

CLOSING PRAYER:

~ A Prayer during the 4th Week in Lent ~

O Jesus,
Light of the world,
why were you born,
and why did you die
in such obscurity?

Bethlehem was hardly a shining place —
the stable hardly a burning stand
for light to come into the world.

Was not Calvary too
an ending place
for life and light?
And would not a cross
in the afternoon sky,
turn all eyes away?

Blind man,
did your eyes turn away too?
Or were you
so accustomed to the dark
as to see what others could not see?

For once —
it was not long ago —
Someone seeing you all in darkness
touched your eyes
and told you to wash
until you saw God's glory
shining through your beggar's clothes.

And you believed.
No one could stop you,
or explain it all away.
You believed.

And so do I.
Amen.

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.

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

PENANCE SERVICE:

Our community celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation will be held on **Monday, April 4th at 7:00 PM.** Our service is centered around reflections by the various characters involved in the passion and death of Jesus. There will also be songs and hymns, and a time to bring ourselves from our sinful ways back to the Lord. As we confront our own sinfulness, we realize that we, too, have a part to play in the death of Jesus. The service will last about 45 minutes. There will be a time for individual confessions following the service, for those who wish to avail themselves of this opportunity. Please join us.



HARVEST FOR HUNGER and THE CLEVELAND FOOD BANK:

This year's Harvest for Hunger campaign is more important than ever. Living through a pandemic has created unthinkable hardships for many Northeast Ohio neighbors, children, and families. In addition to easing the burden of tough choices these people have to make — like choosing between paying for groceries or paying to heat their homes. The Harvest for Hunger Campaign provides the gift of security and hope at a time when it is needed most.



The Greater Cleveland Food Bank has been very grateful for the outpouring of support we've received from the community in response to COVID-19. This crisis has exacerbated the situation for so many families who were already struggling. Even though we don't know what the future will hold, we know that it will take months and even years for our clients and community to recover. With your support, the Food Bank and our agency partners will be here for the long haul.

Beginning next Sunday, and continuing throughout the campaign, we will be collected food items. Here is a list of food items that the Foodbank needs — Beans, Peanut Butter, Canned or Boxed Entrees, Pasta Sauce [low sodium please], 100% Juice, Cereal, Canned Protein [Tuna or Chicken], Whole Grain Rice and Pasta, and Canned Fruits and Veggies. **Place the items you bring in the boxes in the Narthex and we will take care of them from there. Cash donations may also be made. Please put them in the collection baskets at the door of the chapel and make sure that the envelope is clearly marked toward this purpose.**

DIOCESE OF CLEVELAND CATHOLIC MEN'S CONFERENCE:

The Diocese of Cleveland is sponsoring a **Catholic Men's Conference** on **Saturday, April 2nd.** The Conference will take place at **The Holiday Inn Rockside**, 6001 Rockside Road in Independence. Registration begins at 8 AM, and the conference will conclude with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Malesic. Mass will conclude at 5 PM. Featured speakers will be Father Nathan Cromley [nationally known speaker, writer, retreat leader, explorer, innovator, educator and devotee of Our Lady], and Kevin Reilly [a cancer survivor who underwent surgery to remove his left arm and part of his shoulder and 5 ribs]. His message of hope and faith is inspiring. **To register, go to www.cmfneo.com, or call 877-208-5585. Cost for the day is \$35 [includes continental Breakfast and Lunch].**



BROTHER DAN KANE, C.S.C., RETURNS IN CONCERT:

On **Sunday, April 10 at 1:30 PM** in our **Center for the Performing Arts**, **Brother Dan Kane, C.S.C., will return in concert.** Brother Dan recently retired from Gilmour and returned to Columba Hall at Notre Dame. His return to Gilmour is indeed a special occasion. We hope you will join us for this special concert featuring selections including Bach, Chopin and Mozart on the Steinway grand piano. There will be a reception following the recital. The Event will also be live-streamed on Gilmour.org/live.



