this I feel like it’s the first time … I love the social atmosphere.”

Leigh Brittain, who is relocating to Baton Rouge from Port Neches, Texas, found peace as she glorified God through her artwork and made friends.

I didn’t know one person from here in my life and now I know 24,” said Brittain.

The students “crowned” St. Helena by applying 23 karat gold leaf to her halo.

Pat Snow

The saint was then ready to grace the homes of her creators.

“My neighbor next door told me that after they are blessed they come alive,” said Karen England.

Pointing to her icon, she said, “You see those ears? They are listening to our prayers.”
Sister Mary John Hotard, 93, dies in New Orleans

Sister Mary John Hotard CSJ, a Sister of St. Joseph for 76 years, passed away at Our Lady of Wisdom Health Care in New Orleans on March 30. She was 93.

Sister Mary John was born in Union, one of eight children of the late Sidney Joseph and Olympe Chauvin Hotard. She was baptized Marie Francoise Therese.

Sister Mary John is survived by two sisters, Dorothy Hotard Prosperie and Rita Ann Hotard Prosperie, her niece, Adele Labatat Miles, and close friend and colleague, Father Doug Doussan. She was pre-deceased by a sister, Marie Hotard Labatat, and four brothers, John Peter, Sidney, Joseph and Leo.


Sister Mary John was born in Union, one of eight children of the late Sidney Joseph and Olympe Chauvin Hotard. She was baptized Marie Francoise Therese.


Sister Mary John was from page 2 of the document.

Gospel ▼

From page 2 of the document.

Gospel ▼

From page 2 of the document.

in God’s mercy.

We celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday on the Second Sunday of Easter. During the Easter Season, the first readings are from the Acts of the Apostles. We hear the growth of the church, the people of God as they celebrate the beginning of our worship today. They taught the message of Jesus, while praying and sharing Eucharist in community. Their witness of love, devotion and service to God and one another was inspiring, so much so that many came to believe and were saved.

The Gospel of St. John 20:1-9, tells the account of the appearance of Jesus in the upper room. All of the apostles were present except for Thomas. Jesus, showing the wounds of his crucifixion, said, “Peace be with you.” I hear the Lord telling us these same words, as we join in the upper room. His blessing of peace invites us to trust in his fatherly care.

Before the second appearance, Thomas desire proof? Why do we desire proof? Is there one? Why do we want proof? Why do we want proof because what they said is a contradiction to what one understands about death. Death is final. This is unreal and not ordinary. But what about Jesus is ever ordinary in the history of the church. The Paschal Mystery of Christ’s dying and rising, I have found, reveals a depth of grace that has become even more real to me in these challenging days.

There were no public celebrations Palm Sunday and none will be allowed during the triduum or Easter Sunday. The annual Chrism Mass traditionally celebrated on the Wednesday of Holy Week was postponed.

The liturgies associated with Holy Thursday and Good Friday of the Passion of the Lord have been shortened to align with the bishop’s directives relating to the number of participating ministers.

The Easter Vigil in the Holy Night, commonly called the Holy Saturday service, has traditionally welcomed catechumens and candidates into full communion with the church. This service has been truncated and all liturgical activities relating to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) have been postponed.

Easter services will be televised live on CatholicLife TV and numerous church parishes will livestream their own services. In addition, CatholicLife TV will air the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday at 11:30 a.m.

More resources can be found on the diocesan website at coronavirus.diobr.org, including dates and times of services which will be broadcast from Rome by EWTN.

Bishop extends Mass suspension

By Richard Meek

The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Michael G. Duca has extended the suspension of Masses in addition to other liturgies and devotions through April 30.

Bishop Duca followed Gov. John Bel Edwards’ extension of the state’s stay-at-home order until April 30. The bishop had earlier suspended public liturgical celebrations through April 13 to coincide with Edwards’ proclamation to limit public gatherings.

The bishop made the announcement of the extended suspensions April 3, the same day he issued a detailed guidance to priests and deacons with respect to celebrating Holy Week, the triduum and Easter Sunday services. He said all services will be private in nature, restricted to a priest celebrant, a deacon and a minimum number of assisting ministers, such as a cantor or lector.

“I have moved carefully so we can consider all aspects of our actions during this time. Now that our stay-at-home directive has been increased to encompass all of April, I will continue to review our policies as reality dictates throughout the month,” Bishop Duca said.

