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Proclaiming the universality of Christ's message

The Magi's greatest gift? Wondrous Christian art

No Christmas scene is complete without the three Wise Men. These exotic kings with their luxurious gifts have always been one of the crowning glories of any crèche. But more than a pious Advent adornment or a kind of Christmas action figure, the Magi have been a staple of Christian iconography from its earliest origins, and indeed help us understand why the early community of believers chose to recount the story of salvation through the visual arts.

The Wise Men have graced everything from the starkest catacombs to the most splendid chapels in Christendom. For almost two millennia, the Magi have represented man's recognition of God's self-revelation to all mankind in the person of the infant Christ.

In the earliest years, the Christian community avoided the use of images, in part out of obedience to the First Commandment, but perhaps also in defiance of the idolatrous Empire. Soon, however, the Christians chose to employ the visual arts to celebrate the momentous occurrence of the invisible God become



"THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI" BY ANDREA MANTEGNA (1500). EARLY RENAISSANCE ARTISTS BEGAN TO DISTINGUISH THE MAGI AS CAUCASIAN, MIDDLE EASTERN, AND AFRICAN, CALLING TO MIND THE ENDLESS MISSION OF CHRISTIANS TO BRING THE WORD OF GOD TO ALL.

visible. *"No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed Him"* (John 1:11-12). The image of the Epiphany proclaims this great event.

The earliest known Christian images are found on the walls of the catacombs where they were hastily painted

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on and around the tombs. The iconographic repertoire tended to favor the Old Testament, with one exception: the Epiphany. The Magi were among the first New Testament figures to be represented in Christian art, and the oldest image of the Oriental triad (probably dating from the third century A.D.) still remains in the Greek chapel of the catacombs of Santa Priscilla.

The fresco is simplicity itself. Three beardless young men in single file seem to hurry towards the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is seated on a throne holding the infant Jesus in her arms. The Magi are depicted in profile and dressed in three different colors – white, red and green. They possess no other distinguishing characteristics, just the three hues. For the early Christian community still under persecution, who knew and witnessed the sacrifices of the martyrs, those colors referred to all the known world at the time, Asia, Africa, and Europe, and to the hope that, one day, *“All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee”* (Psalm 66:4).

The momentum of the figures towards Christ and His mother speaks to the desire common to many different cultures, to find meaning and purpose in life. They were searching, and in encountering the visible God, they found what they were looking for.

The Magi wear the peaked caps that denoted foreigners in the city of Rome. On one hand, this expresses the universality of God’s self-revelation for all mankind. Not just those who happened to be in Bethlehem on the evening of the Nativity, but those who were from far away places; not just the local and neighbors of a tiny provincial community.

Moreover, peaked caps are symbols of the freedman in Roman art; a former slave awarded his liberty wore the Phrygian cap, as it was called. In the image of the Magi approaching Christ, it allows the viewer to recognize that gazing upon the face of Christ offers freedom from the slavery of sin.

The feast of the Epiphany was so



THE OLDEST IMAGE OF THE MAGI (PROBABLY DATING FROM THE THIRD CENTURY A.D.) IS THIS FRESCO IN THE GREEK CHAPEL OF THE CATACOMBS OF SANTA PRISCILLA IN ROME.

“The momentum of the figures towards Christ and His mother speaks to the desire common to many different cultures, to find meaning and purpose in life. They were searching, and in encountering the visible God, they found what they were looking for.”

significant in this age that the Nativity of Christ was celebrated on January 6, united to the Epiphany. God’s manifestation to man so awed and amazed the early Christians that the illustration of the Adoration of the Magi could be employed to represent to whole Christological cycle from Incarnation to Ascension.

Like all paleo-Christian images, the fresco of the Magi was intended as a symbol. Rather than a realistic portrait of three men, the image served as a visual pointer to the far more momentous reality of God’s revelation of Himself to the world as the *Lumen gentium*, or Light of the nations. The swift, light brushstrokes that almost dissolve before one’s eyes and the simple scene with

no background or fine details guided the minds of the faithful from the little fresco in an underground chamber toward an understanding of the universal importance of God’s epiphany to the whole world.

With his 313 A.D. Edict of Milan, Constantine had legalized Christianity, and with its newfound status as an accepted religion, Christianity began to be openly discussed and debated in intellectual circles. In time, heresies appeared, the most problematic being Arianism, the false teaching that Jesus was not God.

In this new historical context, the Magi were subtly transformed to meet new catechetical needs. One of the most popular mediums for Christian art in this era was relief sculpture on sarcophagi. The Romans, who had long loved beautiful burial objects, transformed the pagan themes of the sarcophagi into the Christian stories of salvation.

In the marble relief of The Adoration of the Magi found today in the Vatican Museums, the Wise Men retain the same positioning as in the Catacomb of Priscilla fresco, as they rush to recognize the newborn “King of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). The iconography, however,

is patterned on Roman triumphal arches showing conquered peoples bringing tribute to the Roman emperor.

No longer distinguished by color, the Magi are individualized by the gifts they offer to Jesus (see Matthew 2:11). The first King brings gold, represented as a wreath or crown, to symbolize the Christ's royalty and reflect the beginning of His reign, "May the kings of Tarshish and the islands bring tribute, the kings of Arabia and Seba offer gifts. May all kings bow before Him, all nations serve Him" (Psalm 71:10-11).

The next gift is Frankincense, offered in a basket and portrayed by the sculptor as rounded lumps that look like rolls of bread. Frankincense is a hardened resin which was molded into balls for sale called "tears." It was very expensive and burned in the temples as the finest, sweetest-smelling incense. This offering of the second king recognized the divinity of Christ, as incense represented an offering of prayer. "Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice" (Psalm 141:2).

The third gift was myrrh, a bitter but fragrant substance used primarily for embalming the dead. This is brought in a jar, and alludes to the mortality of Jesus and the suffering he was to endure as the sacrificial lamb for the salvation of the world. In Mark's Gospel, when a woman anoints Jesus' feet at Bethany, He says, "She has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her" (Mark 14:8).

As the fourth century refined the artistic details of the Magi representations, they accentuated the teachings of Christ as God and Man, more deserving of tribute, adoration, and honors than the Roman emperor himself. Furthermore, in this relief, the attire of the Magi is accentuated so that contemporaries could identify them with Eastern



IN THE MARBLE RELIEF OF THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI (DEPICTED AT LOWER LEFT) IN THE VATICAN, THE SARCOPHAGUS' ICONOGRAPHY IS PATTERNED ON ROMAN TRIUMPHAL ARCHES.

philosopher/magicians who were known to don this sort of dress. But these Eastern magicians of the Epiphany, with their unusual garb and exotic gifts, also represented different philosophical currents buffeting the newly legalized Christianity.

Each Magus symbolizes a different

dead or taming wild beasts with his lyre. The next Magus stood for Mithras, the Persian god who was believed to have brought good into the earth by slaying a great sacrificial bull. Mithras was also always shown in a peaked headdress and stood for the mysterious Eastern philosophies of Zoroaster.

The final Magus denotes the prophet Daniel, also frequently seen in art with the foreigner's cap. Daniel's wisdom, given to him by God, prevailed where the magician's art failed. Stories from the Book of Daniel provided many subjects for early Christian painting symbolizing the Christian hope for salvation. These three men, from ancient intellectual and religious traditions, were associated with the Magi to symbolize how the new religion, the Gospel of Jesus, superseded all others.



THE MAGI IN MOSAIC, IN RAVENNA.

system of thought. The cult of Orpheus, a philosophical religion derived from the extremely popular Dionysus worship, was one of the most beloved subject matters of pagan funerary art. Orpheus was always represented in a pointed magician's cap whether he was bringing Eurydice back from the

The sixth century witnessed a new transformation in the Wise Men. The Magi were given names and their representations reflected the three ages of man. In the mosaic illustration from Ravenna, the oldest, Melchior, with his white hair and beard kneels before the Christ Child. Following him is Balthasar, seen as a mature man with

PLEASE TURN TO **MAGI** ON PAGE 4



"THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI" BY GENTILE FABRIANO (1423) IS A SPECTACULAR ALTARPIECE OF EXOTIC POMP AND PAGEENTRY, SERVING TO ILLUSTRATE HOW THE RICH CAN ALSO SERVE AND HONOR GOD.

➤ **MAGI** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

a beard holding his gift as he stands awaiting his turn. Caspar (or Gaspar), the youngest, hurries impetuously from behind, his youthfulness denoted by a round, clean-shaven face. These Magi reflected the Christian notion of time, the Alpha and the Omega, the time before Christ, the present after the Redemption of Man and the future Last Judgment. It also could be seen in a more personal manner. Each person encounters Christ differently in his or her life and often at different times. Some know Christ from infancy, others not until old age.

In Middle Ages, the Magi attracted a great deal of new interest when the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa took the relics of the Wise Men from their resting place in Milan and brought them to Cologne in Germany in the twelfth century, where they remain today.

"The noble mien of the Magi, their stunning robes, and their striking retinue allude to the privileged of this world, reminding them that for the gifts of beauty, wealth, or intelligence to have meaning, they must be placed in the service of God."

The Renaissance brought about the acme of Magi imagery as the wealthy families of Florence seized upon this subject matter. *The Adoration of the Magi* by Gentile Fabriano, painted in Florence in 1423, is a spectacular panel of exotic pomp and pageantry. Crafted for the Strozzi family of successful bankers, the altarpiece served to illustrate how the rich can also serve and honor God. As individual families in Florence became increasingly affluent,

the Gospel monition that is it easier "for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24) acquired ever more pertinence. In response to this, many of Florence's grandest citizens poured money into all kinds of charitable activities. Notably, one of these institutions, a society founded to help orphaned children, was called the Compagnia dei Magi.

Gentile's Wise Men are shown as splendid kings, decked in shimmering finery and surrounded by exquisite accessories such as golden spurs and bejeweled bridles.

By contrast, the shepherds gawking at the dazzling procession appear crude and rough.

The noble mien of the Magi, their stunning robes, and their striking retinue allude to the privileged of this world,

reminding them that for the gifts of beauty, wealth, or intelligence to have meaning, they must be placed in the service of God.

This same era which saw the discovery of the New World also left its mark on the Magi, when artists began to distinguish the Magi as Caucasian, Middle Eastern, and African to show all the lands of the Earth. Andrea Mantegna's panel from about 1500 (*see page 1*) opens a window on this rainbow of visages pressed close to the Baby Jesus. Melchior, the European, has known of the coming of Christ for a long time and leads the others in adoring Him.



Olive-skinned Balthasar represents the Muslims and the constant desire for their conversion.

Youthful Caspar, with his dark skin, symbolizes Africa and the countries yet to be evangelized. This heterogeneous group calls to mind the endless mission of Christians to bring the Word of God to all.

In the Renaissance, Magi imagery came full circle. The first tri-color Magi in Priscilla culminated in the three different ethnicities of Mantegna enjoining all the nations to bow before Christ.

As we set out our Nativity scenes this Advent, we should take a minute to remember that Melchior, Balthasar, and Caspar provide more than just a colorful accessory. They proclaim the universality of Christ's message across boundaries, philosophies, status, and time.