PRAYER REQUESTS:

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

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:

- For Marie Forsythe who is seriously ill.
- For Fletcher Linsz, brother of incoming student, Logan Linsz ['26], who is undergoing treatment for Hodgkins Lymphoma.
- For Agnes Mirando, grandmother of David ['12], Agnes ['14] and Matthew ['25], who is seriously ill with a tumor.
- For David Matis, husband of former Middle School Director, Paula Mattis, father of Kim ['89] and Bill ['91 Mattis, who is under the care of hospice.
- For Daniel Saunders, father of former Gilmour administrator, Yvonne Saunders, who is critically ill.

FOR THE DECEASED:

- For Richard Schuenger
- For Vita Tinella [anniversary]
- For John Climaco
- For Dorothy Poland.
- For Irene Cunningham, grandmother of Carolyn ['03], Kevin ['05], and Kathleen ['08] Benacci
- For David Hinckley ['71], brother of Thomas Hinckley ['72]
- For Daniel Weist
- For Donald Sledz ['59], brother of Leonard Sledz ['63]

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

- For the people of the Ukraine and the people of Russia; for an end to the war; and for all people of the world to work more ardently for peaceful resolutions to political and social issues.
- For Thomas ['65] and Carolyn Brigham, and Hannah LeBerteaux ['05], whose homes were destroyed in the Colorado fire.
- 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.

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. Thanks for not forgetting about us.

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|---|-----------|----|
| Offerings-----[Saturday, March 19]-----[Weekly Mail-in] ----- | \$ 135.00 | 19 |
| Offerings-----[Sunday, March 20]----- | \$ 436.00 | |

PRAYER REQUESTS:

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

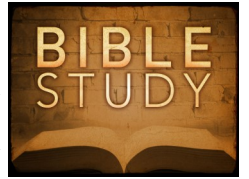
PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:

- For Les Richardson, father of Gilmour Nature Specialist, Darci Sanders, who is recovering from Brain Surgery.
- For Patrick Byers [‘65], who is seriously ill with a brain bleed following a fall.
- For Brother Donald Kuchenmeister , C.S.C., who is recovering from a heart procedure.
- For Elaine Hocevar, mother of Greg [‘97], Matthew [‘98], Ryan [‘00], and Sarah [‘01] Hocevar, who is critically ill and awaiting a heart transplant
- For Barry Cooper, cousin of AVI associate director, Bobbie Bonner, who suffered a stroke and has brain bleed.
- For Eric Penick [‘71] who is recovering from surgery.
- For Thomas Hughes [‘56], who is undergoing medical treatment.
- For John Visconsi, brother of Tom [‘61] and Tony Visconsi [‘75] and Paulette Poklar, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For William Rogal, father of Jill Thompson, who is undergoing rehab following surgery
- For Cassandra Williams [‘15], sister of Sebastian Williams [‘18] who is undergoing treatment for inoperable cancer.
- 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 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 recovering from a bone marrow transplant
- 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 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 Chiacchiarri, 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.
- For Paul Tuggey, grandfather of Charlie Tuggey [‘21], seriously ill following a heart attack.



NEXT BIBLE STUDY — WEDNESDAY, APR. 6th:

Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Wednesday, April 6th 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:**



How the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus completes the Passover.

If you text or email Father John [blazekj@gilmour.org] he will send you the zoom link and password. This is an important stop 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:

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|--|----------------------------------|
| Sunday, March 27: 4 th Week in Lent | 10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream |
| Monday, March 28: | NO MASS |
| Tuesday, March 29: | NO MASS |
| Tuesday, March 30: | NO MASS |
| Thursday, March 31: | NO MASS |
| Friday, April 1: | NO MASS |
| Saturday, April 2: 5 th Week in Lent | NO MASS |
| Sunday, April 3: 5 th Week in Lent | 10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream |

TETELESTAI IS COMING:

Our Lady Chapel is blessed to be only 1 of 2 places in the Cleveland Area to host the Passion Play, *Tetelestai*, this coming Lent. **Cleveland Performing Arts Ministries’ musical passion play will be presented at Our Lady Chapel on Friday, April 8th [8 PM], Saturday, April 9th [8PM], and Sunday, April 10th [2 PM] — Palm Sunday weekend..**



Tetelestai’s dramatic stage production and timeless music tell the story of Jesus’ trial, execution and resurrection in a visual way that will leave a lasting impression. Having *Tetelestai* here as we begin Holy Week will be a great way to enter into our observance of the Paschal Mystery.