“This has been an extraordinary Lenten Season to say the least,” the bishop continued, “but the disruption of our liturgical life these past few weeks is not unprecedented in the history of the church. The Paschal Mystery of Christ’s dying and rising, I have found, reveals a depth of grace that has become even more real to me in these challenging days.”

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Dow is the director of the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

The Catholic Commentator

Serving the Diocese of Baton Rouge since 1963

Happy Easter.

We do see him. God is present everywhere. We see him in our sacrifice because he sacrificed himself for us. We see him in the suffering because he suffered. We see him in our life, because he gave his life which gives us life! Therefore, we say AMEN!!

Christians, to the Paschal Victim offer your thankful praises! A Lamb the sheep redeems; Christ, who only is sinless, reconciles sinners to the father. Death and life have contended in the crucifixion, said, “Peace be with you.” I hear the Lord telling us these same words, as we join in the upper room. His blessing of peace invites us to trust in his fatherly care.

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The Catholic Commentator

Serving the Diocese of Baton Rouge since 1963

Happy Easter.
The sound of silence

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

More than a dozen pre-K students, clad in pajamas for a special lesson of the day on hibernation, tiptoed into St. Jude the Apostle Church in Baton Rouge with their index fingers on their lips to remind them to stay quiet.

Single file, with their eyes on the rosary parts of a monstrance and a sheet of a monstrance and a list of prayers for their time in adoration.

Platte said the day was set aside for prayer intentions for vocations and to have the children pray for the needs of those involved in the church including priests, deacons and laity. Then invitations were extended to parents “to nurture their gift of their vocation in parenthood, to come and pray with their children,” she said.

“The response has been great,” said Platte. “They’ve been coming in all day and the kids have been amazing. Parents have come in and sat with them. It’s been great.”

Time spent in adoration varied by age group, from five minutes to an entire class period.

Seventh-grader Abbie Talbot said she prayed two prayers and the rosary during her class visit. Though she didn’t finish the rosary before the Eucharist, she said she finished it as she and her classmates walked back to class.

“It was our first time and it was very lovely,” said Talbot. “I thought it was very peaceful and we got to pray and it was nice and calm and quiet. I just enjoyed it for my first time and would definitely like to go back.”

Platte distributed a color sheet of a monstrance and a host to grades pre-K through second with a flap that showed a picture of Jesus in the host to give the younger students “a visual.” Teachers in the higher grades gave their students a list of prayers for their time in adoration.

First-time adorer Eli Vincent said it was nice “just to have some silence in my life for a little while.”

“I thought it was good just to have quality time with me and Christ,” said Vincent, a sixth-grader. “It’s very silent and it’s good just to have some time with prayer alone, silent and peaceful. Even if you don’t really want to pray you can at least enjoy the silence with nothing bothering you.”

The faint sound of children playing, laughing and talking from the nearby playground filtered in just beyond the front doors of the church. The sound moved in a crescendo each time the doors were opened.

But the students lined up to enter remained silent as they walked down the center aisle of the church toward the altar. Platte was slightly surprised that the students were touched by the peacefulness and silence of adoration but said she could see “them feeling that sense of peace and calmness” in the presence of the Eucharist.

“And when they come in, I think they don’t really know what to expect, and it’s just silence, and I can just look over and see them loving it,” said Platte.
A USDA program designed to supplement food needs for low-income senior citizens is available to church parishes in the Diocese of Baton Rouge as well as throughout the state of Louisiana.

And all it takes to get started is a simple phone call, said Tim Robertson, executive director of Food for Families/Food for Seniors for Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, which administers the program.

“If we get a call from any place in Baton Rouge, including a parish that says it has a need for food assistance, the first thing we do is look at the location,” Robertson said, adding an adequate amount of space is required to distribute the food boxes from the delivery truck.

“We would come to the responsible people and explain to them what they would expect from us and what we would need from them,” he said. “And basically just set it up.”

Robertson works with the parish staff to qualify those residents wishing to participate, including verifying their income level and that they are 60 years old and older.

The delivery process itself is relatively simple. Once a month, a truck arrives with the number of boxes designated for each location, whether it’s a church of any denomination, senior center or even a senior housing center, and the food is distributed via tailgate style.

Robertson has already established several distribution points in Baton Rouge, including the Dr. Leo S. Butler Community Center, Eden Park and a community center in north Baton Rouge.

In the past year, the Central Food Bank in Central has also been added.