— Dr. Elizabeth Lev

Dr. Lev, a renowned art historian, speaker, and author, is a member of the faculty of the University of St. Thomas Catholic Studies Program in Rome, Italy. Her new book, [Roman Pilgrimage: The Station Churches](#), with George Weigel and Stephen Weigel, is on sale now.

The Catholic Difference

JFK, a half century later

On November 22, 1963, the seventh grade at Baltimore's Cathedral School was in gym class when we got word that President Kennedy had been shot. A half-hour later, while we were climbing the stairs back to 7B's classroom, Sister Dolorine's voice came over the p.a., announcing that the president was dead.

Walking into 7B, my classmates and I saw something that shocked us as much as the news we'd just heard: our tough-love homeroom teacher, a young School Sister of Notre Dame, was sobbing, her faced buried in her arms on her desk.

The days of public mourning that followed – their solemnity shattered only by the assassination of the assassin on live TV – were bound to leave an impression on a 12-year-old. Indeed, so great was the impression, and so effective the subsequent myth-making, that a half-dozen or so years later, as a college student beginning to feel the effects of late-'60s skepticism, I was nonetheless offended when it was first reported that the late president had been a "fearsome girl" (as Ben Bradlee's father put it).

Still, the magnetic appeal of the man (or the myth, or both) was such that when I first went to Dallas, I was inexorably drawn to the site of the assassination, the Texas School Book

Depository and nearby Dealey Plaza. Standing at the window from which the shots that changed American history were fired, I quickly decided that a trained marksman could have easily done, by himself, what the Warren Commission concluded he had done.

I remain grateful to John F. Kennedy for inspiring the conviction that public life ought to accommodate both idealism (without illusions, as JFK described his own approach) and elegance. Fifty years after his death, however, I fear that much of the Kennedy mythos is an obstacle to the flowering of Catholic witness in America – and indeed to a proper understanding of modern American history.

The myth of Camelot, for example, misses the truth about the assassination: that John F. Kennedy was a casualty of the Cold War, murdered by a dedicated communist. "Camelot" also demeaned the liberal anti-communist internationalism that Kennedy embodied; that deprecation eventually led Kennedy's party into the wilderness of neo-isolationist irresponsibility from which it has yet to emerge.

Then there is the mythology surrounding Kennedy's 1960 speech on church-and-state, delivered to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association. No one should doubt that hoary Protestant bigotry was an obstacle the Kennedy campaign had to overcome in 1960. Still, a close reading of the Houston speech suggests that Kennedy neutralized that bigotry, not only by deft rhetorical moves that put bigots

"Fifty years after his death, I fear that much of the Kennedy mythos is an obstacle to the flowering of Catholic witness in America – and indeed to a proper understanding of modern American history."



➡ PLEASE TURN TO JFK ON PAGE 8

“We must not fail to share God’s love with others”

In his Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*” (“*The Joy of the Gospel*”), released on November 26, Pope Francis points out “new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come” by calling for renewal and rethinking the way every person and every institution – from the Pope and the Roman Curia down to the parish and its parishioners – live their faith and focus their energies. The 224-page document outlines the Pope’s vision for a missionary Church, whose “doors should always be open.” He speaks on numerous themes, including evangelization, peace, homiletics, social justice, the family, respect for creation, faith and politics, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and the role of women and of the laity in the Church.

Here are the opening paragraphs, in which the Holy Father invites all Christians to a personal – and joyful – encounter with Christ. The entire document can be read on www.news.va.

The great danger in today’s world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of His love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers, too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry, and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God’s will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ.

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting Him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfaithfully each day. No one should

think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord” (Pope Paul VI, *Gaudete in Domino*, 1975). The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that He is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: “Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace.” How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost!

“Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.”

Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another “seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:22) has given us His example: He has forgiven us seventy times seven. Time and time again He bears us on His shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and un-failing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew.

Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards!

The books of the Old Testament predicted that the joy of salvation would abound in messianic times. The prophet Isaiah exultantly salutes the awaited Messiah: “You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy” (9:3). He exhorts those who dwell on Zion to go forth to meet him with

song: “Shout aloud and sing for joy!” (12:6). The prophet tells those who have already seen him from afar to bring the message to others: “Get you up to a high mountain, O herald of good tidings to Zion; lift up your voice with strength, O herald of good tidings to Jerusalem” (40:9). All creation shares in the joy of salvation: “Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth! Break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted His people, and will have compassion on His suffering ones” (49:13).

Zechariah, looking to the day of the Lord, invites the people to acclaim the king who comes “humble and riding on a donkey”: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he” (9:9).

Perhaps the most exciting invitation is that of the prophet Zephaniah, who presents God with his people in the midst of a celebration overflowing with the joy of salvation. I find it thrilling to re-read this text: “The Lord, your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives you the victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing, as on a day of festival” (3:17).

This is the joy which we experience daily, amid the little things of life, as a response to the loving invitation of God our Father: “My child, treat yourself well, according to your means . . . Do not deprive yourself of the day’s enjoyment” (Sirach 14:11, 14). What tender paternal love echoes in these words!

The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ’s cross, constantly invites us to rejoice. A few examples will suffice. “Rejoice!” is the angel’s greeting to Mary (Luke 1:28). Mary’s visit to Elizabeth makes John leap for joy in his mother’s womb (cf. Luke 1:41). In her song of praise, Mary proclaims: “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior”

(Luke 1:47). When Jesus begins His ministry, John cries out: *"For this reason, my joy has been fulfilled"* (John 3:29). Jesus Himself "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" (Luke 10:21). His message brings us joy: *"I have said these things to you, so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete"* (John 15:11).

Our Christian joy drinks of His brimming heart. He promises His disciples: *"You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy"* (John 16:20). He then goes on to say: *"But I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you"* (John 16:22). The disciples "rejoiced" (John 20:20) at the sight of the risen Christ.

In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the first Christians "ate their food with glad and generous hearts" (2:46). Wherever the disciples went, "there was great joy" (8:8); even amid persecution they continued to be "filled with joy" (13:52). The newly baptized eunuch "went on his way rejoicing" (8:39), while Paul's jailer *"and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God"* (16:34). Why should we not also enter into this great stream of joy?

There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved. I understand the grief of people who have to endure great suffering, yet slowly but surely we all have to let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress:

"My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is . . . But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness . . . It is good that one

should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."

Lamentations 3:17, 21-23, 26

Sometimes we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met. To some extent this is because our *"technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy"* (*Gandete in Domino*). I can say that the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have



"An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm."

seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to. I also think of the real joy shown by others who, even amid pressing professional obligations, were able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith.

In their own way, all these instances of joy flow from the infinite love of God, who has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ. I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: *"Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction"* (*Deus Caritas Est*, 2005).

Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God's love, which

blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being.

Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?

Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good.

In this sense, several sayings of St. Paul will not surprise us: *"The love of Christ urges us on"* (2 Corinthians 5:14); *"Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel"* (1 Corinthians 9:16).

The Gospel offers us the chance to live life on a higher plane, but with no less intensity: *"Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others"* (Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document*, 2007). When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfillment. For *"here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means"* (*Aparecida Document*). Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!

Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that *"delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears*

➤ PLEASE TURN TO POPE ON PAGE 8

🔴 **POPE** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

that we must sow . . . And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient, or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ” (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975).

A renewal of preaching can offer believers, as well as the lukewarm and the non-practicing, new joy in the faith and fruitfulness in the work of evangelization. The heart of its message will always be the same: the God who revealed His immense love in the crucified and risen Christ. God constantly renews His faithful ones, whatever their age: “They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31). Christ is the “eternal Gospel” (Revelations 14:6); He “is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8), yet His riches and beauty are inexhaustible. He is forever young and a constant source of newness.

The Church never fails to be amazed at “the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” (Romans 11:33). St. John of the Cross says that “the thicket of God’s wisdom and knowledge is so deep and so broad that the soul,



POPE FRANCIS WATCHES AS RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN KISSES THE ICON OF THE MADONNA OF VLADIMIR, A GIFT FOR THE HOLY FATHER DURING PUTIN’S VISIT TO THE VATICAN ON NOVEMBER 25. THE POPE ALSO KISSED THE IMAGE, A REVERED ICON BY THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX. (AP IMAGES)

however much it has come to know of it, can always penetrate deeper within it” (*Spiritual Canticle*). St. Irenaeus writes, “By His coming, Christ brought with Him all newness” (*Adversus Haereses*). With this newness, He is always able to renew our lives and our communities, and even if the Christian message has known periods of darkness and ecclesial weakness, it will never grow old.

Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose

Him, and He constantly amazes us by His divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always “new.”

– Pope Francis

🔴 **JFK** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

on the defensive, but by dramatically privatizing religious conviction and marginalizing its role in orienting a public official’s moral compass.

Thus Kennedy became, in effect, a precursor of what Richard John Neuhaus later called the “naked public square”: an American public space in which not merely clerical authoritarianism, but religiously-informed moral conviction, is deemed out-of-bounds.

Finally, there is the phenomenon that might be called the Kennedy Catholic: a public official who wears his or her Catholicism as a kind of ethnic marker, an inherited trait, but whose

thinking about public policy is rarely if ever shaped by Catholic social doctrine or settled Catholic moral conviction. The many Kennedy Catholics in our public life are one of the last expressions of urban (or suburban), ethnic, Counter-Reformation Catholicism in America; and as such, they evoke a certain nostalgia.

Unfortunately, the shallowness of their Catholic formation and the invisibility of Catholic moral understandings in a lot of their judgments make Kennedy Catholics de facto opponents of the Church’s mission in the postmodern world, not protagonists of the culture-reforming Catholicism of the New Evangelization.

At daily Mass in downtown Washington, I

often receive Communion while standing on the marble slab in St. Matthew’s Cathedral that marks the place where the president’s casket rested, at the funeral Mass on November 25, 1963.

In praying for him there, I also mourn what might have been – and what has been distorted in the half-century since.

– George Weigel

George Weigel is the Distinguished Senior Fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, DC. His new book, [Roman Pilgrimage](#), written with Elizabeth Lev and his son, Stephen Weigel, is on sale now. It is also the prize for winners of THE EAGLE Christmas crossword on pages 24-25.

Take time to pray during Advent

Prepare worthily, in anticipation of seeing Jesus

The sights and sounds of Christmas captivate our senses. Holiday decorations constantly remind us that we have so much to do in so little time. Christmas music fills the air as we rush from one place to the next. The excitement and anticipation of Christmas at times becomes overwhelming.

And then we recall that silent night, that holy night over two thousand years ago in Bethlehem; that night when the Incarnate God entered the world as a child to save us. Setting aside the noise and anxiety of the season, we rest in the silence of that night. We rest with the Child Jesus in prayer.

Advent is a season of prayer. Just as the shepherds prayed on that holy night, we also turn to God in prayer, giving thanks and praise. We admit our limitations and complete dependence on God. We admit the fact that we come from God, we belong to God, and we will return to God. Our prayer is centered in Jesus; every prayer starts from Jesus; it is He who prays in us, with us, and for us. Through prayer our souls are uplifted, our hearts are transformed, and we find meaning and purpose in our lives.

