

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

**~ A Prayer for the Family ~**

**Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,  
in you we contemplate  
the splendor of true love,  
to you we turn with trust.**

**Holy Family of Nazareth,  
grant that our families, too,  
may be places of communion and prayer,  
authentic schools of the Gospel  
and small domestic Churches.**

**Holy Family of Nazareth,  
may families never again  
experience violence, rejection, and division.  
May all who have been hurt or scandalized  
find ready comfort and healing.**

**Holy family of Nazareth,  
make us once again  
more mindful of the sacredness  
and inviolability of the family,  
and its beauty in God's plan.**

**Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,  
graciously hear our prayer.  
Amen.**

—Pope Francis

**CAMPUS MINISTRY OFFICE:**

The Campus Ministry Office is located in **Our Lady Chapel**.  
phone: [440] 473-3560 or 216-570-9276 [cell]. e-mail: blazekj@gilmour.org

# Our Lady Chapel

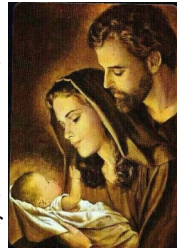


*Our Lady Chapel is a Roman Catholic community founded in the love of the Father, centered in Christ, and rooted in the Holy Cross tenets of building family and embracing diversity. We are united in our journey of faith through prayer and sacrament, and we seek growth through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in liturgy and outreach, while responding to the needs of humanity.*

**FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY:**

Every year right after Christmas, we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family. There is a reason for this. It's easy to think that the "incarnation" means God took on a human body. But there is much more to it than that. In Jesus, God unites himself to an entire human nature. He fully enters into human experience, with all its peaks and valleys. And a part of that human experience — peaks and valleys include — is family. We forget that Jesus spent over 90% of his years in the obscure nitty-gritty of family life. Though little of those years are recorded, what we do know is significant. First of all, despite the cuddly image of our nativity scenes, the original Christmas was anything but cozy. A woman nine months pregnant rides 75 miles on the back of a donkey over bumpy, dusty roads so she can have her baby in a stable full of dirty, smelly animals. Quickly after the birth they have to pick up and flee for their lives, seeking asylum in a foreign land. A few years later, the now adolescent son goes missing for several days, and there ensues a conversation characterized by no little emotion. Joseph is a saint; Mary is without sin; Jesus is God incarnate — yet there are still challenges, difficulties, tense moments, and opportunities for misunderstanding. Welcome to real family life.

—excerpt from an article by Marcellino D'Ambrosio which appears on the internet

**2022 CALENDARS:**

Caleendars for the year 2022 are available for your taking. Besides having space for you to write your family appointments, the calendar also contains information about Mass and Reconciliation times here at Our Lady Chapel. We wish to thank the Schulte-Mahon-Murphy Funeral Homes for their generous donation of these 2022 Caleendars to us. Please feel free to take as many caleendars as you would like. Thank you.

**CELEBRATE THE NEW YEAR — BEGIN WITH MASS:**

It has been a long-standing tradition here at Our Lady Chapel that we begin our New Year's Eve celebration by first coming to Mass before going out for the evening. This affords us a great opportunity to begin the New Year with a time of prayer and worship of God. **January 1<sup>st</sup>** is not a **Holy Day of obligation** this year. But the **Feast of the Motherhood of God** and **New Year's Day** still remain important in our lives. In addition, our Holy Father, Pope Francis has asked all of us to pray intensely on January 1<sup>st</sup> for world peace. **We will have a Mass on Friday, December 31<sup>st</sup> at 5:30 PM.** Please plan on joining us.

**CHRISTMAS FLOWERS AND DECORATIONS:**

Again this year we will accept memorial donations to help defray the cost of flowers and decorations which we use in our chapel for the Christmas season. If you are interested in making a donation **in memory of loved ones**, please put the names of the loved ones along with your donation in an envelope, mark it "Christmas Flowers," and either give it to Father John or drop it in the offering basket. We will publish the names of the loved ones in the Bulletin as a memorial.

**THANK YOU:**

A special note of "thanks" goes out to all of you who participated in our **Giving Tree** and our **Adopt a Family** programs. Many families, in addition to literally hundreds of gifts for children from the giving tree were gathered again this year. Thank you and God bless each of you for sharing your life with someone else. A special thank you to **Patty Szaniszlo, Tina Newton** for all their hard work in coordinating these projects. Again, thanks to all who participated. As usual, your generosity in reaching out to others has been marvelous. Thank you. You are special.

**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers.

**PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:**

- For John Visconsi, brother of Tom [\*61] and Tony Visconsi [\*75] and Paulette Poklar, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Brother Joseph Annan, C.S.C., who is undergoing treatment for a stroke.
- For Father Joseph O'Donnell, C.S.C., who is under the care of hospice
- For Sheila Coyne, aunt of Katie Coyne [\*24], who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Frank Nannicola, grandfather of Cassie [\*17], Frank [\*18], and Mia [\*19] Nannicola, who is recovering from cancer surgery.
- For Joseph Boehm who is critically ill with COVID
- For Marie Forsythe, who is seriously ill with COVID
- For Clare Simonetta, infant daughter of Gilmour Science instructor, Jessica Simonetta, who is recovering from open heart surgery.
- For Brother Paul Kelly, C.S.C., who is hospitalized with a blood clot on his lung.
- For Julie Arndt who is undergoing treatment for COVID
- For Kelsey Cesar, Yearbook Co-Ordinator, who is recovering from shoulder surgery.

**FOR THE DECEASED:**

- For Joanne DeMarco, aunt of Johanna Parker, great-aunt of Gia Parker [\*23]
- For Dorothy Slaght, mother of Whitney Slaught, past Men's Club President, grandmother of Brandon [\*13] and Spencer [\*17] Slaght.
- For Willard Schade
- For Ethna Haag, step-mother of Alison Haag Cukon [\*90] and Libby Knisley –Haag.[\*92].
- For Kenny Evans.
- For Margaret Grgic
- For Joe Rinicella
- For Della Worobetz, grandmother of Jake [\*10], Connor [\*13], and Peter [\*14] Hurley.

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:**

- For all those suffering from COVID.
- For a family going through a difficult time.
- For an end to violence and racial injustice in our society.
- For a growth in awareness of the blessing of family life.
- For all those struggling with various addictions.
- For an end to sexual abuse and lack of respect for human persons.
- For a greater respect for human life, from the moment of conception until natural death.
- For all caregivers.
- For all service men and women serving our country, and for their families.
- For a greater awareness of our call to create a more humane and just society.

**GROWTH:**

Sometimes you have to let go of the picture of what you thought it would be like, and learn to find joy in the story that you are actually living.