Robertson said the program currently serves 5,000 people in the Baton Rouge area, although no Catholic churches have participated.

“I think there was a concern; we were kept at arm’s length,” Roberson said of his initial contact 30 years ago with the then leaders of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

“We have no problem sharing data with the diocese about how many people we serve, pounds of food we give away, and the dollar value. It would not bother us if the diocese took credit for it.”

Today, however, the relationship among the two agencies is one of cooperative agreement and mutual respect. CCDBR executive director David Aguillard said he wants pastors to be aware of the program and added it’s not about who receives credit but getting food to low-income seniors who need it most.

“I’m glad our church is capable of responding to needs without concern for diocesan boundaries,” Aguillard said. “Isn’t that what we are all about?”

He added Robertson and his staff have responded immediately when called on in the past, including in recent weeks because of challenges arising from the coronavirus outbreak.

“I know I can count on them; I can turn in that direction,” Aguillard said.

The senior citizen program is an off-shoot of a supplemental food program for low-income mothers with children under six years old. The original “mom and kids” program, which started in New Orleans in 1970 and was initially limited to Orleans Civil Parish, was initiated to help make an impact on infant mortality.

In 1989 the USDA launched a pilot program for senior citizens and CCANO was one of three selected nationwide, again with Orleans Parish as the only area served. Two years later, Robertson said, it had expanded into Jefferson Parish Civil Parish and around the same time officials from the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux had inquired about serving that area.

In the early ‘90s, state officials asked CCANO about serving the Baton Rouge area, and Robertson said after contacting diocesan officials the program was launched. At the same time, a warehouse was established off of Airline Highway near the old Mississippi River bridge.

The program operated out of the Airline Highway location in the aftermath Hurricane Katrina before returning to its central location in New Orleans.

The Baton Rouge operation recently moved into a 30,000-square foot facility in Baker.

“When Katrina came, it shifted the main point from New Orleans to Baton Rouge,” Robertson said.

He added New Orleans has two trucks delivering to south-eastern Louisiana but Baton Rouge has increased to up to four trucks, covering south-west Louisiana to Lake Charles and north into Alexandria and Natchitoches.

The northern swath of the state is being served from a 20,000-square foot warehouse in Delhi.

Robertson said the food boxes include four cans of vegetables, two containers of juice, one to two cans of meat items, a two-pound block of cheese, two packages of ultra-high-temperature (UHT) milk, pasta or beans, a bag of rice, grits and some type of cereal or oats.

“It needs to be emphasized you can be on my program and be on food stamps or can participate in more than one USDA program,” said Robertson, hoping to clear up some confusion as to participation eligibility. “They can be on all of the programs.

“This is a supplement and not intended to be a full month’s worth of food.”

Aguillard encouraged pastors or other church officials to contact Robertson, especially in these uncertain times.

“They simply call and (Robertson and his staff) will do whatever they can for them,” Aguillard said.

“I’m happy to talk to anybody,” Robertson said. “We are constantly looking for an area where it is underserved and how can we provide the service.

“I have no problem meeting and reaching out to individuals at church parishes.”

Robertson’s direct line is 504-267-9668 or the toll-free number is 1-800-522-3333.
God is present

The numbers are staggering and showing no signs of receding. Coronavirus, a modern-day plague more reminiscent of biblical times, has been relentless in its march across the globe, potentially claiming hundreds of thousands of lives, stretching the health care industry beyond its limits and pillaging the global economy. Perhaps even more disheartening is that as a planet teeters on the cliff of a medical abyss, there is seemingly no end to the nightmare.

Despite a rising death toll, despite images that will likely forever sully our conscious, inexplicably the country appears to be divided on what is truly a life-and-death issue. Far too many people are acting as if social distancing and stay-at-home orders are superfluous suggestions rather than life-saving practices.

Even more reprehensible, but not all together surprising, is this crisis has carried over into the political arena. It is shameful that the health of an entire nation has become tangled in partisan crosshairs, with each side staking out their claim.

Divisiveness is not an option, not when hundreds of thousands of lives are at risk. Why, in the face of such a national emergency, people are defying national and state edicts and tearing at the very fabric of what ties us together as a country will forever be a mystery.

What is needed is unity, galvanization and not polarization, to fight an enemy unlike any of us has ever seen.

Most will likely agree this deadly virus blindsided the country, and initially taken far too lightly. But the blame game is pointless and will certainly not expedite the recovery process. Rather, it will only impede an already lengthy and complex pestilence.