A friend of mine recently sent me an inspiring story about the transformative nature of prayer as witnessed by the life of Diane Rose from Waco, Texas. Diane struggled with glaucoma from a very young age. Just days before she was to have a cornea transplant, she had an accident that left her completely blind. For 14 years she struggled to come to grips with her handicap.

Then one rainy day, depressed and alone, she threw her arms up in the air and cried out to Jesus, “Where are my



“Advent is a season of prayer. Just as the shepherds prayed on that holy night, we also turn to God in prayer giving thanks and praise. We admit our limitations and complete dependence on God.”

talents? Lord, show me where my talents are.” She then felt heat radiating from her hands toward her elbows.

Her first thought was, “In my hands? Lord, What do you want me to do with my hands?”

The next day a friend called her and asked if she would like to learn how to quilt. She said that she would love to, and from that day on she found her talent. Since 1998, she has made over 800 quilts and now sells her quilts on her website, www.theamazingquilter.com, to help provide for her needs.

Diane describes her blindness as an inconvenience, something she doesn’t like, but

something that doesn’t get in her way of living a full life. Diane sees herself as an “*encourager, a person who makes the best out of what life has to offer.*” Her quilts are filled with brilliant color, inspiration, and love.

During this Advent Season take time to pray. At times it will be easy. We will feel the richness of God’s presence and recall the words of St. John, “*God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life*” (John 3:16).

At other times we will struggle. We will want to cry out with the Psalmist, “*My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?*” (Psalm 22:1) Regardless of the circumstances, make time to pray.

In good times or bad, in joy or sorrow, in light or darkness, Jesus calls out to us: “*Turn to Me, speak to Me, accept My love, allow Me to give you My peace. I understand your fears and anxieties, your doubts and your sorrow. Come to Me. I will give you rest.*”

So how should we pray? In the words of Archbishop Fulton Sheen:

“Approach God with full confidence and the boldness of a loving child who has a right to ask a parent for favors. Though the parent may not grant all your wants, be sure that, in a certain sense, there are no unanswered prayers. A child may ask a parent for something that isn’t good for him. The parent, while refusing, will pick up the child in his arms and console him, giving him the response of love, even in the denial of a request. As the child forgets in that embrace that he ever asked for a

➤ PLEASE TURN TO PRAY ON PAGE 12

A Christmas memory of two miracles

Baby Jesus and the Moon Princess, all in one night

Many, many years ago when some cars still had spoked wheels and telephones were two-piece vertical instruments, living in the country for the very poor was referred to as “living in the woods.” Of course, there were no locks on doors and windows were “latched” down. Leggings and double-runner skates were the height of fashion. And the best hand-me-down was anything that didn’t fall off!

Simple things were ordinary wonders: spicy seeds from wild pepper plants, a bath outside in the back yard with rain-water right from the barrel – it wasn’t *that* cold – and the best, on Sunday: toast dipped in Cairo syrup! Central heating meant that one wore his clothes to bed and snuggled deep under lots of homemade quilts.

How could one not have exciting memories from that period, like priming the pump with boiling water before sunrise outside in tons of snow, and gathering hazel nuts by a pond for special days? Lots of these memories flood my mind as I fly off to Holland to visit one of my sons who might ask, “*Leggings?*” “*What’s a pump?*”

May I tell you of my first, impossible love? I was 10. It begins on a cold and very lovely winter night.

The wind was as blue as the snow-covered forest that stretched forever from my bedroom window. The golden moon, cloaked in the black star-filled sky, looked like a magical prince taking pleasure in the blue light he’d spread all about him – a new night, golden bright, rested upon blue fields of snow, all around me, as far as a boy could see or dare to imagine. Enraptured by the magic, I yearned to be a part of it, to play with the Golden Prince, and to walk in the pale blue night. That, of course, was forbidden.

Deludes’ Pond lay at the foot of the hill



“Deludes’ Pond lay at the foot of the hill just a few minutes away from my window. I could see its white ice invisible in its blueness with golden streaks unfurled by the princely golden moon. I jumped from bed, dressed over my pajamas, and slid from the window into the blue, blue night.”

just a few minutes away from my window. I could see its white ice invisible in its blueness with golden streaks unfurled by the princely golden moon. I’d skated all that day until my toes were numb and grudgingly left the pond when everyone headed for home to dinner and a special happiness.

It was Christmas Eve, the first Christmas I remember at home after the orphanage. I didn’t know what to expect. My frozen toes barely got me into the back door. The food was hot and smelled

wonderful; it was a happy moment and the talk was of Christmas and the surprises of Santa and his angels. They talked of Midnight Mass, but it was too cold and far to walk to church – old St. Theresa’s Church was miles away.

The house was cold like the blue night and everyone was asleep; the silence made the magic of the night even more exciting. I wondered what Deludes’ Pond would be like so late and so blue.

My hockey stick leaned by the bed. I reached to touch it and as I did a sudden urge-like shiver rushed through the room. I jumped from bed, dressed over my pajamas, and slid from the window into the blue, blue night.

I ran down the hill. A back-glance was too exciting, the house lay dark and silent and no one had heard me leave. The ice was hard. I ran and slid to the roadside end. To a passer by I would have looked like a ricocheting rock skipping across the ice. A noise! I froze still. A car lumbered slowly through the snow. Must be going to church, I thought, and I decided to follow.

I will never forget the perfection of that walk: blue snow, bigger-than-apple-sized sparkly stars, and the moon? Oh, the moon. His Majesty the Prince.

I am not sure how long it took to reach the church. It was huge, it must have held 25 people (!) all at once. People were standing on the front steps. I pulled my collar high and pretended I was with one of the families.

Once inside I lost all sense of anything for I had, all of a sudden, walked into the Moon Prince's palace – candles, trees sparkled with tiny lighted candles, a crib holding a babe, carols, colors, people in clothes that glistened. I huddled in the back, afraid I'd be found.

I watched the Mass unfold and I felt at home, blissfully safe and so warm, so happy. At Communion time everyone went forward. Not me. The likes of me did not fit; these were rich folk and my toes were too cold to move.

All of a sudden, and to this day, I received the greatest Christmas present I'd ever get: my collar up, not to be noticed, my eyes to the floor, shiny blue boots stood, toe to toe, an inch facing mine. I looked up and, behold, the Moon Princess was by my side!

We just stared; me, my heart was stopped. "I know you, you're the kid from the woods." Her smile was more magical than anything I'd ever seen. "Merry Christmas," she said, and went into the crowd.

I ran from the door, out into the snow and it seemed like magical seconds later when I crept into my window and, fully dressed, pulled the covers over my frozen hair. Two miracles, two sweet miracles and mine alone: I'd met the Moon Princess, and I'd seen the Baby Jesus. Wow, and all in one night.

– Rev. Al Audette, M.S., M.H.

Fr. Audette, Priest-in-Residence at the Basilica, is also a practicing psychotherapist and Life Coach. He can be contacted at www.audetteassociates.com.

Liturgy of the Hours

God's Word will come to us

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, O.Cist. (1090-1153) was a French abbot and Doctor of the Church who reformed the Cistercian order. This excerpt is from one of his most famous writings, In Adventu Domini ("The Coming of the Lord").

“We know that there are three comings of the Lord. The third lies between the other two. It is invisible, while the other two are visible. In the first coming He was seen on earth, dwelling among men; He Himself testifies that they saw Him and hated Him. In the final coming all flesh will see the salvation of our God, and they will look on Him whom they pierced. The intermediate coming is a hidden one; in it only the elect see the Lord within their own selves, and they are saved.

“In His first coming our Lord came in our flesh and in our weakness; in this middle coming He comes in spirit and in power; in the final coming He will be seen in glory and majesty.

“In case someone should think that what we say about this middle coming is sheer invention, listen to what our Lord Himself says: *‘If anyone loves me, He will keep my word, and my Father will love Him, and we will come to Him.’* There is another passage of Scripture which reads: *‘He who fears God will do good, but something further has been said about the one who loves, that is, that he will keep God’s word.’* Where is God’s word to be kept? Obviously in the heart, as the prophet says: *‘I have hidden your words in my heart, so that I may not sin against you.’*


“Keep God’s word in this way. Let it enter into your very being, let it take possession of your desires and your whole way of life. Feed on goodness, and your soul will delight in its richness. Remember to eat your bread, or your heart will wither away. Fill your soul with richness and strength.

“Because this coming lies between the other two, it is like a road on which we travel from the first coming to the last. In the first, Christ was our redemption; in the last, He will appear as our life; in this middle coming, He is our rest and consolation.

“If you keep the word of God in this way, it will also keep you. The Son with the Father will come to you. The great Prophet who will build the new Jerusalem will come, the one who makes all things new. This coming will fulfill what is written: *‘As we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, we shall also bear the likeness of the heavenly man.’* Just as Adam’s sin spread through all mankind and took hold of all, so Christ, who created and redeemed all, will glorify all, once He takes possession of all.”



***“Feed on goodness,
and your soul
will delight in its
richness. Remember
to eat your bread,
or your heart
will wither away.”***

 **PRAY** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9
favor, so in praying we forget what we wanted by receiving what we needed – a return of love.”

And what about those times when it is too difficult to pray? Those times when we are overcome with exhaustion or illness. When our mind is not even capable of having a conversation with God. What do we do then?

We can offer our very breath. We can return to God what God has given to us. In the end, we pray not to get our way, but purely out of our love of God who is love and is always present.

Again to quote Archbishop Sheen:

“The more we pray, the fewer and fewer things we ask for ourselves and the more we ask for God’s love. Isn’t it true that the more we love someone, the more we seek to give the less we desire to receive? The deepest love never says, ‘Give me,’ but ‘Make me.’ If Jesus were to walk into our midst right now, would we ask Him for material things? No, we would throw ourselves on our knees and kiss the hem of His robe. And if He were to place His hands on our head, we would feel a peace and trust, even in darkness, that we would have nothing else to ask for, or favors to beg. We would want only to look into His eyes and never leave His side.”

Imagine the moment when Joseph and Mary gazed into the eyes of the Christ Child for the first time. Words cannot adequately describe the peace and joy they must have felt.

This is really our deepest prayer, to one day see Jesus face to face. One day we will.

In anticipation of that day, may we prepare ourselves worthily and well by making Advent truly a season of prayer.

– Deacon Patrick Toole, Jr.

Deacon Toole serves as Permanent Deacon at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Fairfield.

BASILICA CALENDAR: DECEMBER 2013 – JANUARY 2014

Every Monday: Holy Hour, with Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the Rosary: 7 p.m. in the Basilica.

Every Tuesday: Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults
Classes: 7 p.m. in the Rectory. **NO classes Dec. 24 & 31.**

Every Wednesday: Latin Reading Group, 6:15 p.m. in the Rectory. • **Legion of Mary**, 7:30 p.m. in the Rectory. Devotions and meeting. • **Bible Study**, 7 p.m. in the Rectory. Explore the Book of Isaiah every week with Fr. Terry Walsh. All are welcome. **NO classes/meetings Dec. 25 & Jan. 1.**

Every Thursday: Introduction to Biblical Greek class, 6:30 p.m. in the Rectory. **NO classes Dec. 26 & Jan. 2.**

Every Friday: Holy Name Men’s Society, 7-8 a.m. in the Rectory. All men are welcome.