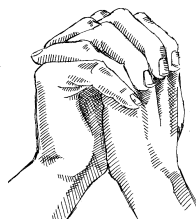
—Richard Martin

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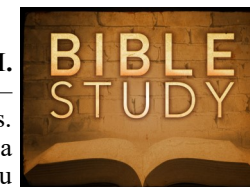
**PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:**

- For Anthony Constantino, father of Nancy Hagan Constantino [‘83] and Patty Constantino [‘85], who is critically ill
- For Cassandra Williams [‘15], sister of Sebastian Williams [‘18] who is undergoing treatment for a soft tissue cancerous tumor which is inoperable.
- For Erin Crow, aunt of Logan Cleary [‘20] who is in critical condition following an accident.
- For Tammi Ramsey, who is critically ill with COVID
- For Catherine Ivery, aunt of Kitchen associate director, Bobbie Bonner, who is serious ill with COVID
- For Vicki Giancola, mother of Vince Giancola [‘23], who continues treatment for cancer.
- For Joseph Borkey [‘82], brother of Jeff [‘80] and Jerrod [‘87] Borkey, father of Christian Borkey [‘16], and uncle of Jerrod [‘12] and former Gilmour student, Ian Borkey, who is undergoing treatment for cancer
- For Katie Poelking [‘01], sister of TJ Poelking [‘98], who is undergoing treatment for breast cancer.
- For Mary Goers who is undergoing treatment for pancreatic cancer.
- For Serena DiCillo, daughter of David DiCillo [‘84] and Polly Duval DiCillo [‘84], and granddaughter of long-time Gilmour teacher, Bonnie DiCillo, and niece of John [‘83], Dawn [‘86], and Dan [‘88] DiCillo and Laurie Duval Muller-Girard [‘81], who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Ray Gruss who is battling cancer.
- For John Weathers, who is undergoing treatment for liver cancer.
- For Bruce Schwartz, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Bill Barrett, who is undergoing treatment for pancreatic cancer.
- For David Patterson [‘83], brother of Charles [‘79] and Neil [‘81] Patterson, who is undergoing medical treatment.
- For Mary Curran, mother of Megan [‘10], Carolyn [‘12], and Catherine [‘17] Curran, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Addison McKito, sister of Aidan McKito [‘24], who is undergoing treatment for Hodgkin’s Lymphoma.
- For Darlene Lonardo, mother of Joseph Lonardo [‘00], and grandmother of Angelina [‘22] and Giana [‘22] Lonardo, who is undergoing treatment for leukemia.
- For Christine Maharg, mother of Lily Maharg [‘21], who is seriously ill with cancer.
- For Margaret Malarney [‘24] who continues rehab and medical care.
- For Bernice Girgash, aunt of Basketball Coach and Counselor, Dan DeCrane, who is undergoing treatment for cancer..
- For Krishna Gupta, Sister of Science teacher, Neena Goel, aunt of Nikhil [‘13] and Nupur [‘17] Goel, who is undergoing treatment for a brain bleed
- For Karuna Singla, Sister-in-law of Science teacher, Neena Goel, aunt of Nikhil [‘13] and Nupur [‘17] Goel, who is undergoing treatment for bone cancer.
- For Melita Chiacchiari, mother of Mark [‘94], mother-in-law of Michelle DeBacco [‘96] who is undergoing further treatment for cancer.
- For Mike Heryak, husband of Janet, father of Lillian [‘09], Rosa [‘12] and Edwin [‘17] Heryak, who is seriously ill
- For Tom Podnar, father of Lower School art teacher, Eileen Sheehan, who is awaiting a heart transplant.
- For Father James Caddy, former pastor of St. Francis, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.



**NEXT BIBLE STUDY — WEDNESDAY, JAN. 5<sup>th</sup>:**

**Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Wednesday, January 5<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 PM.** Bible Study continues to meet bi-weekly. The Bible Study is open to everyone — all middle and high school students, college students, young adults, and all adults. We will all come together to be enriched by God’s word. It’s a great time, and a good witness of our faith to others. If you can’t come at 6:30, come when you can. Gather your favorite snack and/or drink, but be prepared to be nourished on God’s word. **Our topic for this Bible Study will be: The Christmas Feasts**



**If you text or email Father John [blazekj@gilmour.org] he will send you the zoom link and password. This is an important step to prevent negative intruders.**

We also need your help — we need future topics. **So, if you have a topic that you would like us to discuss, please let Father John know.** Mark your calendars and be part of this wonderful activity that will deepen your spiritual journey. **We will meet every other week — topic to be decided at the end of the previous meeting.** Join us. You’ll have a blast, and celebrate your faith along the way..

**SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:**

Sunday, December 26: <b>Holy Family</b>	<b>10:00 AM</b> In Person & Live Stream
Monday, December 27: <b>St. John</b>	<b>NO MASS</b>
Tuesday, December 28: <b>The Holy Innocents</b>	<b>NO MASS</b>
Wednesday, December 29:	<b>NO MASS</b>
Thursday, December 30:	<b>NO MASS</b>
Friday, December 31: <b>New Year’s Eve</b>	<b>5:30 PM</b> In Person & Live Stream
Saturday, January 1: <b>Mary, Mother of God</b>	<b>NO MASS</b>
Sunday, January 2: <b>Epiphany</b>	<b>10:00 AM</b> In Person & Live Stream

**R.C.I.A [Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults]:**

Our RCIA program will begin shortly. If you have been thinking about investigating the Catholic faith, or if you know someone who has been thinking about it; if you have been away from the Catholic Church for a while, or are interested in learning more about the Catholic faith; if you know someone who is not fully initiated [Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation] in their Catholic faith — then consider joining or having them join our RCIA program.



**CHRISTMAS JOY:**

Joy is the infallible sign of God’s presence.

—Teilhard de Chardin

**REFLECTION ON THE THEME FOR THE WEEK:**

Today is the feast day of the Holy Family. A wise friend once told me there are no “sides” in families — only seasons. Some seasons are much more difficult than others. So, while our families, our communities and our world are in this difficult season, let us be mindful of St. Paul’s words: “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Above all these virtues put on love” [Colossians 3:12-21]. The Feast of the Holy Family calls us to open ourselves to the “peace of Christ [which] can control my heart.” Living with Christ’s peace in our heart will make it much easier to be compassionate and kind to all family members and all God’s children who are struggling.

Most Medical-School students, when reading about sicknesses and ailments, begin wondering if they have or have had whatever it is that they are studying. The term “Dysfunctional Family” is commonly used to describe various deficiencies within family life. Most of us, hearing the term “Dysfunctional Family,” begin wondering whether we were or are members of such a group. The process moves from wondering to probably to certainty. The problem is that we are not exactly sure what a “dysfunctional family” looks like. What we do know is that our family of origin was not perfect, and that we weren’t given everything we wanted for Christmas, birthdays — and every other day of our lives. The major dysfunction for all of us began when we discovered that our parents were not gods and goddesses, and our siblings were not little angels.

The author of the Book of Sirach [3:2-6,12-14] outlines how daughters and sons can atone for sins by reverencing their parents. Being in a family is the situation where human sinfulness is displayed in life-size Technicolor. But Family life is also a very holy experience. St. Paul reminds us of this when he writes to the Church at Rome — “Where sin abounds, there does grace more abound” [see Romans 6]. Sirach is instructing siblings on how their relationships with the parents are part of their relationship with God.