The common question is “Where is God?” Frankly, he is easy to find, present in the hearts of every health care worker who is risking his or her life on a daily basis for the sake of others. They are truly living out Christ’s command of serving others in time of need.

God is also present in every laboratory where medical professionals are frantically attempting to develop not only a cure but a vaccine for the coronavirus. Without using their God-given talent, there can be no success.

For most of us, the best we can do is pray, and pray often. Pray the rosary, pray to your favorite saint, pray the daily readings. Prayer is needed now and forever.

As Easter approaches, remember that God is in every labora
tory where medical professionals are working hard to develop a vaccine. As Pope Francis said, “In the midst of isolation when we are suffering from a lack of tenderness and chances to meet up, and we experience the loss of so many things, let us once again listen to the proclamation that saves us: He is risen and is living by our side.”

Easter is the culmination of three liturgical celebrations: Holy Thursday, then Good Friday and finally the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday. On Holy Thursday, Jesus gives the apostles the sacrament of the Eucharist, the presence of his body and blood under the appearances of bread and wine to be sacrificed the next day on the cross.

Then comes Good Friday, the day of his crucifixion, the result of human jealousy, fear of loss of power, the natural hatred of the good by the evil. The immediate cause of Jesus’ death was the sinfulness of the people, particularly the leaders of Jesus’ day. I often wonder, however, if in divine providence there was not the desire for the redeemer to completely identify with so many unfortunate who would suffer persecution and violent death, as well as accident and painful disease, through the entire history of humankind. There will be a Good Friday for all of us, even those who die peacefully in their sleep. We are all mortal, born to die. But the God who is love has an answer for suffering and death, natural or violent. It is that Easter, resurrection, always follows Good Friday, for us just as it did for Jesus.

We are promised a share in Jesus’ resurrection. He tells us so in St. John’s Gospel. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me.” In my father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.” (Jn 14:1-3).

I promise to remember all of you readers in my Easter Mass to be celebrated on my dining room table in the isolation of my home.

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 johnny.carville@gmail.com.

Easter in a time of isolation

A picture is worth 1,000 words.

This old saying from the field of photo-journalism was certainly true on the evening of Friday, March 27 when Pope Francis gave an Urbi et Orbi blessing (to Rome and the world) from a totally empty St. Peter’s Square in the midst of the world-wide coronavirus pandemic. Aldo Grasso, Italy’s best-known historian and critic of television, described the moment: “One day we’ll remember these sad times we’re living with many other images: the daily count of the dead, the lines at the hospitals, the frantic challenge to an invisible enemy. But the prayer for the end of the pandemic, the solemn Urbi et Orbi blessing, the solitude of the pope, will end up as one of those decisive moments in which television captures our history, our anguish, in real time.”

Just as in the United States, Easter services at the Vatican this year will be conducted without congregants, but they will be televised. The Urbi et Orbi blessing is traditionally given by a new pope on his election day and at Christmas and Easter of each year. Pope Francis must have thought Catholics and the world could not wait in our fear and anxiety until this Easter Sunday. But the blessing may have been late, but also it was needed. A voice: “In the midst of isolation when we are suffering from a lack of tenderness and chances to meet up, and we experience the loss of so many things, let us once again listen to the proclamation that saves us: He is risen and is living by our side.”

The text of Pope Francis’ sermon can be read by googling “Pope at Urbi et Orbi sermon.” It makes a wonderful Easter meditation. He likened the pandemic to a storm laying bare our illusion that we can be self-sufficient. The reality of the COVID-19 disease leaves all of us “fragile and disoriented,” seeking each other’s help and comfort. Thank God for cell phones and emails. Isolation is our only available preventive measure. Vaccines will take a year to develop. If isolation doesn’t work and we get the disease, medicines to treat it are still being sought.

This pandemic requires hard rethinking of important Catholic concepts like: What is the spiritual meaning of vulnerability? Pope Francis’ answer in his sermon is that the pandemic is not a punishment from God but a call to recognize what it means to be human, mortal, vulnerable and suffering, all in light of Jesus’ example in his passion and death.

Also, it is a call to measure everything we do against the needs of the weakest among us. My favorite line in the sermon is “in the midst of isolation when we are suffering from a lack of tenderness and chances to meet up, and we experience the loss of so many things, let us once again listen to the proclamation that saves us: He is risen and is living by our side.”