Saturday, December 21: Rorate Mass in the Extraordinary Form, 6:45 a.m. in the Basilica. Coffee and in the Msgr. Nagle Hall afterwards. Details on page 28.



Saturday, January 11: “Men Under Construction: A Father/Son Talk” by Steve Wood, founder of the Family Life Center, 9 a.m.-12 Noon in the Msgr. Nagle Hall. Details on page 27.

Sunday, January 12: Baptism of the Lord. Bishop Frank Caggiano will celebrate the 10:00 a.m. Family Mass. Coffee and afterwards in the Msgr. Nagle Hall.



CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE

Christmas Eve, Tuesday, December 24:

4:00 p.m.: Vigil Mass with Christmas Carols.
Confessions 3:00-4:00 p.m.

Midnight Mass, 12:00 a.m.:

Featuring our Magnificent Choir and Musicians.
No Confessions prior to Midnight Mass.

Christmas Day, Wednesday, December 25:

7:30 a.m.: Mass.

10:00 a.m.: Family Mass with Christmas Carols.

12 Noon: Solemn Mass with Choir.

No Mass at 5:00 p.m.

6:00 p.m.: Haitian French/Creole Mass with Choir.

Confessions prior to each Mass except 6 p.m.



New Year’s Day is a Holy Day of Obligation.

Mass Times: Tuesday, December 31: 5:15 p.m.

Wed. January 1: 8 a.m.; 12:10 and 5:15 p.m.

Confessions prior to each Mass except 5:15 p.m.

The Basilica Office will be closed on
December 25 & 26 and January 1.
No Religious Education classes December 22 & 29.

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care . . .

The giving of gifts at Christmas is pure magic

Are you still packing a stocking on Christmas Eve? Truly, it was the very best moment of Christmas when one was a child. Everything was still to come, not a precious minute of the day had yet passed, all was Now! The first tentative exploring poke with the toe established that yes, it was really there. Heavy and nobbly, its weighty bulk reaching just about from side to side of the bottom of the bed.

“Are you awake?”

Of course she was. Neither of us had slept more than two or three hours. Quiet as mice we tiptoed to the light, found our dressing-gowns, and hopped back into the bed, hauling our stockings up beside us. There was a ritual – neither would start unpacking until the other was ready, and both would reach the orange and walnut in the toe at precisely the same moment. We tried to be very quiet, but the finding of a harmonica or kazoo was irresistible. Toused and cross, an elder sister would appear and tell us to shut up.

“But it’s Christmas!” we would wail, and just sometimes she would come with her own stocking and join us in the bed.

As presents for the grown-ups, we made cards, calendars, bookmarks, and blotters which took many days. We’re talking the early 1950s. It’s ages since I made a blotter. Several large pages of murky pink, purple, and green blotting papers were bought; never white for some reason: perhaps it was kept for writing-paper pads? Last year’s Christmas cards were tumbled out and the best pictures chosen and trimmed to decorate the homemade presents.

Glue was always a problem. If we were lucky we had a proper bottle with a brush sticking out of the lid. One had to cut the blotting papers to a suitable size using at least two layers of paper of different colors, then fix the chosen card,

and tie the papers together at the top with ribbon in a neat bow – the most difficult bit. Parents, Aunts, Godparents, and friends who had an interest in One (eg. the piano mistress) expressed wild enthusiasm for these blotters – very gratifying to a seven-year-old.

Bookmarks were quickest; just a cut-out of an old Christmas or birthday card fixed onto some stiff paper, cut to size with a message written on the back. We made our



“Mummy’s stocking was a tour de force and we saved up our pocket money for at least two weeks, then ‘borrowed’ unashamedly to make up the shortfall.”

own Christmas cards from the same stiff paper. Our designs inevitably included several ponies, fully harnessed, admiring the crib.

Daddy’s stocking relied heavily on things bought by Mummy, although I remember one year my sister made a hand-knitted nose-warmer, held on like spectacles, with crocheted loops over the ears: both exotic and ingenious. Mummy’s stocking was a tour de force and we saved up our pocket money for at least two weeks, then “borrowed” unashamedly to make up the shortfall. The elder sisters were soft targets for loans. There had to be soap, violet-scented sachets, hair nets, a new bed-bonnet, and hairpins. She didn’t eat chocolate and we were too young to buy gin. She liked handkerchiefs (no paper ones in those days),

and we imagined she liked “Palma violet pastilles,” so usually tucked a packet in. Indian ink, mapping pens, pencils, and a good eraser always went down well. On one famous occasion we bought a box of loose peach face-powder with a vast peach powder puff! Quite the loveliest aid to beauty we’d ever seen. There was, of course, the blotter, bookmark, and calendar, all of which she exclaimed over, much to our satisfaction.

Church took hours. My parents never went; escorting us little ones was the duty of the eldest sister who we knew was very religious and, amazingly, really enjoyed the endless music and drama of it all. The church was high Anglican, liturgically similar to Roman Catholic (I converted years later). One year I was taken outside (hurray) for throwing up due to the gales of incense.

How we skipped home, duty done, to see the Christmas tree for the first time with the presents arranged around it! It had real candles, to be lit as soon as soon as darkness fell. Relations had arrived in our absence, and presents (quite a different experience from opening stockings) were opened with pre-lunch sherry or juice.

How *do* parents get exactly the right presents? I remember a vast paint box for my little sister and me, with at least 40 paints in it and two brushes; and a small wooden bed for my teddy with his name painted on it. Daddy made the bed, Mummy did the artwork. And oh, joy, a pair of roller-skates!

The giving of gifts is magic, and the receiving of them, especially the homemade ones like blotters, is enough to reduce one to tears.

– Virginia Barton

Virginia, a writer, wife, mother, and grandmother, lives in Oxford, England. Her collected writings are posted online at: www.VirginiaBarton.com

Visiting the shrines of favorite Saints to say thanks

I recently visited the shrines of some wonderful saints who have had a great impact on my life and, in particular, upon my priesthood. My pilgrimage to France, the “Eldest Daughter of the Church,” gave me the opportunity to say thanks and to ask for their continued intercession. My friends and I would begin our journey in Geneva, Switzerland, then cross the border into France and make our way to Paris, driving from one holy shrine to another along the way.

The first streaks of dawn cast a beautiful glow upon the canopy of fog trapped between the mountains beneath our wings as our flight began its slow descent into Switzerland. Green fields emerged from the blanket of fog in the lower regions of the French Alps, home to small country hamlets scattered here and there. It all seemed so peaceful.

My thoughts drifted to the days when **St. Francis de Sales** (1567-1622) ministered to a deeply fragmented population in the turbulent time of the Protestant Reformation. As Bishop of Geneva, he courageously defended the truth of the faith. Indeed, his spiritual classics continue to benefit the faithful today, especially *Introduction to the Devout Life* and *Treatise on the Love of God* (available in our Basilica bookstore), among other great works.

His pastoral zeal for souls was clearly evident through his tireless work. He visited the 600 parishes of his diocese – on a mule. He co-founded the Religious Community of the Sisters of the Visitation, along with the mystic, **St. Jane Frances de Chantal**. St. Jane established an additional 87 new monastic communities over the course of 26 years. Four hundred years later, the Sisters of the Visitation are thriving in monasteries throughout the world.

After landing in Geneva, we drove across the border to Annecy, France, to visit St. Francis and St. Jane. I strolled



THE STATUE OF OUR LADY OF THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL IN PARIS, FRANCE.

“From Heaven, the Saints encourage us through their prayerful intercession and long for each one of us to join them one day.”



THE EFFIGY OF ST. THÉRÈSE ABOVE HER TOMB IN THE CARMELITE CHAPEL IN LISIEUX, FRANCE.

through the medieval city along the narrow streets, and made the short walk up to the Basilica of the Visitations, which stands out like a beacon of light, nestled in the hills that overlook the beautiful old city beside the fifth largest lake in France. There in the sanctuary lie the mortal remains of St. Francis and St. Jane in glass coffins on display for public veneration very near the altar rail. One could easily touch a Rosary or Holy Card to them. They seemed just as approachable in death as they were in life, eager to help those seeking instruction in the ways of faith.

We next braved the snowy driving conditions and drove southwest to Ars, home to the Patron Saint of Priests, **St. John Vianney** (1786-1859). As we made our way, I wondered how people managed to find the hidden hamlet in the 1800’s in their horse-drawn carriages. We had difficulty with a map and a GPS that had us driving in circles. And yet, thousands upon thousands flocked to meet the Curé for spiritual direction. He spent 16 to 18 hours a day hearing Confessions from the masses of people that sought his guidance. He lived a most extraordinary life in great simplicity and humility. Abbe Francis Trochu wrote a wonderful biography of his life: *The Curé D’Ars*.

Ars has changed very little over the years, apart from the grand Basilica attached to the old church where the Curé carried out his ministry. Many beautiful side altars line the interior, and above one rests the remains of the saint. Offering Mass at that altar was indeed a great grace. Afterwards, the sacristan opened the crypt beneath the sacristy for a glimpse of the wooden altar upon which the saint offered daily Mass. I was given the grace of examining his chalice, marked with the scene of the Agony in the Garden.

Later that afternoon, we paid a brief visit to **Cluny** and the ruins of the great monastery established there that



IN THE TRANQUIL LAKESIDE VILLAGE OF ANNECY, FRANCE (ABOVE), THE BASILICA OF THE VISITATIONS (RIGHT) HAS THE REMAINS OF TWO GREAT SAINTS: FRANCIS DE SALES AND JANE FRANCES DE CHANTEL.

BELOW, IN THE VILLAGE OF ARS, ST. JOHN VIANNEY PREACHED IN THE OLD CHURCH TO THE RIGHT, WHERE A BASILICA WAS ERECTED BEHIND IT.



short walk from the convent.

We enjoyed the beautiful countryside as we drove north to Paris where we would spend the last couple days of our pilgrimage. I wondered again just how St. Francis de Sales covered long distances on a mule!

We spent our first Parisian day at Rue de Bac, the famous Shrine of the Miraculous Medal, where the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to **St. Catherine Labouré** in 1830 in the chapel of the Convent of the Daughters of Charity. Fine shops and restaurants now line the city street, and one could easily miss the narrow gate of the convent. Yet when the gates open for visitors, thousands flock to this place of prayer where numerous miracles have been attributed to the medal struck from the apparition. On the hour, various groups from around the world would attend Mass, another beautiful reminder of the universality of the Church and the Communion of Saints. In the sanctuary are entombed on either side the remains of St. Catherine Labouré and of **St. Louise de Marillac**, the co-founder of the Daughters of Charity with St. Vincent De Paul.

Sunday morning began with a brief visit to **Notre Dame** as soon as the doors

➤ PLEASE TURN TO **SAINTS** ON PAGE 17

endured for nearly 1,000 years. There we pondered the widespread influence this flourishing community had in spreading Catholicism throughout Europe, especially in the Middle Ages.