I once asked a group of married couples: “Other than your spouses, what has been the biggest disappointment in your living the sacrament of marriage?” After they stopped laughing, they all said that they did not know that raising children was going to be so hard — “It’s a lot of work!” It is a lot of work raising expectations and levels of compassion and trust. Parent-child relationships are directly related to our relationship with God.

Paul’s letter to the Church at Colossae gives us a long and detailed prayer, which Paul writes concerning his wishes for those trying to live together. He prays about “functional” loving and living. In listening to the many virtues and practices listed, we just might find where any “dysfunction” in our living together might be rooted. It is unfortunate that this list of virtues is often passed over so quickly — each virtue deserves some slow mediation and resolution. What also leads spouses to begin dysfunctioning is the sentence about wives being subordinate to their husbands. If that bothers you or your spouse, then you haven’t heard or read the spirit of what Paul — or the Holy Spirit — are saying. Family is the place to follow the example of Jesus by being willing to surrender to our being human and our needing forgiveness from the humans with whom we live or have lived.

Joseph and Mary are shown as having great reverence for God’s laws concerning birth, family rituals, as well as the annual pilgrimage up to Jerusalem [Luke 2:41-52]. The annual pilgrimage served as a great example of how the life of family and our relationship with God are connected.

But on this particular pilgrimage, a great deal of family dysfunction occurred. Three times every year a pious Jewish family would make their way to Jerusalem — for Pentecost and the feast of Booths,

**TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE:**

The late Raymond Brown’s writings and lectures cleared up a lot of the problems I had with the gospel infancy narratives — especially Luke’s story of Jesus lost in the temple [Luke 2:41-52]. Even as a kid, this “lost in the temple” passage didn’t make sense. Why would God’s parents miss a second’s sleep over “losing” him? He’s God! He can take care of himself, no matter how old he is or where he finds himself.

Brown helps us understand something all modern Scripture scholars take for granted — our sacred authors frequently employ sources. They don’t begin writing with just a stylus and blank sheet of papyrus in front of them. They have other sheets of papyrus on their desk — papyrus already written on, writings they’ll eventually integrate into their finished work. Sometimes — as in Luke’s gospel — it’s easy to notice when one source stops and another begins; at times, other sources have been so closely integrated that it takes an expert to point them out.

Luke used at least two different sources for his infancy narrative. He employed one in which the author included an annunciation to Mary — a narrative which had an angel inform the virgin beforehand about the divinity of her son. In the other — exemplified by this “lost-in-the-temple” story, the writer seems to have presumed Mary and Joseph only found out about Jesus’ divinity after his resurrection. The child’s parents were legitimately worried when he was inadvertently left behind in the Jerusalem temple. They certainly weren’t faking it.

Among other things, these different sources tell us the early church was convinced there’s more than one way to understand the gospel Jesus in our lives — even contradictory ways. Since all the first Christians thought with Jewish framework, they were always interested in the both/and of their faith — not the either/or. Such Greek, analytic thinking didn’t hijack the church until late in the second century — long after our Christian Scriptures took shape.

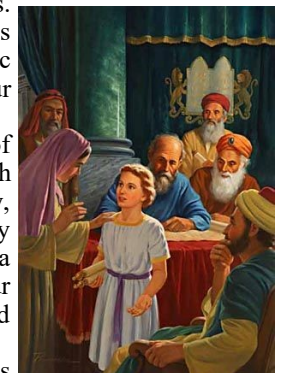
It might especially be good to remember our biblical sources on this Feast of the Holy Family. In my limited experience, no two families are alike — each encounters reality in a unique way. Not only do we experience things differently, we react differently, and, in the process, we and things around us constantly change. Physical punishment, for instance, which I simply took for granted as a child, could now get a parent arrested. Thankfully we see implications of our actions today that we never noticed yesterday. As we grow, families grow; and as families grow, we individually grow.

This directly applies to Paul’s letter to the Church at Colossae. Though his command for wives “to be subordinate to your husbands” — a marriage hierarch — makes for smooth running of a household, it reduces one partner to a non-entity. This is often what happens when our church hierarchy does this to the laity. In order to become the people Jesus intends, we need more than just one source commenting on our relationships.

Some behavior is basic Christianity, no matter what’s going on around us. Husbands, for instance, should love their wives, and fathers shouldn’t provoke their children. At all times, as other Christs, we should “put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” [Colossians 3:12-21]. And as Sirach insisted, we should never “grieve” our parents. Even if a father’s mind fails, there’s never an excuse for “reviling” him [Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14]. When positions switch and we’re caring for those who once cared for us, love should always remain.

But once these essentials are covered, each family must make its own path through life. It’s always good to appreciate that fact, especially during today’s feast. If Luke didn’t think it necessary to employ just one source to tell the story of Jesus’ family, then we shouldn’t be content just to employ one way to imitate Jesus’ love in our families.

—taken from the writings of Father Roger Karban, which appear on the internet



**GOD’S ENTRY INTO EVERYDAYNESS:**

If you happen to be in Rome on Christmas Day, you can visit the Vatican's featured Nativity scene from Peru. It’s populated by some 30 characters — people and animals — authentically garbed and posed as contemporary folks from the Andean highlands. The Magi might be mistaken for extra shepherds as they accompany their llamas laden with the fabulous foods people of the area have enjoyed since before the time of the Incas. This is a cultural translation or interpretation of the meaning of the Incarnation.



If we could anthropomorphize a little, we might imagine the Trinity taking great pleasure in this and myriad other representations in which people depict the Holy Family and the rest of the cast in their own style of dress and following local customs. The people who do that have captured the message of the Incarnation — God decided to be like us to give us faith in our divine potential.

Christmas emphasizes the fact that ours is a God who does something more than just sit around the heavens! God’s love took flesh among us, not because we deserved it, but because of God’s great love. If there were one question we might imagine God asking to sum up the motive for the Incarnation, it is: “What can I do to help you?”

This is the message of Christmas. This is the amazing and simple news of God’s nearness. We would do well to give ourselves time to enter deeply into mystery and grace to be so awed that words cannot suffice.

—excerpted from the writings of Sister Mary McGlone, C.S.J., which appear on the internet

**CHILDREN’S BULLETINS:**

Each week, we are making available a **Children’s Worship Bulletin**. There are **two editions: [3-6] and [7-12]**. They are available on the table as you leave. The Bulletin focuses on the readings for the week. These are wonderful tools for your children to learn more about the scripture readings for the week. We hope you will take them for your families or your grandchildren. Thanks.



**CHAPEL ENVELOPES:**

Over the course of COVID-19, many people have been mailing in donations to the chapel. Now that we have begun to assemble again, many are also looking to replace their envelope supply. We really appreciate this, as our collections are obviously way down. **If you would like us to send you a supply of envelopes, please call Father John or Patty at [473-3560], and we will get them right out to you..**

**WEEKLY OFFERING:**

**Thank you to those who have begun to send in weekly offerings. We really appreciate it.** Here are the offerings that we have received throughout **the week prior to July 18-19**. Thanks for not forgetting about us.