There is no charge for the presentation, but free-will offerings will be accepted. **Covid Protocols will be in effect — exactly what these will be will be announced closer to the date.** For more information, please contact the chapel office [440-473-3560] or visit the *Tetelesai* website, www.livethepassion.org.

REFLECTION ON THE THEME FOR THE WEEK:

Luke's Gospel for this 4th Week in Lent is the story of the prodigal son [Luke 15:1-3, 11-32] — a passage that is very familiar to all of us. Our initial reaction to this story of Jesus might be: "I know this one; I have heard it so many times in my life." Yet, we need to stop ourselves and to hear God's urgings to listen deeper.

To do this, we need to "back up" and hear taunts of Jesus from the Pharisees and scribes: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Rather than focusing on a hard working son who despite doing everything right never gets a party, we need to discover the joy expressed by the father who sees his wayward son metaphorically come back to life. There could be no better reason for a joyful celebration. What a perfect message of conversion for this Lenten season.

St. Paul supports this message of conversion in his letter to the Church at Corinth as he teaches about reconciliation: "I mean that God was reconciling the world in Christ. God is not counting our sins against us. And God has committed to us the message of reconciliation [2 Corinthians 5:17-21]."

In order to fully appreciate the power of this message, we all need to stop and get in touch with the reality that deep down, we all desire to return to the ground or land or home from which we have wandered. The Eucharist is that Home — that resting place — where we are welcomed again — prodigal though we may have been. We renew the divine embrace and we pledge once more to live more generously the embrace we receive.

Joshua has taken over the leadership of the people of Israel and has led them for all these years of their wandering in the desert. They arrive in their new land, flowing with abundance. Because of their forty-year pilgrimage, those men who were born during these years have not been circumcised. Circumcision was the physical sign of agreement or acceptance of the covenant made between God and Abraham years before. This not being circumcised was the "reproach of Egypt" because the men of Egypt were not circumcised. Upon their entering the new and holy land, it was important that they, as a nation, pause and have the men more fully enter the Jewish traditions and practices [Joshua 5:9-12].

They celebrated the great Passover that year as full members of the Jewish people — their freedom from slavery now being complete. The raining down of manna ceases, and the beginning of the eating from the produce from their new abundant land begins. God had been faithful to the covenant over these many years by freeing them, and feeding them; now they were to earn their bread from the sweat of their brows and the fertility of the land.

Luke's Gospel is a wonderful parable open to all kinds of questions, answers, and self-reflections. The younger son is a selfish, greedy, and rebellious young man. The elder son is secure in the fact that he has done all things well — "Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders". The Pharisees certainly knew with whom Jesus was comparing them. As the father in the parable welcomes back the disobedient son, so all "sinners" are welcomed back by God. Jesus eats with them — as does the father and his household eat with the welcomed-back son.

The elder son does not want to have anything to do with the household, the younger son, nor the celebration. The Pharisees stand at a distance and judge the entire gathering of Jesus and His embrace of sinners. The father reminds his elder son that they have always been together and in love have shared in everything — "You were never lost," the father tells him, "but your brother, was dead and gone, but now he has returned." There is always the welcome back of God. Jesus is expressing that God never separates from even the worst sinner. The father had gone out each day to see if the younger son had come to his senses, and the son had done just that. Sitting with the pigs and their messiness, the son looks around, smells around and wakes up. Remember, pigs, to the Jewish religious sensitivities were the worst things with which to associate. The young son would love to talk himself back into his truest identity — that he is a son of a loving father. But he thinks he has lost that, so he is prepared to ask that he be treated as one who will work for his bread by the sweat of his brow.