As evening approached, we pushed onward to Paray-le-Monial in anticipation of our visit to one of the earliest convents of the Sisters of the Visitation and home to the mystic, **St. Margaret Mary Alacoque** (1647-1690), called “The Beloved Disciple of the Sacred Heart.” Through her mystical conversations with our Lord Jesus Christ, a renewed devotion to the Sacred Heart flourished, which would include the First Friday Devotion. I had visited this Holy Shrine as a seminarian a decade

earlier and returned to say thank you for her life and inspiration and to ask for her continued intercession.

While a more modern town has grown up in Paray-le-Monial over the centuries, the cloistered Convent of the Visitations and the nearby centuries-old Basilica still hold the center place for this community. The public Masses at the convent are well attended and are held in the chapel where the apparitions took place. From the cloistered chapel that faces the altar you can hear the Sisters chanting the Divine Office beautifully at various hours of the day. I offered Mass at a side chapel where the remains of this great saint are entombed. Before leaving Paray, we made a visit to her Spiritual Director, **St. Claude de la Colombière**, at a chapel a

Combat life's hardships as Christ did, with a smile

The scene: Jerusalem, 56 B.C. A small stone house. A pious Jew named Ephraim is alone and kneeling in a dimly lit room.

Ephraim: Lord, when will You send us the Messiah who will save us, the one who will deliver us from our enemies and restore Israel to glory and honor?

God: In about 60 years.

Ephraim: Hallelujah! You have heard our cry at last! May I ask another question?

God: Always.

Ephraim: Who will his father be? A general? Scholar of the law? A well-respected merchant?

God: Nope, even better: A poor carpenter.

Ephraim (puzzled): And his mother?

God: A poor, unmarried teenage girl.

Ephraim (visibly shaken): What city will he be born in?

God: Bethlehem.

Ephraim: The city of David! Where will he be born there? A warm home near the city center? A hospital? A palace?

God: Nope, I've got an even better idea: a dark, freezing-cold barn on the fringes of town . . . and it will smell like manure.

Ephraim (growing faint): I, um, I have one more question. When he's born, at the very least will you see to it that the most important people are there to welcome him to the world?

God: Indeed I will.

Ephraim: Phew. (*A moment passes*) Lord?

God: Yes, Ephraim.

Ephraim: Could you just clarify for me who exactly these important people will be?

God: They will be dirt-poor shepherds. And they will smell like manure.

(*Ephraim faints*)



In many ways, the story of Christ's birth is tinged with sadness. It's a story about God's mercy and angelic songs and a star, yes, but it's also a story of breathtaking rudeness. A couple knocks on door after door in a strange land, begging for shelter. She's busting-at-the-seams pregnant. It's cold, it's late, and yet no one in this city – a city inhabited by Joseph's very relatives – has the decency to give them a bed.

One way of looking at it is to say that the



“When Joseph and Mary reflected on that Christmas night 10 years later over the dinner table . . . what are the odds that they had a laugh over it?”

first Christmas was a poor showing of the human race, the height of inhospitality, a little sad. But there's another way to look at Christ's birth in a smelly stable.

It's – and this is somewhat hard to say – kind of hilarious.

Think about it. Jesus could have entered the world any number of ways – on a ball of fire, descending from a mountain, born to royalty. He could have entered with a bang, capturing the attention of all the big-wigs. But God instead went with irony: How about a freezing night in a cave that smells like cow dung?

It was the greatest act of humility the world will ever know – Christ coming into the

world to save us from sin and death. From it, we learn that God has enough humility to endure a first night so uncomfortable and so absurd, it's funny. In other words, Christmas teaches us that God has a self-deprecating sense of humor. This Christmas, perhaps we should follow suit.

Wait a minute, you ask. What's so funny about the Holy Family's sufferings? Are we supposed to laugh at people's misfortune? Isn't that sadistic?

No, that's not the point. A Christian life means having the compassion to alleviate unnecessary suffering – to feed the poor, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned. The message of Christmas is not that it's okay to turn away Christ when He comes to your door asking for a place to stay. Instead, Christmas teaches us that true, perfect humility gives us the power to laugh at our imperfections – and the absurdities of life – more readily. Sometimes we have to look at our difficulties in life and smile.

Here's an example. The night after I began writing this piece was utter chaos. At one point, I was in my business suit at home, trying to watch two daughters while my wife was out of the house – all while editing a time-sensitive work document. Everything seemed to be going wrong: the computer was slow to load, one daughter was crying, my phone was ringing, and the other daughter wasn't getting any of my attention. Just when things had reached a boiling point, my two-year-old went to get up from the table . . . and spilled six ounces of milk on my computer and suit.

In a moment like that, I have the strong suspicion that, if it happened to Christ, He would have paused and then let out the loudest, most sincere belly laugh on earth. (I wish that had been my response.)

Why would Christ laugh amid misfortune? Because He's humble enough.

Just look back to Christmas night. When Joseph and Mary reflected back on that evening 10 years later over the dinner table . . . what are the odds that they had a laugh over it?

I think we need more of the hilarious humility of Christmas in our families today. Life is stressful in so many realms – personal finances, family, health, work, school. And so often God’s plans for us seem like they must have to Ephraim – downright crazy. But here I think G.K. Chesterton does a good job explaining the antidote to these stresses, the weapon to counteract life’s many misfortunes and sadnesses:

“Seriousness is not a virtue. It would be a heresy, but a much more sensible heresy, to say that seriousness is a vice. It is really a natural trend or lapse into taking one’s self gravely, because it is the easiest thing to do. For solemnity flows out of men naturally; but laughter is a leap. It is easy to be heavy: hard to be light.”

What is the Christian’s weapon against life’s hardship? Humility. And humility personified is Christ. With the exception of Good Friday, there is perhaps no other day in human history that better exemplified humility than Christmas, the day when Christ humbled Himself enough to enter into the world . . . in a place that smells like manure.

This Christmas, may we and our families remember to combat life’s hardships as Christ did – with humility and a smile. May we remember one of the greatest lessons of that beautiful, frigid night in Bethlehem, a message that will let us live out the joy of Christmas each day of our lives:

“Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.”
– Matthew 23:12

– **Ricky J. McRoskey**

Ricky, a member of St. John’s and father of two who lives in Norwalk, writes for a New York-based financial firm.



WORKERS ON A CRANE DECORATE THE CHRISTMAS TREE IN ST. PETER’S SQUARE ON DECEMBER 6. THE 82-FOOT-TALL TREE IS A GIFT OF THE PEOPLE OF WALDMUNCHEN, A TOWN IN GERMANY’S BAVARIA REGION NEAR THE CZECH BORDER. THE EVERGREEN, SAID BLESSED POPE JOHN PAUL II, SYMBOLIZES THAT “LIFE THAT DOES NOT DIE,” AND TEACHES THE FAITHFUL THAT THEIR LIVES CAN REMAIN “EVER GREEN” IF THEY OFFER THE GIFT OF THEMSELVES IN SERVICE TO OTHERS. (AP PHOTO/ALESSANDRA TARANTINO)

👉 **SAINTS** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

opened. The Cathedral is the very heart of Paris. Next we boarded a train to the Normandy region to a town called Lisieux, home to the Little Flower, the great Doctor of the Church, **St. Thérèse** (1873-1897). Before she died at age 24, she remarked, “I want to spend my heaven doing good on earth.” She is a special saint in the heart of priests. Of the many books written about her, I would recommend at least these two:

“Get to know the Saints better. Read about them. Read what they have written. And, without hesitation, ask for their intercession.”

Maurice and Thérèse by Bishop Patrick Ahern and, of course, the spiritual classic, *The Story of a Soul*, the spiritual reflections written by Thérèse.

You don’t have to fly across the ocean to get to know the Saints. They are already in your heart – for they are with God. Why not get to know them better? Read

about them. Read what they have written. And, without hesitation, ask for their intercession – especially at Mass – where they surround us and join us in our adoration and praise of Almighty God. You will come to truly know them well – and love them.

– **Rev. Terry Walsh**

Fr. Walsh is Parochial Vicar and Director of Religious Education at the Basilica.



IGNATIUS CARDINAL KUNG PIN-MEI

1901 - 2000

Please pray one “Hail Mary” daily for the opening of the cause of canonization for Cardinal Kung.



Expect the unexpected

Christmas and the surprising ways of God's love

December. The year is fraying out. The weary year has now almost run its race. I think, for most of us, there is a surprise and a sadness as the last page of the calendar appears. There is that unpleasant feeling that time is slipping through our fingers.

Now, Winter's icy knuckles are at the door. The long nights close in so fast with almost no pause for twilight. In terms of daylight, December takes us to the very depths of the year – with more than fifteen hours of darkness. The sun will put in a scant nine-hour day, and glimmer pale and shy. As John Donne put it, it is “*the year's cold and decrepit time.*”

For many people, the dark afternoons make a sadness inside them even heavier. They often wish they could follow the woodchucks into their holes and hide away with them for Winter.

But December is also the solstice that marks the official start of Winter, but promises the return of Spring. The Solstice, the *Natus Solis Invicti*, the Birthday of the Invincible Sun, is the time when the sun will turn back from the abyss, and the daylight will get a new grip on life. The dark nights will shorten and daylight will lengthen.

And, of course, December is the Nativity, which comes on the heels of the Solstice. In the midst of Winter dark we have our festival of lights and greens and gifts and prayers. By a certain strange magic the world is transformed, and the darkest month is one of the most cheerful.

It is hard for me to imagine Christmas anywhere else than in New England. The cold is part of it, the smell of wood smoke, the look of naked Winter trees filled with stars, the church spires against the sky. How could there be Christmas without these things? In a way, even the eerie excitement of darkness descending by 4 p.m. adds to the magic.



“Christmas can bring the confidence that, somehow, things will be all right. As Isaiah put it, ‘The Lord shall do His work, His strange work, and bring to pass His act, His strange act.’”

How mellow and inviting a candle looks in the window of a home on a December night. I admire the perseverance of anyone who climbs up on the roof and sets up a Santa Claus and the reindeers.

But for some of us, these are days we “officially” celebrate, but our hearts are different. Christmas can be dispiriting. Christmas is our time to be aware of what we lack, of who's not home; Christmas is a memory of other days. It is the remembering.

And it may or may not surprise you to hear that, during December, doctors prescribe between two and three times as much tranquilizing medicine as usual. Records indicate that the workload of psychologists and marriage counselors usually increases during the Christmas season, and police records

indicate an increase in domestic disputes during this time. Statistics show an increase in suicide and suicide attempts at this time of year.

As mentioned, the yuletide can be a special hell for those families who have suffered a great loss. Christmas is their time to be painfully aware of what they lack, of who's not there. Christmas is a memory of other days.

Still, Christmas means that He has come; that He has made the night bright. Part of the mystery of Christmas is that God comes to us in ways and times we least expect. The first Christmas He came quite unexpectedly and differently from what people would have thought.

Perhaps Christmas can help assure us that God will come to us in surprising ways.

The ebb and flow of life may leave some of us a bit sad and tired; we love God with a discouraged kind of love. Christmas may help us to believe that God will visit us by routes which we cannot map in advance, that we will experience something about the surprising ways of God's love. May this Christmas season revive many of us, enable us to catch glimmers of hope and peace.