Offerings-----[Saturday, December 11]-----[mail-in]-----	\$ 180.00
Offerings-----[Sunday, December 12]-----	\$ 612.00
Offerings-----[Saturday, December 18]-----[mail-in]-----	\$ 345.00
Offerings-----[Sunday, December 19]-----	\$ 1,102.00

**A CLEAR PATH:**

The direction to which our wills must be put is, like Mary, in obedience to God’s will. Then something decisive happens for this earth. In place of the confusion of injustice, strife, open war, and treachery, there is revealed a path of the most lively unity and clarity. We are released from the servitude of our own wants and desires, our selfish hopes and fears — we are redeemed, we become free.

— Philip Britts

both harvest celebrations, and for Passover. As Luke’s Gospel unfolds, the Holy Family is journeying to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover — they are fulfilling the Law and customs around which their families live their private and communal lives. While on their way back home, Jesus begins breaking away.

After a three-day journey, it is discovered that Jesus, the twelve-year-old, is not among the returning caravan. His parents return searching for him and find him still in the temple discussing things of the law with the “teachers.” After a short discussion between his parents and himself, Jesus returns to the family and the keeping of the Laws and customs of the family.

There is something different in the air — Jesus expresses an intensification of the response to God which is built upon the Law, but the “Father’s business” will be lived out and preached during the rest of his public life, leading to his death and resurrection. Jesus will confront these “elders” again eighteen years hence, and call them to a more personal response to God. He will be leaving his family of birth to extend the Covenant of life to the entire family of humankind. That will come later, but for now, Luke gives us a glimpse of how Jesus, Mary and Joseph lived their faith and love.

The couple and their child return home and by their living according to God’s law, the child grew strong and full of wisdom. So we have a picture of a holy family. They received from God, they returned thanks to the Giver; they were faithful to their lives.

It seems that child or children make the couple into a family. Mary and Joseph were not known as the Holy Couple. But what makes the family Holy? That is not as easy to define. But Mary gives us a hint. Her trip back to Jerusalem and the trip home from the temple describes a circle of her heart’s concern. The child, her husband, the temple, the sky and her child encompassed the elements of her holy family. A circle has no point of priority. Did she love God in the temple more than her child in her house or her husband by her side? Loving God makes the human and family circle all one act, so that loving her husband is loving God. Loving the sky and earth is loving God as well. Joseph’s circle of love is completed as well by his being husband, father, and worker with wood of the earth and providing a space for growth of the child.

From the announcement by the angel to Mary and then to Joseph this couple was going to live in a Christ-centered tension — from the finding of Jesus in the temple to the finding of Jesus at the foot of the cross, from the flight into Egypt to his leaving home, mystery, uncertainty and letting go created a salvific tension. Holiness has something to do with how we allow grace to enter our very human tensions and what we do with them. It is too easy to say: “belief is relief”. Tensions may not be dissolved — they received for what they are — invitations.

Flights, journeys, wonderings, confusion — this family is holy, not only because of the presence of the historical Jesus, but the living grace of their family vocation of mystery. The growing child the husband by her side, the temple and its laws and customs, the world around them were all elements of tension and Mary and Joseph kept walking, journeying, fleeing and trusting. How do you spell “holiness?” — you don’t; you live it!

—taken from the writings of Julie Kalkowski and Father Larry Gillick, S.J., which appear on the internet

**THE FULLNESS OF TIME:**

Jesus came in the fullness of time. He will come again in the fullness of time. Wherever Jesus, the Christ, is the time is brought to its fullness. We often experience our time as empty. We hope that tomorrow, next week, next month or next year the real things will happen. But sometimes we experience the fullness of time. That is when it seems that time stands still — that past, present, and future become one; that everything is present where we are; and that God, we, and all that is have come together in total unity. This is the experience of God’s time — “When the completion of the time came [that is: in the fullness of time], God sent his Son, born of a woman” [Galatians 4:4]. And in the fullness of time God will “bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth” [Ephesians 1:10]. It is in the fullness of time that we meet God.

—Henri Nouwen

**A REFLECTION ON THE FAMILY by POPE FRANCIS:**

Dear brothers and sisters: A few days after Christmas, the liturgy invites us to turn our eyes to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. It is good to reflect on the fact that the Son of God wanted to be in need of the warmth of a family — like all children. Precisely for this reason — because it is Jesus' family — the family of Nazareth is the model family, in which all families of the world can find their sure point of reference and sure inspiration. In Nazareth, the springtime of the human life of the Son of God began to blossom at the moment he was conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit in the virginal womb of Mary. Within the welcoming walls of the House of Nazareth, Jesus' childhood unfolded in joy, surrounded by the maternal attention of Mary and the care of Joseph, in whom Jesus was able to see God's tenderness.

In imitation of the Holy Family, we are called to rediscover the educational value of the family unit — it requires being founded on the love that always regenerates relationships, opening up horizons of hope. Within the family one can experience sincere communion when it is a house of prayer, when affections are serious, profound, pure, when forgiveness prevails over discord, when the daily harshness of life is softened by mutual tenderness and serene adherence to God's will. In this way, the family opens itself up to the joy that God gives to all those who know how to give joyfully. At the same time, it finds the spiritual energy to be open to the outside world, to others, to serving brothers and sisters, to cooperation in building an ever new and better world; capable, therefore, of becoming a bearer of positive stimuli; the family evangelizes by the example of life. It is true that there are problems, and at times arguments in every family — “Father, I argued...” But we are human, we are weak, and we all quarrel within the family at times. I will tell you something: if you quarrel within the family, do not end the day without making peace. “Yes, I quarreled”, but before the end of the day, make peace. And do you know why? Because a cold war, day after day, is extremely dangerous. It does not help.

And then, in the family there are three words — three phrases — that must always be held dear: “Excuse me”, “Thank you”, and “Sorry”. “Excuse me”, so as not to be intrusive in the life of others. “Excuse me: may I do something? Do you think I can do this? Excuse me”. Always, not being intrusive. “Excuse me” is the first phrase. “Thank you”: so much help, so much service that we do for one another within the family. Always say thank you. Gratitude is the lifeblood of the noble soul — “Thank you”. And then, the hardest one to say: “I am sorry”. Because we always do some bad things, and often someone is offended by this — “I am sorry”. Do not forget the three phrases: “excuse me”, “thank you”, and “I am sorry”. If there are these three phrases in a family, in a family environment, then the family is fine.

May the Virgin Mary grant that families throughout the world be increasingly fascinated by the evangelical ideal of the Holy Family, so as to become leaven of a new humanity and of a concrete and universal solidarity.

—Pope Francis, December 27, 2020

**ONE STAR:**

A star shone forth in heaven brighter than all the stars; its light was indescribable, and its strangeness caused amazement. All the rest of the constellations, together with the sun and moon, formed a chorus around the star, yet the star itself far outshone them all, and there was perplexity about the origin of this strange phenomenon, which was so unlike the others.

Consequently all magic and every kind of spell were dissolved, the ignorance so characteristic of wickedness vanished, and the ancient kingdom was abolished when God appeared in human form to bring the newness of eternal life. And what had been prepared by God began to take effect.