The rest of the story is Jesus-wise predictable. The message here is clear — Jesus is the Redeemer;

THERE'S MORE TO THIS STORY:

Those — like Jesus of Nazareth — who employ parables when they teach have a deliberate, specific agenda. For such people parables are more than just cute, memorable little stories. By integrating them into their teaching, they're revealing their unique mentality. Parables only come into play when teachers are trying to go beyond just providing more information or facts to their students — they are a sign that teachers are interested in changing the way their students process all the information and facts entering their brains. A parable is a means to retool one's frame of mind, telling the recipient: "You can't get to where I am from where you are. Unless you drastically change the way in which you look at reality, you'll never understand what I'm saying."

A parable traps the listener to sign off on something he or she normally would never accept. When, for instance, Jesus is criticized for wasting his time preaching to the crowds, he quickly comes up with a parable about a farmer sowing seed [see Mark 4:1-9, 13-20]. If he stopped sowing just because the process wasted most of the seed, we'd have no bread. It all depends on how you look at it.

In St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus' parable of the prodigal father accomplishes something similar. Triggered by those in the evangelist's community who can always be counted on to come up with logical reasons for putting limits on their forgiveness of others, the gospel Jesus reframes the issue into a death and life situation — "Your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found" [Luke 15:1-3, 11-32]. Looking at the younger son's behavior from that perspective, what father — and what Christian — wouldn't throw legalities to the wind? We're dealing with a whole new ball game.

One of the problems we face today is that once Jesus' parables were lifted from their original contexts and "allegorized," they lost a lot of their kick. Rarely do they demand a 180-degree turnabout in the way we think. Yet, as Paul mentions in his letter to the Church at Corinth, Christians always presume they must develop a new frame of mind. Why? Because the person we imitate is himself a "new creation." The risen Jesus is unlike anyone we've encountered. If we approach that unique person with the same mentality we approach everyone else, we'll never develop into other Christs; never scratch the surface of the "righteousness of God" [2 Corinthians 5:17-21].

Just as things changed when the Israelites celebrated their first Passover in the Promised Land, so if we really want to appreciate the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, we must change our value system. That transformation is what the Galilean carpenter insists upon when he commands his followers, "Repent!"

It's sadly clear that we've resisted this change through the centuries. Instead of developing the mindset of the risen Jesus, we've successfully squeezed his teachings into our mindset, lopping off an ear there, a leg here, until it fits. How can we possibly carry on his "ministry of reconciliation" unless we first accept the uniqueness of that ministry?

As important as Luke's Gospel is in our imitation of Jesus, do you realize that, before the 1970 lectionary reforms, this passage was never proclaimed during a Sunday liturgy? Unless we heard it during a religion class — as I did — or in a retreat conference, we could have gone a lifetime not knowing it exists. And though I did know about it, for some reason I don't remember anything ever being said about the prodigal father's key older son — the person whose mindset triggered the parable's creation.

Even today the vast majority of Scripture is never found in a liturgical setting. Don't you wonder what else is "out there"?

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

FINDING HAPPINESS:

Our days are happier when we give people a bit of our heart rather than a piece of our mind.

—Ritu Ghatourey



THE STORY OF OUR “LIFE-GIVING” GOD:

What’s the message of the story of the prodigal son [Luke 15:1-3, 11-32]? Is it repentance? If so, we would have to admit that the young man's repentance was motivated almost entirely by his own self-interest. He was dying to eat pig slop. Just about anything would look better than that! Such repentance sets a pretty low bar.

Is it forgiveness? The father never said a word about forgiveness or absolution or “I’m glad you learned your lesson.” Even when the older brother whined, the father said nothing to excuse the younger one's behavior. He simply pointed out that everything he had belonged to the elder as well.

And he threw a party.

In the Scripture Readings for this 4th Week in Lent, we find the Israelites are in a long-awaited moment of transition. God says: “I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you.” The people were no longer slaves, and, just about as important, they were no longer desert wanderers. They had come into a land where, instead of waiting for “bread” to drop from heaven, they were eating the fruit of the land just as Adam did at first in the garden, and then by the sweat of his brow. No matter that they had to toil, build their homes, dig their wells, etc., they were free agents, images of their creative, fruitful God [Joshua 5:9-12].