I've come to believe that God commonly comes when we least expect Him. He is a God who does the unexpected. He will come in His time. We will be overtaken by the grace of God. Christmas can bring the confidence that, somehow, things will be all right. As Isaiah (28:21) put it, “*The Lord shall do His work, His strange work, and bring to pass His act, His strange act.*”

– Dr. Thomas Hicks

Dr. Hicks, a member of St. Theresa Parish in Trumbull, is Professor Emeritus of Theology and Psychology at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield.

“3 Godfathers” (1948): Three wise men and a baby

Now that Christmas is coming, we're all getting battered down for a long winter season replete with frosted windows, icicles, blazing Yule fires, and plenty of snow. So naturally, our Christmas movie takes place in the Mojave Desert. Yes, it's a Western. But it's not just an ordinary Western; it's the 1948 John Ford gem, *3 Godfathers*. Yet it's not really about Christmas and it's not really about the Church. So what is it about? It's about the sweetest and most touching story you could possibly expect, despite the fact that it features violence, robbery, and suicide. In a word, it's classic John Ford.

And being a Ford movie, his first in color, it is naturally a visually beautiful film, where even the swirls of desert sand dunes against the backdrop of the dusky purple mountains seem to have come from the brush of a landscape artist. Also great is the cast which includes Ward Bond, with the usual mix of gruffness and tenderness he displayed in so many Ford movies; Pedro Armendáriz, who was born in Mexico but grew up in Texas and graduated with an engineering degree from California Polytechnic State University; Harry Carey, Jr., and the ever dependable John Wayne as a sinner with a heart of gold.

Ford opens the film with a dedication to his longtime friend, Carey's father, who had recently died, referring to him in the credits as the “Bright Star of the early Western sky.” The plot starts out as a fairly routine Western: three cattle rustlers, Robert Hightower (Wayne), William Kearney (Carey), and Pedro “Pete” Rocafuerte (Armendáriz), ride into Welcome, Arizona to rob a bank. On arriving in town they meet Perley “Buck” Sweet (Bond), who turns out to be the sheriff. After exchanging some friendly banter with Sweet and his wife, they mosey down the street and carry out the robbery. The young Kearney, also known as “The Abilene Kid” is shot fleeing the holdup and while



Director John Ford uses “bibliomancy,” a practice popularized by St. Augustine to glean divine inspiration from randomly chosen selections of sacred text.

in pursuit, the sheriff shoots a hole in the robbers' main water bag as they escape.

On the run with the wounded Abilene Kid, the robbers find themselves engaged in a desperate game of cat and mouse with Sheriff Sweet and his posse, who foil their attempts to reach the few sources of water in the vast desert. During a sandstorm so fierce and realistic you can feel the grit in your teeth, the men lose their horses and must cross the desert on foot in search of water. They find an abandoned wagon where a gravely ill woman is about to give birth. After Pete helps with the delivery, the woman (Mildred Natwick), with her dying breath, asks the men to be godfathers to her baby, whom she names Robert William Pedro in their honor. And here's where the movie departs from the normal Western formula and enters into Ford legend.

Now anyone familiar with John Ford knows that he was a devout Catholic whose films usually reflect his deep belief in the beauty of redemption. In *3 Godfathers*, he makes use of a plot device called “bibliomancy,” which is the practice of gleaning divine inspiration from randomly chosen selections of sacred text. This idea of chance biblical inspiration was popularized by St. Augustine who, after years of sinful living, wrote in his *Confessions* that he heard a childlike voice advising him to “take and read,” which he interpreted as “no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find,” which was St. Paul's exhortation to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh.” A wonderful and time-honored precedent, but to my knowledge *3 Godfathers* was its first use in a Hollywood Western.

With the death of Robert William Pedro's mother, the tale of redemption begins with her burial, where Pete prays silently while the Kid gives a soulful rendition of “Shall We Gather at the River,” one of Ford's favorite

➤ PLEASE TURN TO **THREE** ON PAGE 20

THREE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

hymns which is featured in many of his films. Another Ford staple, sentimental comedy mixed in among the pathos, proceeds with the three tough men trying to feed and bathe the tiny baby with use of an instructional book found among the late mother's possessions. Also found is a Bible, which provides greater instruction later on.

Soon after they take charge of little Robert William Pedro, things get tense as the water runs out, the posse closes in, and the Kid's condition worsens. Desperate to find water, Pete picks up the Bible, saying, "Maybe Nuestro Senor has put here what to do in the Bible book."



Bob, whom we have learned is a bitter agnostic, disdainfully slaps the Bible from his hands, when the Kid picks it up and says, "Do you think this is all just chance? Finding the mother and helping her?"

"How can there be a happy ending after so much misery, death and suffering? John Ford, through his faith, knew the answer to that question; and he wants us to know Him, too."

The infant in the manger, that star so bright last night?" He goes on to read the open passage where he finds, "And when the days of her purification were accomplished according to the Law of Moses, they lifted up the child and took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord." So they agree to head for the town of New Jerusalem, Arizona: sixty miles away on foot through the howling desert, but guided always by the star.

Still, things get worse as it's clear the Kid is dying. Fading fast, the young cowboy struggles to pray the Our Father, but instead ends with, "If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. God bless mom and father and sister, and make me a good boy. Amen."

Shortly after the Kid's death, Pete

stumbles, breaking his leg. Knowing he will never finish the trip, he asks Bob to leave him his pistol, ostensibly to ward off coyotes. As Bob clutches the baby and turns to leave the man he knows will soon use the gun on himself, Pete says, "Oh Bob, I just remembered what tomorrow is: Feliz Navidad, Merry Christmas." [Tragically, life was to imitate art as Armendáriz would also take his own life, shooting himself after discovering he had inoperable cancer in 1963.]

Many have criticized this movie, predictably bemoaning Ford's use of religious symbolism to achieve his ends; a trait which is wonderfully on display here. The movie abounds with allusions to the birth of Christ and what that means for the redemption of sinners, with the robbers themselves assuming pseudo-biblical identities: the irreligious Bob as the Prodigal Son, Pete as the Good Thief, and the Kid, with his innocence and purity, a man who lays down his life

for that of another.

Needless to say, Bob and the baby make it to New Jerusalem, but I'll not spoil the fun by revealing what happens next in this tale of Three Wise Men and a baby. Suffice it to say that the conclusion is a happy one; for which Ford suffered the ridicule of some skeptics. After all, how can there be a happy ending after so much misery, death, and suffering?

John Ford, through his faith, knew the answer to that question; and he wants us to know Him, too.

Feliz Navidad!

— Lisa Fabrizio

Lisa is a columnist for the [American Spectator](http://www.spectator.org) (www.spectator.org).



Pope Francis' Prayer Intentions

Each month, the Holy Father issues prayer intentions and invites Catholics the world over to unite in prayer. These intentions may be prayed through the Morning Offering prayer:

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer You all of my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day, for all the intentions of Your Sacred Heart, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world; in reparation for all my sins; for the intentions of all Your associates; for the reunion of Christendom; and in particular for [the Holy Father's monthly intentions, below], and I desire to gain all the indulgences, granted by the Church, for my prayers and good works of this day. Amen.

DECEMBER 2013

General Intention: Victimized Children. That children who are victims of abandonment or violence may find the love and protection they need.

Missionary Intention: Prepare the Savior's Coming. That Christians, enlightened by the Word incarnate, may prepare humanity for the Savior's coming.

What happened to our world?!

Prayer will bridge the gulf between God and man

Now that I have attained the three score and ten plus years required for old age, I can't help reflecting on our recent years.

Believe it or not, when I was a boy at St. Ephrem's Grammar School in Brooklyn, NY, the church rang the bells for the Angelus and the traffic stopped, the male pedestrians took off their hats, blessed themselves and said the Angelus, and then went on with their lives.

The number one show on fledging television was Bishop Fulton S. Sheen, who never had guests, but instead gave a Catholic homily into millions of American homes, and he was loved.

Today most Catholics do not know the Angelus; television has every politically-correct sexual situation, *ad nauseam*, interrupted by a vote against God at the Democratic National Convention.

It seems to be getting worse. Now we have our military chaplains under attack because they are against gay "marriage." The Church is under fire to accept practices against our faith.

Several years ago I heard a homily by the Pastor of St. Mary's Church in Milford. Fr. James Cronin related how, in Genesis, God and Adam were friends. They named the animals together and enjoyed their company. After the fall, when Cain killed Abel, God spoke to him and received a smart answer, "*Am I my brothers' keeper?*", when Cain knew exactly what he had done.

In two generations, look at the gulf between God and man. Where are we today?

Our forefathers, the founders of our republic, were religious men who believed in God and the rights of man. They put the motto "In God We Trust" on our currency. They used the Bible to swear on in our courts. Now we forbid school prayer.



"When I was a boy and the church rang the bells for the Angelus, traffic stopped, men took off their hats, all blessed themselves and said the Angelus, and then went on with their lives."

It is my opinion that by legalizing abortion we crossed a line between God and man and have widened the distance and damaged the rapport. I think that abortion and the resulting sexual freedom have led to increased same-sexual activity, resulting in calls for same-sex "marriage," which in turn calls for younger, distorted sexual education in our schools and the general decay of the nuclear family. Divorce rates, out-of-wedlock birth rates, and declining Mass attendance by those saying that they are Catholic, all would support this view.

One only has to remember that our Lord Jesus said, "*Without Me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5). This would explain the above situation, our Syrian policy, the recent shutdown, and many other developments. Maybe, you can do nothing means nothing, nada, zilch!! We cannot do it!!

What *can* we do? We can PRAY. That is what we can do.

Just about a century ago the Blessed Mother appeared to three young children at Fátima, Portugal. Her message was to pray. Pray especially for the conversion of sinners, and for those who do not pray for themselves.

In Fr. Andrew Apostoli's great book *Fátima for Today*, we learn that, before Our Lady appeared to the children, an angel, believed to be St. Michael the Archangel, met with the children to prepare them for Mary's visits. The angel taught them this prayer, and told them to say it many times during the day:

"My God, I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love You! I ask Your pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope, or do not love You."

Mary also stressed praying the Rosary both individually and as a family.

Our Blessed Mother is also the patron Saint of the United States of America, so why wouldn't we ask her help for a nation off course?

In addition to telling us that, *without* Him, we can do nothing, Jesus also told us that, *with* Him, anything is possible.

Also at Fátima, it is important to remember that the Blessed Mother saw fit to let the children have a vision of Hell, and they were sickened by what was revealed. And we now as humans in an imperfect place need that knowledge to help in our priorities.

I don't think my solution is naïve, because if you know I am praying, and I know that you are praying, we both will find the going a little easier. As Our Mother told us at Fátima, we can change things by our prayers.

– Al Tonry

Al, a member of the Holy Name Society of the Basilica, lives in Orange, CT.

Fr. Vincent R. Capodanno, Servant of God

Recovering the life of a hero – and a future Saint?

On February 21, 1970, Charles L. Keyser, the Episcopalian chaplain for the 5th and 1st Marine Regiments in Vietnam, wrote Captain Thomas Moye, then head of chaplains. Besides reporting to his friend that he would soon be transferred from the 5th Regiment in An Hoa, Vietnam to the 1st Regiment “located on Hill #55,” the chaplain also reported that he recently made a discovery.