—St. Ignatius of Antioch



violates the soul, family life remains a sacrament — sometimes indeed because of its imperfections rather than simply in spite of them.

It is in forming hearts that are big enough to love and forgive within imperfection that we ready ourselves for heaven.

For many of us, coming home from the hospital to join a family will be our first baptism, our family dwelling will be our primary church, our family table our primary place of Eucharist, our living room our first sanctuary, our marriage bed our deepest experience of Eucharist, and our reconciliation with each other after the pettiness and hurts of family life our ongoing sacrament of reconciliation. It is there that the flow of the life that originates within God, and finds its perfection there, will flow through us.

—taken from the writings of Father Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I., which appear on the internet

**CARRYING THE BURDENS OF FAMILY LIFE:**

One of the most important powers that God bestowed upon us was when God created us for family. That's why he makes us so diverse — male, female; young, old; clever, slow, healthy, weak. We need each other and that need drives us to form families. But family comes not only from need, but also from fulfillment. We find fulfillment in family. Today, family faces a huge threat — the threat of false individualism. This is the feeling that I can make it on my own. A certain self-reliance is good, but if a person carries it too far, the results are disastrous. Young people, sometimes, rebel and cut themselves off. But we older people can also assert a false independence — “I don't want to be a burden to my children,” we say.

There are two reasons why no one should say: “I don't want to be a burden.” First, it isn't a matter of choice. No one wants to be a burden, but we are or may be a lot bigger one in the future. The person who thinks that he or she can escape being a burden — we are all burdens at various times in our lives on others. Second — and this is the real point — family is about bearing burdens or special circumstances or needs. Oftentimes, there is the burden of an “unplanned pregnancy” — at least unplanned for you; then there is the burden of a special needs child, or older child who goes off the rails, or those who go through a “second childhood” — the burden of total independence. Family means to bear one another's burdens.

We see that in the Holy Family. You know, Mary and Joseph had a special child. We get a glimpse of that in Luke's Gospel [2:45-52] as we recall that mysterious episode about Jesus disappearing for three days — and then finding him in the Temple. “Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.” Great anxiety — does not every family experience times of terrible anguish? Some are experiencing it right now. We need to pray for each other — and turn to the Holy Family. Anguish and burden come with family — nuclear families, extended families, and parish families. How often we are tempted to pull away. But the reality is that if you accept the burden of family, you will experience true freedom — and the joy only God can give.

Jesus lives in his “Father's house.” He wants to take us there. An, you know, there's no better place. Outside it is cold, dark, and miserable. In the Father's house, we have light, warmth, and nourishment.

For sure, family now involves anxiety and burden, but we have a brilliant future. Just as the Feast of the Holy Family comes on the heels of Christmas, so many other feasts come one after the other as the mystery of salvation continues to unfold — the Feasts of the Epiphany, the Baptism of Jesus, the Wedding Feast at Cana, and many more. This is what family life is all about.

—taken from the writings of Father Phil Bloom., which appear on the internet.



**FAMILY LIFE AS SACRAMENT:**

The catechism from which I drew my religious instruction as a child stated that a Christian sacrament was an “outward sign instituted by Jesus Christ to give us grace.” Later on, in the seminary, the theology text we used on sacraments was written by Father Edward Schillebeeckx, and he defined a sacrament in words to this effect: “A sacrament is anything that visibly, tangibly makes present or prolongs a saving action of God.” While both of those definitions are theologically very good, they are too abstract at times to give us a real sense of what precisely a sacrament is and where a sacrament is sometimes found. I prefer a more colloquial definition — one that simply defines a sacrament as “anything that gives skin to God.”

What is meant by this? There is a marvelous story told of a four-year-old girl who woke up one night frightened and convinced that there were monsters and spooks in her room. So, she ran to her parents’ bedroom. Her mother, however, brought her back to her own room, put on a number of lights, showed the child that there was nothing to be afraid of, put her back to bed, calmed her, and finally left her with the words: “There is nothing to be afraid of. When I leave, you won’t be alone in the room. God will be here with you.” But the young girl replied: “I know that God will be here with me, but I need someone in the room who has some skin!”

There is wisdom, and theology, to the girl’s response. As human beings we are creatures of the senses. We need something we can grasp tangibly — physically. Thus, a God who is everywhere is, at a certain point, nowhere. God, of course, already knows this and that is why we have been given God’s presence physically in sacrament. Understood in this sense then, there are more than seven sacraments. Family life is — or at least it can be — a sacrament. Like the Eucharist, or any other sacrament, it too can give flesh to God.

Partly this can be understood by contrast. Jean-Paul Sartre once said “the other is hell.” That, for a Christian and for every other major world religion, is the exact opposite of the truth. Hell is alienation, arrogant self-willed aloneness, the opposite of community, non-family. As John Shea so aptly puts it, hell is never a surprise waiting for a happy person, but the full-flowering of a life of arrogant alienation. Heaven is union with others, and thus as long as we are somehow linked to a community and family we cannot go to hell.

Buckminster Fuller once said that God is not just a noun, but also a verb. That is true. God is not just a person, but also a certain flow of life, a flow of receptivity and gratitude between three persons. Inside of God there is a kind of family life going on and Jesus has assured us that when we give and receive from each other within a family, when we break open our lives and hearts and joys and frustrations and egos and agendas and finances and share these with each other, we are letting the life of God flow through us and we are giving skin to the inner life of the Trinity. In that sense, family life is a sacrament and, for many of us, the most important sacrament of all because it is the one that in fact touches our lives and transforms us the most deeply.

But all of this should not be unduly romanticized. To say that family life is a sacrament is not to say that it will not be fraught with pettiness, frustration, anger, jealousies, selfish concern, pathology, and even at times real sin. Our families are never the holy family! I remember my mother — a truly pious and good woman — occasionally lamenting how in her idealism she dreamed of being the mother of the holy family — and she ended up getting stuck with us!

Our families are never the romanticized stuff of our adolescent or pious dreams. Nor are they ever the idealized families of literature and movies, where people are still attractive, interesting, and worthy of our understanding and sympathy even when they are petty, selfish, jealous, unfaithful, and sinful. As we know, understanding and sympathy in the midst of the muck and grime of real family life is considerably harder to crank up. All of that notwithstanding, however, unless there is present the kind of abuse that

**HELPING EACH OTHER TO GROW IN FAMILY:**

Luke’s Gospel for this Feast of the Holy Family gives us a glimpse of the family life of Jesus and his parents Joseph and Mary [Luke 2:45-52]. Each year the family made the obligatory journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the week-long celebration of Passover. When Jesus was twelve — about ready to assume the religious responsibilities of a Jewish adult — he traveled with his parents to Jerusalem for the feast. But he did not return with them — choosing instead to stay and participate in the weekly informal discussions held by the Sanhedrin in the Temple. After a day’s journey, Joseph and Mary, realizing Jesus was not with their relatives or friends, returned to Jerusalem and found their son in the open discussion, impressing the teachers with his questions and answers. Expressing her displeasure, Mary said: “Son, why have you done this to us?” Jesus answered: “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Mary and Joseph did not really understand what he meant, but his mother kept pondering the whole event. For his part, Jesus returned to Nazareth and was obedient to his parents, growing in “wisdom and age and favor before God and people.”