In Paul’s letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul reminds us that “Whoever is in Christ is a new creation; the old things have passed away. And all this is from God” [2 Corinthians 5:17-21]. This is all about a new condition — a freely offered new way of being and living.

Both Joshua and St. Paul say much about the situation of the young degenerate who left home and blew his father’s fortune on what he thought would be the good life. The young man really did bring reproach upon himself as he all but sold himself into slavery. Perhaps the humblest thing he ever said was: “I no longer deserve to be called your son.” But even that statement didn’t quite clear the bar for truth.

“I no longer deserve” presumed that once he had deserved the status of being a member of the family. In truth, he never could have done anything to earn that prestige. It was an accidental, unmerited condition of the good fortune of being born into that family whose prosperous father loved him. None of us have any claim to have earned life or any of the privileges or talents that come with our birth. Our life and our talents are free, unmerited gifts.

In spite of those allusions, the real subject and message bearer of this story is the father. There are countless descriptions of the prodigal father of this parable. One — perhaps not so well known — that captures its simplicity, good humor, and depth is Joe Wise’s children's song, *The Prodigal Son*. Wise sings the story of the boy who took off on his bike with some frozen dinners, a bag full of coins, and a soft bedroll. But even as it goes through the story of his misadventures, the most poignant line is: “And his father drank his coffee at the door.”

Filling that out, Wise’s chorus repeats the super-singable refrain: “And waiting is half of his story, and waiting is how he will be. He can’t help it, our God, he’s a father, and waiting is how he must be.” Of course, it all comes to a head when the father “saw him coming and he ran. His son in his arms and the fiddle plays on and dancing is how he must be.”

The parable we call the prodigal son describes an incurably philanthropic God who knows that love can never be commanded. Rather, while love must be awaited, God responds to a little love with overwhelming, unrelenting, unrepayable generosity and joy.

It seems that this parable — and the Book of Joshua and the Letter of Paul — invite us to quit concentrating on ourselves and our dutiful or errant ways. When we escape narcissism of introspective guilt or righteousness, we can “taste and see” [see Psalm 34] the feast thrown by the unrelenting God who longs for us, patiently waiting to lavish us with ever more prodigal love. Then, with the help of grace, we can begin to act in the image of our relentless, ever-creative, party-loving, life-giving God.

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

he does not exclude. The Pharisees are the disapprovers and excluders. Jesus is putting Himself in direct opposition to them and their ways.

Some Scripture scholars believe that each of us are both sons — the elder part of us is ordered, strict, obedient, logical, exact, dutiful, and pleased with our own good works; the younger part of us is inconsistent, envious, wanderous, self-satisfying, independent, and stubborn. Quite a “complexis” and quite a war within. The elder part would like to tie down tightly the younger-side. We don’t want our looser side to be seen by anybody. We want to appear better than we know that we are. The elder-side judges everything we do or think; it is very unhappy with the internal tensions.

The younger-side does eventually come to its senses. The emptiness of trying to build ourselves, achieve ourselves, and indulge ourselves renders us senseless about our true self. The emptiness of whatever pigpen the younger son ends up in, moves him up and out and back to his true home. We live in that tension then between the self-righteous and the self-redeemed-by-Christ. Those who live severely judging others are victimized by their own self-centered severity. Those who are forgiven tend to be forgiving of others.

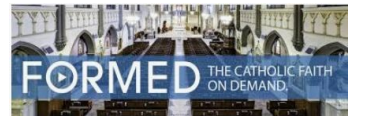
Learning about the experiences of the younger son who spent his entire inheritance on pleasure, we come to understand there have been many gifts in our life when we have sinfully squandered. As the son desperately realizes that the animals he is caring for have more to eat than he does, we need to make space for our shame and face the moments in our life when we have come to a breaking point. And as we hear the taunts of the Pharisees and scribes, we need to wonder when have we tried to live like Jesus lived and opened our heart to sinners with joy and without judgment? As the younger son returns home to his father with contrition and no expectations, we, too, need to feel an abiding trust in God’s love for us.