Pope Francis on March 16 restricted Vatican Holy Week services. Father Massimo Faggioli SJ, an Italian church historian, wrote this would be a type of liturgical fast, lessening the physicality of the sacrament. The Vatican is televising the daily Mass in the simplicity of the Vatican II liturgical form. Father Faggioli notes that “the field hospital church urged by Pope Francis nov has to support the literal field hospitals demanded by the vast number of COVID-19 victims.”

Another Perspective

Father John Carville

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US

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

I believe that the Resurrection of Christ from the dead is the one action that confirms to God that the world which he gave his only son so that we might have life and have it to the fullest. God, who is love, can never act in a way that is not loving or respectful of his children. So I do not believe God sent this virus as a chastisement. I do believe that God allows us to experience the good and the bad of our freely chosen actions and to face the imperfections of this world torn by sin and death.

Why do these trying times so challenge our faith or the feelings of our faith in God? God is with us and gives us all that we need if we trust in him. He knows that difficult times can cause us to flee superficial ways and rediscover our faith in God. In these times of challenge, we should consider that we have, over the years, equated the superficial celebrations of Easter as the real source of our Easter joy. I can help you understand what I mean by posing the same question I did in my Christmas article. When you wake up on Easter Sunday, and there is no Easter Mass, no family gathering, no ability to visit loved ones, will you still rejoice with the joyful proclamation in your heart, CHRIST IS RISEN! This year we have the opportunity in the midst of struggles to deepen our faith in what it means to us that Jesus has Risen.

We need to awaken the HOPE that is our birthright in baptism. We have hope and life born into Christ’s death so that we might rise with him to new life. Our faith in the resurrection of Jesus has the power to free us from sin and despair if we will embrace this faith in Jesus at the foundation of our very self. That means all that we do is lived in light of this faith, in light of the truth of Jesus’ teachings in the Scriptures and through his Body the Church. I am not suggesting that our problems will go away as our faith deepens, but I do believe we will be able to embrace our difficulties with our renewed openness to God’s grace and through that grace we will discover new ways of seeing that will free us to find new hope.

I pray that in these difficult times we will discover that while the celebrations of Easter may diminish, the PROCLAMATION of Easter, “CHRIST IS RISEN!” is not diminished but rather reveals a depth of grace deeper than we had imagined and a truth that is big enough to empower us to confront and overcome our most fearful temptations and whatever might threaten to rob us of our trust and hope in the Lord. In fact, this proclamation of our faith should become our anthem, our cry of defiance against sin and death, it should be prayed out loud so that our Hope might be awakened, a Hope that has always been with us, but now needs to be reawakened in times of struggle. Or as Saint Mother Teresa is quoted as saying, “Let nothing so fill you with sorrow that you forget the joy of the Risen Savior.” I pray this will be an Easter season when you and I will rediscover the hope and strength that comes to those who believe in Christ risen from the dead. I pray that when feeling weak in temptation, when losing hope in the challenging time, and even when facing death, you will draw deep on your Hope in the Lord, Risen from the Dead!

This year we don’t just celebrate Easter, we proclaim the glorious truth of our faith that, “Christ is Risen!” so that we might live in the Hope that that lifts us up, especially in difficult times. He is Risen Indeed!

Love in the time of COVID-19

In 1985, Nobel Prize winning author, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, published a novel entitled, “Love in the Time of Cholera.” It tells a colorful story of how life can still be generative, despite an epidemic. What’s besetting our world right now is not cholera but the coronavirus, COVID-19. Nothing in my lifetime has ever affected the whole world as radically as this virus. Whole countries have shut down, virtually all schools and colleges have sent their students home and are offering classes online, we’re discouraged from going out of our houses and from inviting others into our homes and we’ve been asked not to touch each other and to practice “social distancing.” Ordinary, normal, time has stopped. We’re in a season that no generation, perhaps since the flu of 1918, has had to endure. Furthermore, we don’t foresee an end soon to this situation. No one, neither our government leaders nor our doctors, have an exit strategy. No one knows when this will end or how. Hence, like the inhabitants on Noah’s arc, we’re locked in and don’t know when the flood waters will recede and let us return to our normal lives.