All of us are called to live this story throughout our lives. A collegian who sees it as a rite of passage story concludes that she is still too dependent on her parents and has to take some concrete steps to achieve a healthy interdependence. A mother who is overly protective of her teenage son changes course and dedicates herself to helping him use his growing freedom wisely. A husband who wants his family life to be totally peaceful recognizes that conflict is inevitable, that it can occur without anyone really being at fault, and that it can be a stimulus for greater family harmony. A wife who grew up with an abusive father, realizes that she must forgive her father if she is to be a more loving spouse and mother. A young couple just starting their own family commit themselves to handing on the faith and values they both received in their wonderful families of origin.

How do you respond to Luke’s Gospel? What difference does it make in your life?

—taken from the writings of Father Jim Bacik which appear on the internet

**SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — JANUARY 15<sup>th</sup>:**

Our Savior Lutheran Church, across the street from Gilmour, has a Food Pantry which distributes food to the community on the **third Saturday of each month**. They welcome volunteers. If you want to volunteer, they have instituted some **new procedures** because of the Coronavirus. **Thus they help pre-pack nonperishables in bags on Thursday evening beginning at 5 PM.** They continue this prepacking on Friday if needed. Check with Elina Gurney on this. **On Saturday morning at 9 AM, they need help putting items from the foodbank into the prepacked bags.** Only volunteers will be allowed in the Church building, so you will be protected against the virus. Clients will remain outside in their cars. **The food pantry is then open from 9:30 AM—1:30 PM on Saturday.**

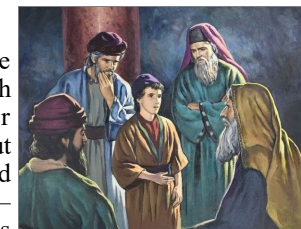
Our Savior Lutheran’s Food Pantry was formed to serve those in emergency situations and/or with on-going need in the cities of Mayfield Heights, Mayfield Village, Highland Heights and Gates Mills. The Food Pantry respects social and cultural diversity and upholds the worth and dignity of those it serves. All those in the area with need will be served equally, as supplies allow. The food pantry is a member of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank.

**Please let Elina Gurney know if you would like to help. You can do this through the chapel office [440-473-3560] or by emailing Elina Gurney at [gurney.oh@gmail.com](mailto:gurney.oh@gmail.com).** In this critical time, this is a wonderful way to serve others. Please consider this opportunity.

**A VISION:**

Set your sights on a place higher than your eyes can see.

—Rumi



**A TEENAGER IN THE HOLY FAMILY:**

Luke's Gospel for this Feast of the Holy Family is the only place in the New Testament where we see Jesus as a teenager [Luke 2:41-52]. It should not surprise us, then, that in this scene from Luke's Gospel we find the holy family in turmoil. Now, I am not picking on teenagers. Teenagers deserve our respect. It is hard being a teenager. So many things are changing. There are new expectations, new fears, new feelings, and oh so many hormones! Many of us wish that we were younger, but few of us wish that we were fifteen. Now having said that, living in a house with a teenager can be challenging — challenging for both parent and child. On both sides, it is difficult to communicate. It is difficult to understand. On both sides, emotions can explode and feelings can be hurt.

All of this is reflected in Luke's gospel, as Mary and Joseph attempt to relate to their teenage son. There is poor communication — Mary and Joseph do not even know that Jesus was staying in Jerusalem. There is hurt and anxiety — Mary says to her son: "How could you have done this to us?" And, of course, there is the confident belief that it is never my fault — Jesus says: "Why were you looking for me. I was in my father's house." It's not my problem.

We see in this passage something very important — the stresses in family life should not be considered sinful. How can they be? Jesus was the Son of God; Mary was born without sin. Yet they still misunderstood one another and ended up hurting one another. This Gospel is telling us it does us no good to tear ourselves apart because of family stress. Our failure to connect with one another is less a sin and more the price we pay for living with one another.

Having said that, all of us want to hurt one another less. How do we do that? The Scripture Readings for this Feast of the Holy Family show us the way. Sirach tells us that families need to relate to one another with honor and kindness [Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14]. This is especially true when things become difficult. A number of years ago there was a television special about the Babemba tribe in South Africa. This tribe had a particular way of dealing with people who were out of order. When someone did something wrong or was antisocial, the tribe would place that member in the middle of the village and form a circle around him or her. Then one by one each member of the tribe would shout out something that was good about the person — some way in which the person brought honor to the tribe. Each person took their turn, and no one said anything negative or even referred to the negative behavior. This process would take several hours. But, when everyone had spoken their piece, they considered the person in the middle of the circle to be "corrected," and they began a celebration. The African tribe was convinced that when someone is out of order, it is more useful to treat that person with honor and kindness than with anger and criticism. There must be some truth to this practice, because it is said that they needed to use this "correction" very seldom.

Now I do not know if we could take this ritual from Africa and apply it to twenty-first century America. But if we tried, it might look something like this. Your teenage son has been sitting in front of the computer screen for two hours. You've asked him four times to take out the garbage, and as of yet there is no movement. Now you could go into his room and explode. Or you could go into his room and say this: "Dominic, here are a few things I know to be true about you. You are a good student. You work hard for your grades. You are a good athlete. Other people look up to you. You are a loyal friend — generous and caring. I remember last month when your friend Mary's uncle died how you found the time to be with her and to support her. You bring honor to this family, and I am proud of you." You could say that and then walk out.



parents to pray together every day for their children after the children grow up and move out.

Jesus was subject to his parents and obedient to them — He allowed them to fulfill their responsibility to care for him in all ways. Children need to be taught that the authority of their parents comes from God. The Fourth Commandment — Honor your Father and Mother — is rooted in the responsibility God gives parents to lead their children to be all they can be: physically, mentally, emotionally, and, most importantly, spiritually.

Jesus was the center of the Holy Family. Jesus must be the center of all our families.

—taken from the writings of Monsignor Joseph Pellegrino which appear on the internet

**ONLY ONE MESSAGE:**

"And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth" [John 1:14]. The Christmas message ultimately is about union — the healing of our separate selves and world through Christ. There's really only one message, and we just have to keep saying it until finally we're undefended enough to hear it and to believe it — there is no separation between God and creation. That's the message. But we can't believe it.

And so this Word — this Eternal Word of God — that we read about in the prologue to John's Gospel, leapt down and took its abiding place on Earth, in order to heal every bit of separation and "splitness" that we experience. That "splitness" and separation is the sadness of the human race. When we feel separate, when we feel disconnected, when we feel split from our self, from our family, from reality, from the Earth, from God, we will be angry and depressed people. We know we weren't created for that separateness; we were created for union.