So are we in or out? We are welcomed, invited, embraced, but both sons had to respond freely. It is not easy to be welcomed in when we are a bit outside ourselves. It is truly humbling to want to be perfect and yet in order to be admitted into the welcome-home banquet, we have to admit ourselves back into our true, fragmented selves. Imagine how the tax collectors and other sinners heard this parable. When they realized what God was doing for them, they probably called out to the Pharisees to get real

PROGRAM AVAILABLE TO CHAPEL FAMILIES:

Through a grant, the Diocese of Cleveland has obtained the wonderful spiritual program called **FORMED**. We are able to participate in this program through St. Francis of Assisi Parish since we lie within their boundaries. **FORMED** has many aspects to it. You can prepare for Sunday Mass by watching an insightful five-minute video by renowned Catholic teachers; you can enjoy a movie with your family that is both nourishing and entertaining; you can enrich your marriage with the award winning video series *Beloved: Finding Happiness in Marriage*; you can help your children grow in character and embrace the beauty and wonder of the Faith; and many more.

FORMED provides amazing content 24/7 for you to grow in your faith. **It’s free and easy to register.** Go to stfrancisgm.formed.org, click “Register” and enter your name, email address, and desired password; if you have previously registered with **FORMED**, you will need to know or update your password. You can only enter **FORMED** this way. Once you are logged in, you can download the app from the App Store or Google Play Store — just search for **FORMED**. Enjoy. Please contact Father John if you have any questions.

**A GOOD DIRECTIVE:**

Keep the joy of loving God in your heart and share this joy with all you meet, especially your family. Be holy.

—St. Teresa of Calcutta

GOD'S AMAZING STORY:

The fourth Sunday in Lent is called “Laetare Sunday”. Laetare means “Rejoice” in Latin. So today our Liturgy tells us to rejoice — not because Lent is half over; rather because we are closer to the celebration of the Resurrection — the foundation of our faith. It’s more likely however that our reasons for rejoicing can be found in the Scripture Readings for this 4th Week in Lent. We begin by hearing how the Israelites received God’s loving care during their wanderings in the desert, how God forgave them their infidelities, and how they rejoiced at God’s kindness [Joshua 5:9-12]. Then we hear of how God’s unbounded love was showered upon the Church at Corinth, reconciling them to one another and then making them ambassadors of reconciliation, spreading the good news of God’s mercy among their neighbors [2 Corinthians 5:17-21]. And this is all capped off with the story of the Prodigal Son, where once again the forgiveness and unconditional love of the Father represent the love of God for us even when we have sinned [Luke 15:1-3, 11-32].

The story of the Prodigal Son has often been called “the Gospel in miniature” since it represents the heart of Jesus’ teaching and ministry: forgiveness, reconciliation. While Luke’s Gospel is called the story of the Prodigal Son, it more rightly should be called “the story of the Prodigal Father” since he is so generous, understanding, and forgiving. After all, the Father did not have to give his son what he asked for — to do this was unheard of in the ancient world. That’s one of the factors that would surprise Jesus’ listeners and make them sit up and take notice. Another was the father’s willingness to receive his son back without recrimination or punishment. Neither one of these things would have happened in the culture Jesus lived in. The father’s action would be unbelievable to the people listening to Jesus. The father’s action is unbelievable — until we realize that Jesus is really talking about God, his Father and our Father. A prodigal Father indeed.

But what in fact was the sin of the son? As we read the story, it seems to be the fact that he squandered his father’s money in loose living. I think his sin was that he broke up the family. Families were very close knit in Jesus’ time, and the younger son destroyed that unity. That’s what sin does. That’s what evil does. It divides. The younger son said: “Bye-bye, Dad. I’m going off to see the world and have a good time. So long, big brother. You stay here and take care of the farm.”