As troops and officers frequently were redeployed, anything deemed unessential for immediate military use was left behind or lost sight of. The chaplain to the 5th Marines reported he discovered things about a former Roman Catholic chaplain of the same Regiment: Fr. Vincent R. Capodanno:

“I first discovered a crucifix in the bottom of a mount-out box. This crucifix was given by the men of 3/5 [3rd Battalion of the 5th Marine Regiment] in memory of Vincent Capodanno. I felt it

would fare better in your hands than over here.”

The men who gave the crucifix were those Marines who fought alongside and witnessed the heroism of their chaplain.



*FR. CAPODANNO MINISTERING TO SOLDIERS
IN THE FIELD IN VIETNAM.*

Keyser went on to tell Captain Moye that he’d also found a document, which he enclosed with his letter. *“This appears to be the original rough draft done by a Chaplain Kelly of the actions of Vince. It*

appears to me to have value because of the mistakes, cross-outs, insertions, and the signatures of the two LCPLs and on PFC.” [Lance Corporal; Private First Class].

Chaplain Keyser had found one of the most valuable original documents relating the details of the courageous service and heroic death in battle on September 4, 1967 of Fr. Capodanno, which led to the posthumous awarding of the Congressional Medal of Honor. In fact, the document gives eyewitness accounts by three Marines who were helped or saved during battle by this Catholic chaplain, a Maryknoll priest from Staten Island, NY.

Private First Class Steven A. Lovejoy, a radioman, reported how the priest helped him drag his heavy radio equipment up a hill, “while under automatic weapons fire,” which saved Lovejoy’s life. Lovejoy reported that the priest then administered last rites to Lance Corporal Steven Cornell and, while still under heavy fire, “crawled across exposed ground” to Sergeant Lawrence Peters, when a mortar exploded within 20 meters of the chaplain, shredding his left arm with shrapnel.

Despite his wounds and the heavy fire, Fr. Capodanno continued to minister to the dying sergeant. The priest then attended to five other wounded and dying Marines.

Lance Corporal Keith J. Rounseville next saw the priest when he came to Sergeant Howard Manfra, *“lying on an exposed slope in a criss-cross of two NVA [North Vietnamese Army] automatic weapons. As Fr. Capodanno ministered to the wounded Sargeant, Rounseville shouted to him that his rifle was jammed. The Chaplain halted his work, reached across the space which was open to enemy fire, and secured a rifle for the Lance Corporal.”* He then returned *“to the task of comforting Sargeant Manfra.”*

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FR. VINCENT CAPODANNO STANDS IN FRONT OF A CHRISTMAS CRECHE IN CHU LAI, VIETNAM.

Lance Corporal Frederick W. Tancke reported seeing the Chaplain come to him as he was tending the wounds of Corpsman Armando G. Leal:

“The North Viet-Nameese were charging the position and a machine gunner set up his weapon within 15 feet of the Lance Corporal. Tancke raised his rifle to fire; but the gun jammed. He was close enough to the gunner to see him laugh. He managed to reach cover as the automatic weapons rounds crashed into the bank over his head. He observed Chaplain Capodanno, seeing the gunner and having heard the bursts, jump down to Corpsman Leal and place his body between him and the machine gun as he ministered to him.”

Lance Corporal David Brooks reported, as did other witnesses, that *“the Chaplain’s presence, unarmed, going about his ministry steadily and calmly amid a hail of fire, sparked others to re-establish leadership and, in this way, saved many more lives.”* As Brooks stated about the chaplain, *“Before he came around, chaos ruled, men were afraid to stand up and take command. His leadership unarmed, restored*

confidence and spirit to the troops.”

This extraordinary document is signed by PFC Stephen A. Lovejoy, L/Cpl Keith J. Rounseville, and L/Cpl David Brooks, and witnessed by Chaplain Charles T. Kelly, notarized and dated September 21, 1967, a mere 17 days after the valiant chaplain died in battle.

“The Chaplain’s presence, unarmed, going about his ministry steadily and calmly amid a hail of fire, sparked others to re-establish leadership and, in this way, saved many more lives.”

There was little doubt about the valor and exemplary bravery of Fr. Vincent Capodanno. Besides the Congressional Medal of Honor, there were numerous other commendations, memorials, and chapels built around the world, and a United States Navy frigate (U.S.S. Capodanno, FF 1093) built and commissioned in his honor.

As the Episcopalian chaplain noted in 1970, things not essential to the moment tend to be misplaced or lost. Now, more than four decades since his death, Fr. Vincent

Capodanno is being looked at once again, but now in a different light.

Unquestionably, he was a hero. But, is he a saint? Valor and sanctity, while similar in so many ways, are not synonymous. And the Catholic Church has recently opened a formal cause of canonization to investigate precisely the question of the good chaplain’s sanctity.

I have been assigned the task of heading the official historical commission for the cause by Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio. As the Archbishop for the Military Services, his work is to provide chaplains and pastoral care to the Catholic service men and women and their families around the globe. It is his competence to have begun and oversee the cause of canonization of one of this country’s greatest Catholic chaplains.

“The cause for his canonization is not for him, but for us,” Archbishop Broglio said at a Memorial Mass for Fr. Capodanno at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC, in September. *“Others should know of his dedication and his desire to serve others. His was a response filled with faith to the Master who laid down his life for the sheep. May the life and legacy of Vincent Capodanno, Maryknoll priest, Marine Chaplain, and devoted servant of others continue to inspire men and women to imitate the Lord Jesus, take stock of their gifts, and get up and serve.”*

The Church doesn’t “make” saints. After long study, she solemnly declares whether a person actually led a life of exemplary and heroic virtue in imitation of Our Lord. If the judgment is positive, the Church simply announces that the individual can be termed a “Saint” as one enjoying eternity with God who raises up heroic men and women in our lives to remind us of His love and promise of eternity to everyone.

Please pray for the success of the cause of Fr. Vincent R. Capodanno.

– Msgr. Stephen M. DiGiovanni

Msgr. DiGiovanni is Pastor of the Basilica.

THE EAGLE CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1. The Prophet who spoke of the Virgin Birth.
4. Feast day December 27 (3 words).
7. It was so bright!
9. Sacrificial animal (1 Across claimed it “recognized” its Master).
10. He prophesied “The Sword of Sorrow.”
11. “For today in the city of _____ a Savior has been born.”
14. “Glory to God in the _____.”
16. The third Joyful Mystery.
19. The Evangelist who records the Joyful Mysteries.
22. He leapt in the womb of his mother in the Presence of the Lord.
25. Where was the first Gloria sung?
27. The little town where Christ was born.
28. Who were the 30 Across guarding?
29. Joseph was skilled at this.
30. The 2 Down did not greet the princes, but rather, the _____.
33. Feast day December 29 (2 words).
35. Gold, Frankincense, and _____.
36. The “New Adam.”
38. Sent from God to greet the Virgin.
39. Wise Man.
43. “Be it done to me according to thy word.”
46. Jesus is a Divine Person but He has two _____.
47. “My Father’s House is a House of _____.”
49. Narrated “The Little Drummer Boy” on television (2 words).
50. Jesus grew up there.

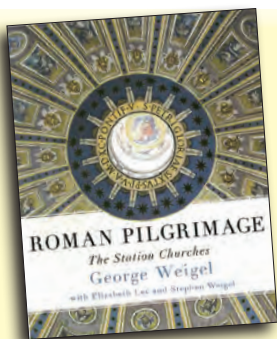
54. Forty days after the Birth of Jesus.
55. Emperor who ordered the migration of all Israelites to their town of origin.
56. Jesus was born in a _____.
57. Feast day December 26.



DOWN

2. They shouted, “Glory to God in the [14 Across]!”
3. Father of 22 Across.
5. Jesus came to offer _____ to all mankind.
6. Sunrise Mass on December 21.
8. Solemnity celebrated on the 8th day of Christmas.
12. The message of the 2 Down to the people on the Earth.
13. Jesus is Priest, Prophet, and _____.
15. Feast day December 31.
17. Wise Man.
18. God promised the Hope of a Redeemer for mankind in the Book of _____.

20. The Three Kings came from the _____.
21. “The _____ of the Lord of hosts will do this!”
23. The “bed” for the Savior.
24. Nine months after the Solemnity of the Annunciation.
26. Liturgical celebration of the Manifestation of Light.
27. Another name for the town where Jesus was born: “House of _____.”
29. Event that brought about the journey to the town of 11 Across.
31. A great Virtue regarding 16 Across.
32. As a young boy, Jesus was “lost” there for three days.
34. Wise Man.
37. The Mother of the Precursor.
40. Why did God become man?
41. The Prophetess who “lived” in the Temple and prayed ceaselessly greeted Him.
42. Perpetually _____, before, during, and after the Birth of Christ.
44. Governor of Syria during the first enrollment.
45. Fear and jealousy led him to slaughter the Innocents.
48. The Holy Family fled there in exile.
51. He spoke of the Genealogy of Jesus.
52. He would endure it for our sake and through it pour out “life-giving water” – grace.
53. Faithful, obedient, pure-hearted Protector.