How should we live in this extraordinary time? Well, I had a private tutorial on this some nine years ago. In the summer of 2011, I was diagnosed with cancer, underwent surgery for a resection, and then was subjected to 24 weeks of chemotherapy. Facing the uncertainty of what the chemotherapy would be doing to my body I was understandably scared. Moreover, 24 weeks is basically half a year and contemplating the length of time that I would be undergoing this “abnormal” season in my life, I was also impatient. I wanted this over with, quickly. So I faced it like I face most setbacks in my life, stoically, with the attitude: “I’ll get through this! I’ll endure it!”

I keep what might euphemistically be termed a journal, though it’s really more a daybook that simply chronicles what I do each day and who and what enters my life on a given day. Well, when I stoically began my first chemotherapy session I began checking off days in my journal: Day One, followed the next day by: Day Two. I had done the math and knew that it would take 168 days to get through the 12 chemo sessions, spaced two weeks apart. It went on like this for the first 70 days or so, with me checking off a number each day, holding my life and my breath, everything on hold until I could finally write, Day 168.

Then one day, about halfway through the 24 weeks, I had an awakening. I don’t know what specifically triggered it, a grace from above, a gesture of friendship from someone, the feel of the sun on my body, the wonderful feel of a cold drink, perhaps all of these things, but I woke up, I woke up to the fact that I was putting my life on hold, that I wasn’t really living but only enduring each day in order to check it off and eventually reach that magical 168th day that I could start living again. I realized that I was wasting a season of my life. Moreover, I realized that what I was living through was sometimes rich precisely because of the impact of chemotherapy in my life. That realization remains one of the special graces in my life. My spirit lifted radically even as the chemotherapy continued to do the same brutal things to my body.

I began to welcome each day for its freshness, its richness, for what it brought into my life. I look back on that now and see those three last months (before Day 168) as one of the richest seasons of my life. I made some lifelong friends, I learned some lessons in patience that I still try to cling to, and, not least, I learned some long-overdue lessons in gratitude and appreciation, in not taking life, health, friendship and work for granted. It was a special joy to return to a normal life after those 168 days of conscripted “sabbatical,” but those “sabbatical” days were special too, albeit in a very different way.

The coronavirus has put us all, in effect, on a conscripted sabbatical, and it’s subjecting those who have contracted it to their own type of chemotherapy. And the danger is that we will put our lives on hold as we go through this extraordinary time and will just endure rather than let ourselves be graced by what lies within this uninvited season.

Yes, there will be frustration and pain in living this through, but that’s not incompatible with happiness. Paul Tournier, after he’d lost his wife, did some deep grieving but then integrated that grief into a new life in a way that allowed him to write: “I can truly say that I have a great grief and that I am a happy man.” Words to ponder as we struggle with this coronavirus.

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EASTER ▼
From page 1

on Easter and celebrate that glorious message at Mass because of the coronavirus invites us to reflect on the suffering and wounds Christ endured in his redemptive work.

“When the stone was rolled away on Easter morning and Jesus was not to be found there, it means that everything changed for us. But Easter morning isn’t won for us without a price,” said Father Chris Decker, pastor of the tri-parishes of Immaculate Heart of Mary in Maringouin, St. Frances Cabrini Church in Livonia and St. Joseph in Grosse Tete. “Jesus actually suffered on the cross and truly died for love of us. He fulfilled this holy mission amidst a lot of ‘let downs’ that led up to that moment of his death.”

Father Decker pointed out that Jesus lost the friendship of Judas, a disciple before turning his back on Jesus and his mercy. He also lost nearly all of his disciples who scattered in fear and was betrayed by St. Peter who he entrusted with divine authority. And so many who had come to believe lost their faith as he breathed his last.

But according to Father Decker and Father Lloyd, Jesus endured and continued his mission, in the same way that people should in the midst of the current health crisis.

“Though he felt abandoned, betrayed and alone, Jesus knew that the love of God the father cannot be broken,” said Father Decker. “It is this same love that holds us up now and binds us all as members of Christ’s body, a true family.

“We feel ourselves in the tomb, and though we may not be able to liturgically celebrate the resurrection of Jesus together in a church building, he did indeed rise and we participate in that moment of death and resurrection when the priest of the church offer the holy sacrifice on behalf of all people. Just as Jesus offered himself even though many were not present at the cross, the church continues to gather God’s family wherever they may be.”

Just as the disciples dealt with fear and doubt initially after the Lord’s resurrection, we can face ours as well, said Father Lloyd.