So, off he went; lost all his money and lost his friends as well, and found himself starving and reduced to feeding pigs — one of the worst things that could happen to a Jew. I once read on old rabbinic saying to the effect that cursed is the man who feeds swine and cursed is the father who teaches his son Greek philosophy. I don’t know what the connection was between feeding pigs and Greek philosophy, but apparently the rabbis did not approve of either one.

Anyway we know the rest of the story. The son comes to his senses and returns home after planning to ask his father to treat him as one of his hired hands. The father sees his son coming home, runs out, throws his arms around him, and kisses him. He is so happy to see him. The fact that he was watching for him means that he must have expected him to return and waited anxiously for the moment when this wayward son would appear. So he throws a party to welcome him back and invites in all the neighbors for a celebration — “My son who was dead has come back to life,” he says. “He was lost and has been found.”

But then there is the elder brother. He hears the music and dancing and becomes angry. He refuses to come in to the party or to be reconciled with his brother. The Father is very eager to have the family made whole again so he goes out to persuade the elder son to come in and join the celebration. But the son will not. He says: “I’ve always done the right thing and this son of yours who wasted your money

**RECEIVING NEW LIFE:**

On this 4th Week in Lent, St Paul tells us in his letter to the Church at Corinth: “we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” [2 Corinthians 5:17-21]. These words are at the very theme of our Lenten Season — reconciliation with God and with each other. Forgive and you will be forgiven.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus gives his greatest parable of reconciliation [Luke 15:1-3, 11-32]. We need to hear this parable afresh. Many of us have become like the one who says: “I’m a very forgiving person, but what he did was unforgiveable.” I understand. I have treated some offenses as unforgiveable. I want nothing more to do with that person.

That’s a mistake — a big mistake. CS Lewis writes: “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.” Jesus’ parable is about a young man who does something inexcusable — he demands his inheritance. It’s like saying to his father: “I wish you were dead.”

Now, last week we saw that God permits offenses so that he can achieve his greater purpose. Just so, the father divides his property between the older and younger son. The younger son dissipates his portion — he hits bottom. Perhaps for the first time in his life he does some serious thinking: “How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger.”

Hunger has a way of focusing one’s attention. The young man puts aside his shame and pride. He formulates a plan: “I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.’”

The prophet Hosea says: “Take with you words, and turn to the Lord”. It’s not enough just to feel miserable and ashamed. No, we need to say it: “I’ve sinned against heaven, against you, God, and against some other person.”

When the young man confesses his guilt, the father does not say: “well, I hope you learned a lesson.” No, the father is so anxious to take his son back, he does not even let the boy finish his prepared speech. Instead he says: “Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him”. The young man has a long road ahead. Maybe he will feel the tug back to his old life, but he has made a new beginning through forgiveness.

God always forgives. The problem is that we humans only sometimes forgive. The older brother seethes with resentment, even though he also had received half of the inheritance. The father assures him: “My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours.” Then he adds a great reason for rejoicing: “your brother was dead and has come to life again”.

Forgiveness is a form of dying and coming back to life. In Jesus who dies and returns to life, we receive forgiveness and the power to forgive others. Forgive and you will be forgiven.

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

**CAMP GILMOUR 2022:**

Camp Gilmour is back and safer than ever. With nine weeks of new offerings and old favorites for children as young as 3, Camp Gilmour has something for everyone! Join us for Preschool Camp [ages 3-5]; Day Camp [ages 5-12]; sports camps; and experiential camps exploring the fine and performing arts, drones, outdoor adventures, service, engineering and more. **Camps offered June 6-August 5.** Complimentary math and reading enrichment offered each morning for day campers. Before Care available beginning at 7:15 AM and After Care available until 6 PM. Register today at gilmour.org/summercamp. 10% discount available thru February 28th.