So God sent into the world one who would personify that union — who would put human and divine together; who would put spirit and matter together. That's what we spend our whole life trying to believe — that this ordinary earthly sojourn means something. Sometimes we wake up in the morning wondering, what does it all mean? What's it all for? What was I put here for? Where is it all heading?

I believe it's all a school. And it's all a school of love. And everything is a lesson — everything. Every day, every moment, every visit to the grocery store, every moment of our so-ordinary life is meant to reveal this great mystery: "My God, I'm a daughter of God! I'm a son of the Lord! I'm a sibling of Christ! It's all okay. I'm already home free! There's no place I have to go. I'm already here!" But if we don't enjoy that, if we don't allow that, basically we fall into meaninglessness.

Friends, we need to surrender to some kind of ultimate meaning. We need to desire it, seek it, want it, and need it. I know no one likes to hear this, but we even need to suffer for it. And what is suffering? Suffering is the emptying out of the soul so there's room for love, so there's room for the Christ, so there's room for God.

—taken from the writings for Father Richar Rohr, O.F.M., which appear on the internet.

**NOVENA TO BLESSED BASILE MOREAU:**

Blessed Basile Moreau was the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, to which Fr. John and the Brothers at Gilmour belong. We have two booklets with Novenas to Blessed Basile Moreau. One is used for a personal intention or healing; the other is used when praying for the intention or healing of someone other than yourself. The Novenas were composed by Father Thomas Looney, C.S.C. Many have received blessings and healings through the intercession of Blessed Basile Moreau, and now we want to extend this invitation to you and your family. Please see Father John and he will be glad to give you the booklets.

**GOD'S PROMISE:**

You seek us in the darkness of night and promise to bring us into the light



**JESUS — THE CENTER OF THE CATHOLIC FAMILY:**

Luke's Gospel presents the fifth joyful mystery of the Rosary — the Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple [Luke 2:41-52]. There are many things that we could consider. Here we have Jesus, representing the New Way — or, if you wish, the New Testament — presenting Himself to the teachers of the Old Way — or Old Testament. He is doing this in His Father's house — the Temple. Jesus is discussing scripture — the Word of God the Father. The Old Testament — the Hebrew Scriptures — was receiving its authenticity from the New Testament, the Word of God become flesh. Jesus' parents are panic struck — and rightly so. It was only twelve years earlier that Herod tried to kill Jesus. True, Herod was dead now, but perhaps some people still loyal to Herod had heard that there was an exceptional young boy in Jerusalem and had kidnaped Jesus. They were relieved when they found him after three days.

Three days. The disciples of the Lord would be relieved when the third day Jesus rose from the dead. Most important for this Feast of the Holy Family is the conclusion of Luke's Gospel — Jesus went back to Nazareth with his parents and was obedient to them, growing in wisdom, and age, and favor with the Father.

So let's look at the family — the Catholic family. For the Catholic family to function as God meant it to function, there must be certain fundamentals. The family must be centered on the real presence of God's love. This springs from a sacramental union of husband and wife — Sacramental union. Sadly, some people are more concerned with their wedding than they are with their marriage. They willingly sacrifice the sacrament of matrimony for a sunset. But just as the secular celebration of Christmas quickly fades away on December 26<sup>th</sup>, a secular marriage will quickly fade into a simple remembrance of a wonderful party. What is needed — what is necessary — for a real marriage, a Christian marriage, a Catholic marriage, is the presence of Jesus. The sacrament of matrimony is the union of Jesus Christ to the love of the husband and wife.

With Christ present in their marriage, the newly married couple joins the Lord in creating the Little Church. That's an expression that used to be popular in describing the Catholic Family. The Little Church exists as long as there is a sacramental union — even if the couple does not have children. If the husband and wife are blessed with children, then the children are brought up in the Little Church of their parents' marriage. That is why we baptize infants. They are baptized in the faith of their parents. People are not ready to think about marriage unless they are ready to think about having children and raising them for God. Those who think that they are too young to have children are too young to marry.

Parents have the responsibility of caring for their children in every aspect of their children's lives. They feed them, keep them clean, care for them when they are sick, help them to learn how to get along with other children, help them as their minds develop, and in all ways protect them. The greatest responsibility that parents have, though, is to raise their children for God. They have to give their children the ability to become that unique reflection of God's presence He created them to be. Parents bring their children to Church and prepare them to celebrate the second two sacraments of initiation — communion and confirmation. They make sure their home is a Little Church by keeping all that would destroy that Church out of their home. This is a huge task considering the ability of evil to enter the home through the many ways that pornography attacks the home.

Parents also realize that the best way they can provide a Little Church for their children is by having an active prayer life within their homes. Family prayer time, from grace before meals to night prayers, and even, possibly, hopefully, the family rosary are just some of the ways that families grow in their spiritual lives. Parents need to pray for their children even after they no longer are part of the children's bedtime prayers. A wonderful way to continue to nurture the presence of God in the Little Church is for



Now, would this work? Is it practical? I am not sure. But I am sure of this. What holds a family together is love and respect. Therefore, we should not abandon those qualities when things become difficult. We cannot go far wrong by telling the other members of our family what is best about them. It is always good to speak to one another with honor and with kindness. And — if we are lucky — it might even move someone to take out the garbage.

—taken from the writings of Father George Smiga, which appear on the internet

**WHEN WE ASK WHY:**

“Whenever I think I'm a bad mom, it makes me feel better to remember that Mary lost Jesus for a whole three days.” My mother said this a lot while I was growing up. So, it is no surprise that whenever I find myself feeling defeated and hopeless, I reflect on Luke's Gospel — and the fifth Joyful Mystery of the rosary. I come to this Gospel in moments of confusion, because to me, this is the most confusing passage in all of divine revelation. I cannot understand why Jesus would commit an action that he knew would bring pain and fear to the hearts of his parents.

God is all-powerful, so His hand is never forced. Even in situations that are not of His own devising — like the fall of Adam — He remains in control. God is also all-good, so we know that when He does make a decision — like the decision to remain in the temple — it is with the well-being of humankind in His heart. So why did Jesus stay behind in Jerusalem, knowing it would put his parents through three days of hell?

I don't have the perfect answer; I do not speak for God. But I suspect that I know other questions that have the same answer as this one. Questions like: Why is there so much pain in the world? Why is there so much death? Why is there so much despair? Why does God allow bad things to happen to those who love and serve Him?

While Luke's Gospel raises these questions, nonetheless, it is the perfect Gospel for this feast — there could be no better passage in all of Scripture to convey the complexity of life and love. While God could use any mechanism in the whole world to communicate His message, He chose to do so through the stories of family relationships — complicated ones, no less. Families who experience poverty, pain, and exile; families who betray one another and forgive one another; families that fall apart and are put back together.