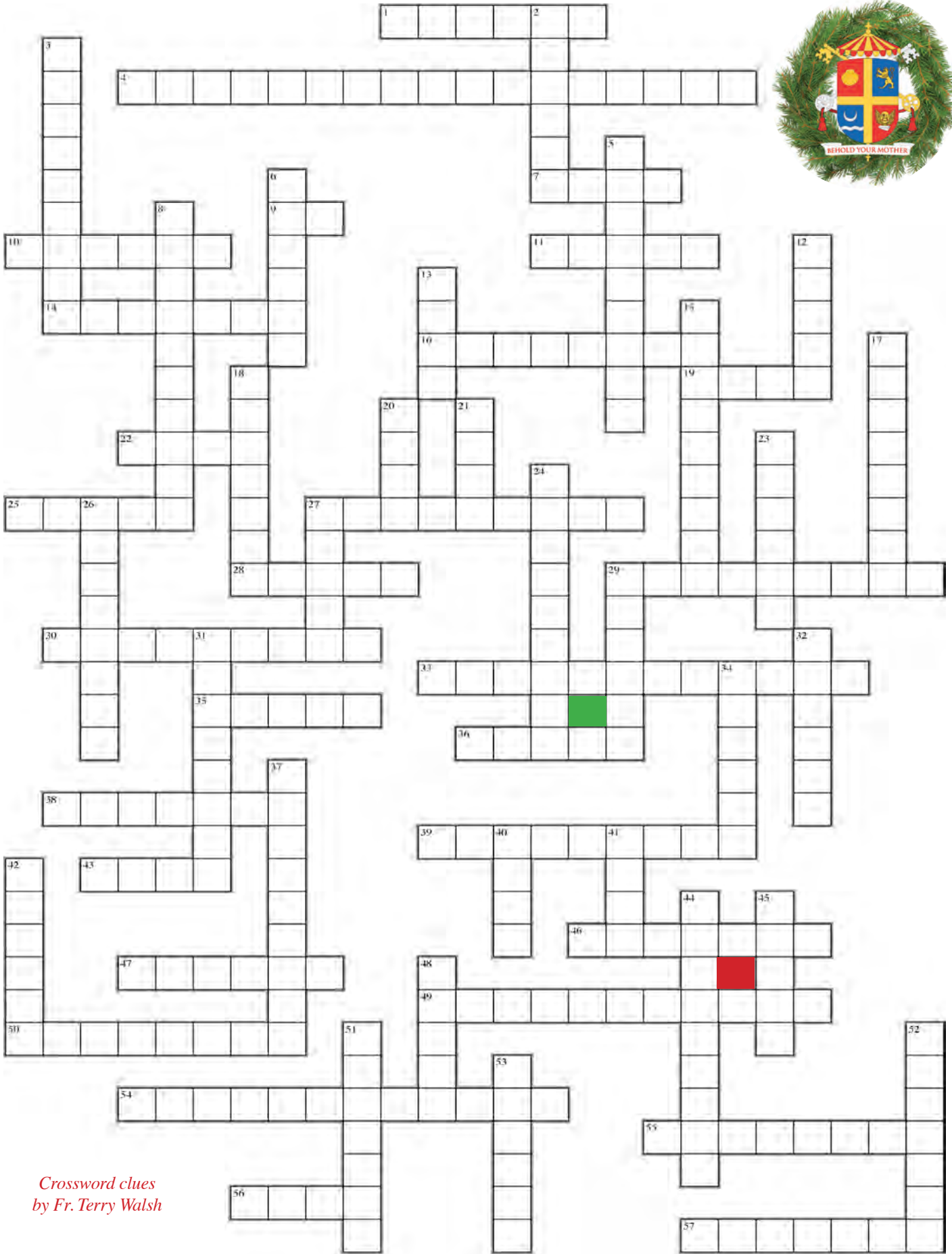


Submit your completed puzzle by **January 3** to win a copy of *Roman Pilgrimage: The Station Churches*, the new book by two contributors to THE EAGLE: George Weigel and Elizabeth Lev, with photographs by Stephen Weigel. Drop these two pages at the Basilica Office, or mail them to: The Basilica of St. John the Evangelist, EAGLE Prize Crossword, 279 Atlantic Street, Stamford, CT 06901. Good luck!

Name: _____

Daytime telephone: _____

Congratulations to the winners of THE EAGLE Crossword in the September 2013 edition: *Bea Centonze, Stamford*
Sr. Rosalie Di Peri, FMA, Haledon, NJ • *Madeline Ghilardi, Huntington* • *Marlene Henninger, Stamford*
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*Crossword clues
by Fr. Terry Walsh*

“I’m sorry, but I could never call you ‘Father’...”

During the first few days of school each year here at Kolbe Cathedral High School, we ask only the freshmen to attend. This is done in an attempt to “orient” them, or make them at least a little less uncomfortable about being in a new school building, being in high school, and, in many cases, being in a Catholic school for the first time. Many of our students are not Catholic, and they often arrive on their first day having no idea what to expect concerning the “Catholic” part of Catholic school.

This is where I come in. Apart from walking around trying to look happy and nice so that I do not frighten already anxious 14-year-olds who have never seen a priest before, I give a presentation on the “Catholic” aspects of our daily life here at school. In my presentation I try to use humor and levity in order to boost the students’ confidence and trust, and to present myself as “approachable.” This does not come naturally to me, especially on the first day of school.

However, with several years of experience under my belt, I think I do this fairly well now. In fact, that on the very first day this year a young girl approached me and said, “*Bishop, I have a question.*”

Feeling very satisfied with my approachability, I gently corrected her, informing her that I am not the Bishop, but simply a priest, and that the proper way to address a priest is with the title “Father.”

“*I’m sorry,*” she said, “*but I could never call you ‘Father.’*”

Now, I knew immediately where she was coming from. I inwardly groaned and experienced a vivid

and frightening flashback to my piano teaching days.

The first thing every student of the piano must learn is how to find “Middle C,” the key on the piano which is the cornerstone for all beginners. Every piano teacher has explained the location of “Middle C” so many times (oftentimes to the same student so many times) that he is subject to chilling nightmares of spending eternity condemned to teach only that simple concept.

The parallel concept, the “Middle C” in the



“Mister, by the way, is a form of the word ‘master.’ There must be fundamentalists everywhere on earth who use those titles every day but refuse to call a priest ‘Father.’”

world of the priest who teaches non-Catholic Christians, is the title “Father.”

In Matthew 23:9, Jesus, teaching the crowds and His disciples, says, “*Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father – the one in heaven.*” He goes on to say that no one should be called “teacher” or “master” either.

This verse is often quoted by fundamentalists to demonstrate that priests should not be called “Father.”

Obviously, Jesus means to say that we should have God alone as our father, our teacher, and our master with regard to spiritual things; a variation on the theme of the First Commandment.

If we took Jesus literally we would be forbidden to call the man who contributed his DNA to produce us our “father,” and we could not introduce anyone by saying, “*This is my teacher, Mr. Smith.*”

Mister, by the way, is a form of the word

“master.” There must be fundamentalists everywhere on earth who use those titles every day but refuse to call a priest “Father.” Anyway, for this reason many of my students are uncomfortable calling me “Father” and call me “Mister” instead. This is the least of my concerns for their salvation.

Realizing, during that unpleasant flashback, that by making and debating the point with the poor girl I would have sacrificed my approachability and got nowhere with her, I moved on and encouraged her to ask her question.

“*What,*” she asked, “*is the difference between Catholics and Christians?*”

I groaned another inward groan and replied, “*You know what, that’s a great question, and you’re going to spend the next four years learning the answer to that question.*”

“*In the meantime,*” I said, trying to hold on to my hard-won approachability, “*tell me what church you go to.*”

The girl did not know what church she goes to, probably because she does not go to church. However, she was sure that she is a Christian, although she probably cannot explain what that means.

From my perspective it’s not much . . . but it’s a start.

– Rev. F. John Ringley, Jr.

Fr. Ringley is Spiritual Director of Kolbe Cathedral High in Bridgeport.

POPE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28
 preach and live the Gospel in a changing world: this forms the largest part of his work. The essence of Evangelization was expressed by Blessed Pope John Paul II, whom Pope Francis quotes:

“There can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord. . . [If the Church] is to fulfill its providential destiny, evangelization as the joyful, patient, and progressive preaching of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ must be your absolute priority.” [#110]

The basis of the Church’s successfully forming world culture in the past and now is the uncompromising faith and preaching of Christ. The Holy Father continues by adding practical suggestions, such as encouraging better preaching by priests [27 pages on preaching, as compared with two paragraphs about the economy!]; granting of greater authority to local bishops’ conferences, even in dogmatic issues; and including women in decision making processes and areas of authority in the Church.

Throughout the Holy Father’s few months in the Chair of St. Peter, he has repeatedly emphasized the need for Jesus Christ to be preached and understood, as the fundamental basis for everything the Church believes and does. If the world does not understand Christ, then it will never understand, let alone believe, in the teachings of the Church.

The most effective means of teaching the basics of Christianity require new and more creative methods by the Church throughout the world.

The Holy Father has given more and new hope to people around the world, for he invites the world to consider the basics: Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God who became one of us, in order to share eternity. The basics – that God thinks so highly of human beings that He became one of us, suffered and died in His flesh

taken in the womb of the Virgin to pay for our failings and sins, and rose in that flesh to give us the possibility of eternal life with him – are revolutionary

no government, economy, industry, or culture can diminish.



“Pope Francis is making the Truth and Christ’s Church more accessible and efficient. He challenges us to bear clearer witness to Christ’s love for us in our own lives.”

Pope Francis is simply making that Truth, and Christ’s Church, more accessible and more efficient, and challenging all of us to bear clearer witness to Christ’s love for us in our own lives. May God bless him.

– Msgr. Stephen M. DiGiovanni

for most people who have never heard this, who never conceived they might be worthy of God’s mercy and love. All men, women, and children share an immense dignity that

Msgr. DiGiovanni is Pastor of the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist.

To read Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation in its entirety, visit www.news.va.

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MEN ONLY

Advent is a beautiful time of each year. The nights of early December are the longest and darkest of the year, and sun comes up later and later. The long nights are suggestive of the state of Creation before the coming of Our Lord: darkened by Adam's Original Sin.

It is during one of those nights and dark mornings that the Church celebrates a votive Mass of the Blessed Mother. Over the centuries, it is known as the Rorate Mass or the *Missa Aurea*, the Golden Mass: offered literally at the crack of dawn. The faithful gather in a darkened church, lit only by candlelight, greeting the God who became Man in the womb of the Virgin Mary – the Light of the World – as the sun peaks through at the moment of the Consecration, and Christ Incarnate, Crucified and Risen, abides with us in the Eucharist.

The Basilica will offer our own Rorate Mass on **Saturday, December 21 at 6:45 a.m.**, in the Extraordinary Form: a Latin Mass according to the 1962 Missal. All are invited, and a light breakfast will follow in the parish hall. For two years we offered the Extraordinary Form Mass each Sunday, but the numbers of the faithful in attendance dropped and dropped. While no longer offered on a regular, weekly basis, the Extraordinary Form will be offered on special occasions, such as our Rorate Mass.

“Rain down [Rorate], O heavens, the Just One,” are the opening words of the Mass taken from the prophet Isaiah, which provide a greeting to us who yearn for the coming of the Redeemer. In the golden glow provided by only candlelight, we who come out in the early hours of a dark and cold December morn acclaim the Savior who humbles Himself to become a man so that mankind could become divine. Please try to attend.

Appropriately, the Holy Father issued his first Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*) on the Solemnity of the Christ King of the Universe,



THE LAST WORD



“In the golden glow provided by only candlelight, we who come out in the early hours of a dark and cold December morn acclaim the Savior who humbles Himself to become a man so that mankind could become divine.”

just in time to serve as the meditation for the world during Advent. His opening paragraphs are published on page 6.

Pope Francis' work concerns the proclamation of the Gospel and the Church's missionary outreach in the world. The first part treats briefly of some of the challenges presented by contemporary culture to the preaching of the Gospel. While the media latched on to his critique of “trickle-down theories” of economics, they paid no attention to the real point of the work: there have developed “anonymous kinds of

power” [#52] in an age that applauds itself for its technical abilities, its vast knowledge, and access to information. The reality is that a worldwide culture of exclusion and inequality has developed. Pope Francis continued:


“Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, and without any means of escape.

“Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a ‘throw away’ culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no loner even a part of it. The excluded are not the ‘exploited’ but the outcast, the ‘leftovers.’” [#53]

This is more than merely a problem created by a world economy or by our consumer culture run wild. It is a dynamic and foundational shift that returns the vast majority of women, men, and children to a state of servitude, drudgery, and hopelessness.

The main purpose of this work is to consider the Church's role in preaching the Gospel, defending and enhancing the dignity of the human person, and the Church's role to form the culture by the Gospel. This is not new. This is the essential role for which Christ established the Church and sent the Apostles forth to change the world by preaching the Gospel and sharing the Divine Life through the Sacraments.

The Holy Father then considers how the Church might more effectively

 PLEASE TURN TO **POPE** ON PAGE 27