“Many people today claim that the existence of suffering is a reason to doubt. That’s why I admire the candid honesty of St. Thomas. While his doubt is not admirable, he at least knows that only if Jesus can show his resurrection to us his resurrection real,” said Father Lloyd. “The first thing Jesus does when he appears to the apostles is show them his wounds. This is his sign that he is no impostor. That is a lesson for us to take away from St. Thomas; to want to see the wounds of Jesus and reject those false and deceptive ideas of a Jesus without wounds. The suffering that we see or experience should not burden our faith — it should feed it.”

Father Decker acknowledged that people may be tempted to try to find a “new normal” without God as they feel a distance between Jesus in the Eucharist and their regular routine.

“However, like the disciples, we see Easter Page 15

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Special Education Classroom Teacher 2020-2021
Seeking classroom teacher for Blessed Margaret of Castello REACH Program

Since 1962, the Diocese of Baton Rouge has served families through the Special Education Department, which has expanded programming across the diocese to provide specific classes for autism and intellectual/other exceptionalities as well as resource and dyslexia labs services.

The Special Education Classroom Teacher is responsible for providing quality instruction to students in partnership with families, staff and host school personnel.

Applicants must meet the following criteria:
• Practicing Catholic (Preferred)
• Valid LA Teaching Certificate or Ability to Meet
• Non-Public Requirements for Teaching
• Certification in Special Education (Preferred)
• Classroom Experience in Special Education (Preferred)
• Evidence of Successful Teaching Experience (Required)

Must be available August 1, 2020 Submit letter of interest, resume with references, and copies of transcripts to Special Education Department Teacher Search P.O. Box 2028 Baton Rouge, LA 70821-2028

The schools of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, admit students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at its schools. They do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin in administration of educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school administered programs.
must allow the ‘burning within our hearts’ for the sacraments and our memories of the ways we have met Jesus in the liturgy home our spiritual senses for how he may be calling us into a deeper relationship with him,” said Father Decker, “In the absence of the sacramental life, God still wishes to impart grace – his supernatural gift to the soul - in an extraordinary way to sustain us.

“Att first glance it may seem as if Jesus isn’t there. But if we continue to make prayer a priority, to allow the Gospel readings to sit within our hearts, then like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we’ll slowly begin to recognize how he is speaking and asking for permission to transform our hearts and lives.”

Father Lloyd encouraged the faithful to strive to see current circumstances through a perspective that rejoices of the heavenly eternity that awaits.

“We shouldn’t make the mistake of forgetting again what the Lord promised. That suffering and death would be followed by the resurrection,” said Father Lloyd. “We might be sad at the tomb, but in faith we discover that the tomb is already empty. Our faith does not promise a life without suffering or death. It promises a life where suffering and death are given meaning through the suffering and death of our Lord.”

From page 14

Diocese of Baton Rouge Catholic Schools
Principal Opening 2020-21 School Year

St. George Catholic School
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

St. George School, founded in 1960 and currently serving 1169 students in Grades PK – 8, seeks a principal with a strong Catholic identity, commitment to growth, collaborative spirit, and strategic vision. With approximately 70 professional staff members, St. George School focuses on integrating Gospel values throughout a progressive curriculum and promoting faith development through liturgy, prayer and service.

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

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

Applicants must meet the following criteria:
• Practicing Catholic
• Master’s Degree, Able to Meet LA Non-Public Requirements for Administration
• Five Years Minimum Experience in Education, Preferably in Catholic Schools
• Demonstrated Leadership Ability, Preferably in Catholic Education
• Must be Available on or before July 1, 2020

Mail resumé, copies of all college transcript(s) showing degrees, and three letters of recommendation to Catholic Schools Office
Attn: St. George School Principal Search
P.O. Box 2028
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-2028

Deadline for Application Extended to April 15, 2020

The schools of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, admit students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at its schools. They do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin in administration of educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school administered programs.

Diocese of Baton Rouge
Principal Opening 2020-21 School Year

Catholic High School of Pointe Coupee
New Roads, Louisiana

Catholic High of Pointe Coupee, founded in 1904 and currently serving 300 students in Grades 7 - 12, seeks a principal with a strong Catholic identity, commitment to growth, collaborative spirit, and strategic vision. With approximately 26 professional staff members, Catholic High of Pointe Coupee has a strong community, dedicated to providing a religious, academic, and disciplined Catholic education whereby students develop their talents in service to school, church, and society.

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

Evangelize Hearts, Educate Minds, Encourage Talent, and Embrace the Future!