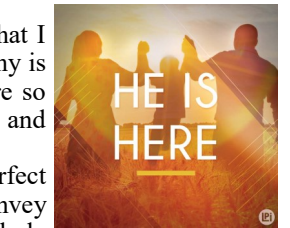
The Feast of the Holy Family reminds us that love is not only a choice, it is also a risk. If Joseph had walked away from the pregnant Mary [see Matthew 1:20], he never would have been in this position — out of his mind with worry, combing Jerusalem for any sign of the boy he now loved as his own and could not live without. Love has a price. That price, so often, is pain. Today is the feast that reminds us that even Mary, who had perfect faith, once asked God: “Why have you done this?” Today is the feast that reminds us that so often when we stare at God, our eyes blurry with tears, and ask “Why?” we are, in fact, asking Him: “Where?” Where were You? Why couldn't we find You in this mess? We were looking so hard.

And, finally, today is the feast that reminds us He is here — in the midst of the confusion and the despair and the anxiety. He is always here, waiting.

—taken from the writings of Colleen Jurkiewicz Dorman, which appear on the internet

**SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION:**

Father John is available to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with you. Please call him [440-473-3560] to arrange for this experience. All social distancing will remain in place. Always remember the Lord's invitation: “I will give them a heart with which to understand that I am the Lord. They shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart”. [Jeremiah 24:7].



**WELCOME HOME — YOUR FAMILY, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH:**

When we were little, my mom used to skip down the aisles and sing in the grocery store. My reaction? — “Um, who is that lady and why is she skipping in the aisles? We are definitely not related!” This scene is real; every family has its own version. Families are quirky. Everyone has that weird uncle, or stories of friends and relatives in quirky situations — right?

Ok fine, maybe you don’t have a weird uncle, but you definitely have a friend who does.

The Catholic Church teaches that the family is the “domestic church.” What does this mean? It’s just a fancy way of saying that human families mirror a family that is bigger than them. Families should be a place of life, love, and community — as well as a place to grow in holiness.

Families are a little interesting — maybe a little crazy — a lot of fun, and hopefully full of love. Growing up, I moved a lot. One thing I learned about moving every three years was that home wasn’t about a place — home was where my family was. Even though my family is a little quirky, I know that I grew up in a family full of life, love, and community. But I also know something else — my family is nowhere near perfect — and neither am I.

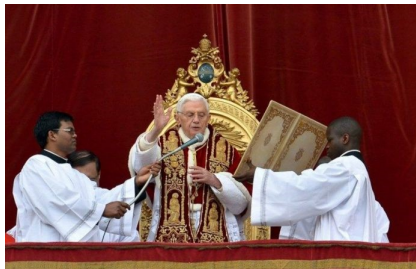
While we know the ideal of how families should function as the “domestic church”, we also know the reality that human families fail. Parents fail sometimes in their role as parents, and brothers and sisters hurt us. No family is perfect or excused from human weakness. We come from all types of families, loud, crazy, large, small, and broken. Maybe you don’t feel like you have much of a family at home; maybe you feel like your family doesn’t understand you; or maybe you are the only one practicing faith at home.

The Catholic Church is also a family — in fact the Catholic Church is one big family. We are all adopted sons and daughters of God, we all have the same God as Father [see Galatians 4:6-7] — which means that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ!

When I was in college, I had the amazing opportunity to study abroad. Part of my trip included a visit to Rome, where I was able to gather with thousands of other Catholics in Saint Peter’s Square outside of the Vatican to pray with Pope Benedict XVI. I don’t think that I have ever had a more profound experience of understanding how as Catholics we really are one big family. Upon seeing and praying with our spiritual Father at the time, Pope Benedict, I was drawn to tears of joy. I was with thousands of Catholics; we all spoke different languages, but we all prayed through the same Holy Spirit. I looked at the woman next to me; she spoke Spanish and I spoke English. We couldn’t communicate, but we were both crying with tears of joy. And then, what I knew about the Catholic Church as family became a reality. We just looked at each other through our tears, and knew we were sisters in Christ.

This is one of the many beauties of being Catholics. Our home is in the Catholic Church. Sometimes our human families fail. Members of the Catholic Church aren’t perfect either, but through grace and the sacraments we strive to be best we can be here on earth. Here are a few things to remember as we think both about our own families and our family in the Church:

- Even though our families can be challenging — and maybe even a little embarrassing! — these are the people whom God has given us to love and help lead to heaven. We are called to do our best to love and be an example of Christ to those in our families!
- You really are part of one big family. The Catholic Church is universal — it stretches across the entire world! You have brothers and sisters in Christ everywhere!
- You always have a home in the Catholic Church. Whether or not you feel at home in your earthly homes, the Church is always there to embrace you with open arms.



- Get to know your parish! Community is essential for feeling at home. Join a Bible study, get to know the teens in youth group, other families at your parish, and even the elderly!
- Most importantly, grow in your relationship with God. Pray to know God more as Father, and Mary as your Mother. Get to know the saints in heaven — they are part of our family too!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, thank you for being part of my family. I am praying for you!

—taken from the writings of Michelle Neitzke, a youth minister

**LIFE TEEN and EDGE:**

**Our Life Teen and EDGE youth group is meeting in-person again.** We will meet **for an hour beginning at 11:30 AM following our 10 AM Sunday Mass in the Lennon Board**

**Room.** If you are unable to join us, there are many resources available for you on the Life Teen website — [lifeteen.com](http://lifeteen.com). There are numerous blogs and videos for you to connect with. The Life Teen national office continues to release many new programs. **Please contact Father John for more information. And please join us each Sunday for our Mass at 10 AM — in person or live-streamed, and then come to our Life Teen/EDGE gathering after Mass.** And above all, let us continue to join each other in prayer. **Father John is available for you. Please contact him [cell: 216-570-9276].**

**READINGS FOR THE WEEK:**

<b>Monday:</b>	1 John 1:1-4, John 20:1-8
<b>Tuesday:</b>	1 John 1:5-2:2, Matthew 2:1-18
<b>Wednesday:</b>	1 John 2:3-11, Luke 2:22-35
<b>Thursday:</b>	1 John 2:12-17, Luke 2:36-40
<b>Friday:</b>	1 John 2:18-21, John 1:1-18
<b>Saturday:</b>	Numbers 6:22-27, Galatians 4:4-7, Luke 2:16-21
<b>Feast of the Epiphany:</b>	Isaiah 60:1-6, Ephesians 3:2-6, Matthew 2:1-12

**A PRAYER:**

O Lord, how hard it is to accept your way. You come to me as a small, powerless child born away from home. You live for me as a stranger in your own land. You die for me as a criminal outside the walls of the city, rejected by your own people, misunderstood by your friends, and feeling abandoned by your God.

As I celebrate your birth, I am trying to feel loved, accepted, and at home in this world, and I am trying to overcome the feelings of alienation and separation that continue to assail me. But I wonder now if my deep sense of homelessness does not bring me closer to you than my occasional feelings of belonging. Where do I truly celebrate your birth? Is it in a cozy home or in an unfamiliar house, among welcoming friends or among unknown strangers, with feelings of well-being or with feelings of loneliness?

I do not have to run away from those experiences that are closest to yours. Just as you do not belong to this world, so I do not belong to this world. Every time I feel this way I have an occasion to be grateful and to embrace you better and taste more fully your joy and peace.

Be with me where I feel poorest. I trust that this is the place where you will find your manger and bring your light. Amen.