Applicants must meet the following criteria:
• Practicing Catholic
• Master’s Degree, Able to Meet LA Non-Public Requirements for Administration
• Five Years Minimum Experience in Education, Preferably in Catholic Schools
• Demonstrated Leadership Ability, Preferably in Catholic Education
• Must be Available on or before July 1, 2020

Mail resumé, copies of all college transcript(s) showing degrees, and three letters of recommendation to Catholic Schools Office
Attn: Catholic High of Pointe Coupee Principal Search
P.O. Box 2028
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-2028

Deadline for Application: Must be Received by April 20, 2020

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Students elect a governor along with House and Senate officers. They also sponsor and debate bills they have drafted; lead and serve on legislative committees; and, speak publicly.

Braud said the majority of the research focuses on bills that lawmakers have introduced for the upcoming session.

“We encourage them to go to the legislative website and make sure that it is not only a law and just improve on the law so they actually have to do some research to find out what’s a law,” said Braud.

The activity brings about lessons and skills that will take them beyond the classroom.

“I learned that there’s a lot more that goes into Congress and our state, how to get our laws and make those safer,” said eighth-grader Camden Womack, a “senator” from St. Theresa.

“I think it’s really a good idea to bring them here so they can learn how Louisiana’s government works and so hopefully they can take that with them later in life,” said Amanda Quintero, a social studies teacher at Most Blessed Sacrament.

For the past four years, St. Theresa social studies teacher Sean Woolworth has been bringing students to Youth Legislature. He said the most important skill gained from the experience is public speaking.

“They need to be able to have that skill for any job, high school, college... you’ve got to be able to present your ideas in a clear, coherent manner; stand up in front of people; make eye contact and get your point across,” Woolworth said. “And, I think this is like the best process on how to do that.”

Students also learn about teamwork, cooperation and leadership. Braud encourages “respectful” debate among the youth, requiring them to explain why they disagree with a proposed bill rather than calling it “stupid.”

“My goal is to raise a new generation of legislators who can respectfully debate the bills and actually listen to the debate, come with an open mind,” Braud laughed.

A byproduct of sharing ideas is a boost in self-esteem and confidence. Students who might be reluctant participants in the classroom seem to jump into the debate with conviction.

“They look around and see everyone else that has these different ideas and they feel inferior but once they start listening to the debates, they realize that their opinions are just as important as everyone else’s,” said Braud.

“It’s really great to see how they put themselves out there and they’re willing to put themselves out there, whether it’s photo journalist, press secretary, whatever, there’s a place for all of them in Youth Leg,” said Camile Gautreaux, a social studies teacher at St. Jude. “It gives them a chance to shine where maybe they don’t get that opportunity in the classroom.”

Youth Legislature draws some 2,000 youth from across the state for the six weeks of sessions. According to Braud, the distinctiveness of the state and of the students is reflected in the bills that are proposed, from urban issues to rural issues such as hunting and fishing and “not getting run over by (sugar) cane trucks.”

“It’s really diverse so it’s really like it is at the State Capitol,” she said. “It just brings them around, seeing what other students living in the same state are exposed to.”

Though the bills might just be practice for the youth, they don’t always die after these sessions. Some have a life beyond Youth Legislature.

According to Braud, a bill on mental health screenings in schools was slated to be introduced at the 2020 legislative session. And, the lessons learned will continue for a lifetime.

“I learned that in order to have your bill passed, you have to put in a lot of work and effort,” said Wes Boudreaux, an eighth-grade student from St. Theresa.

The exhibit “Michelangelo - A Different View” has been rescheduled for Thursday, Nov. 19 – Sunday, Jan. 3 at Raising Cane’s River Center in Baton Rouge, according to Alysia DesCoteaux, the facility’s marketing manager.

Rome will come to Baton Rouge through the use of technology as the ceiling paintings from the Sistine Chapel have been replicated, providing an up-close view for visitors.

The exhibit includes the entire display of the works and licensed by the Vatican, including the 20 x 20 painting of “The Last Judgment.” Instead of having to look up at the ceiling, however, the masterpieces will be on the ground, allowing viewers a unique view of the collection.

“This display is rich in Catholic history,” said DesCoteaux, who is Catholic, noting that the display will provide a unique experience for everyone through a closer, more unhurried glimpse of the artwork than they would have if they were in Rome.

For more tickets and more information about the exhibit, visit visit batonrouge.com/sistinechapel.