MERCY, COMPASSION, GENEROSITY, AND PATIENCE

The story of the Prodigal Son is familiar to all of us [Luke 15:1-3, 11-32]. We've heard it time and again. But sometimes we forget to look at the situation out of which this famous story comes. The beginning of Luke's Gospel sets the scene. There were two groups of people around Jesus — the first group were the tax collectors and sinners, the second were the Pharisees and the scribes. It's most interesting to me to note which verb is used by the text to describe the action of these two groups: the verb used to describe the action of the first group is "were drawing near," the verb used to describe the action of the second is "began to complain." We can surmise that one group was interested in what Jesus was saying, while the other group was not.

Pope Francis gives a striking insight when he comments about the religious professionals of Jesus' day. "Belief in God and worship of God are not enough to ensure that we are actually living in a way pleasing to God. Paradoxically, those who claim to be unbelievers can sometimes put God's will into practice better than believers."

Perhaps both groups can be represented by the two sons in our story — the younger one and the older one. The younger one would eventually recognize his sinfulness and "draw near" to his father in that tender moment of return. The older one's tone of voice has an edge of complaint in it if you examine it closely.

If we are honest with ourselves, we have the heart of both sons within our own. We cycle between repentance and arrogance — or stiff indifference at best — in the spiritual life. But more poignant than that is the steadfastness of the father's character in his dealing with both the sons. It is the father's person that is the striking character in the story. What mercy and compassion are lavished on the wayward son! What patience and generosity given to the older son! And so God the Father is with us!

Why does the Church give us this familiar passage to reflect upon during this season of Lent? Perhaps, it is given to us to remind us that both sons in our story have sinned, both experience the magnanimous character of the father, and I imagine that both are changed by it as they both are welcomed into the father's house for the celebration. I can only imagine what the conversation was between these sons in the days following the party. They gave witness to each other of how they found themselves at the celebration.

We are all prodigals who have left the Father's house in reality — like the younger son — or in our hearts and mind — like the older son. We all have stories of being proverbially lost and running in the wrong direction. But it helps us to be reminded that others are on the narrow path of faith as well. When we hear testimonies of how people overcame personal struggles, we are encouraged. If others can find God's mercy in their troubles, then so can we.

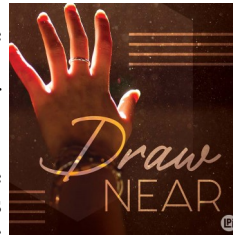
The stories I've heard from people over the years are all unique. Some are dramatic, others are poetic, and others are "normal." I am encouraged and edified by all the stories I've heard because it shows me that Christian faith has become real for these people. It also shows me how faith in Jesus transcends all human labels of people, limitations of personal character, and rationalizations of ideology.

So, what's your personal story of faith? How have you "drawn near" to Jesus, or how has he drawn near to you? Who needs to be encouraged by your testimony of what Jesus did in your life?

—taken from the writings of Brother John Marmion Villa, 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].



living riotously comes home and you kill the fatted calf for him." And here I think we can see the real reason for the story. Remember those scribes and Pharisees we heard about in the beginning of the Gospel passage — the ones who were complaining that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners? Well, it seems to me that Jesus is inviting these people to join the party also, to be reconciled, to bring wholeness and unity to the people of God and not to stand at a distance judging and thinking that certain people were not worthy of their company. This is what Jesus came to do: to restore the unity that had been destroyed by sin.

Barbara Reid — a scripture scholar — commenting on this parable, says it is both comforting and challenging. "From the perspective of the one who is in trouble, all that is necessary as a first step — which is often the hardest — is to be willing to accept such gratuitous love and let oneself be embraced by God's tender arms." Because that's what the story is really about. It's about God's love, God's mercy, God's forgiveness. It invites us to accept that love, mercy, and forgiveness and then share it with others, particularly those with whom we need to be reconciled. It invites us to join the task of restoring the unity that God intended from the beginning — to become, as Paul says in his letter to the Church at Corinth: "ambassadors for Christ." It's a comfort and a challenge for all of us.

Now it seems only too evident that the world we live in needs a great deal of reconciling. We probably think immediately of the Russians and the Ukraine, and we wonder what we can do to help this situation. Well, I believe that reconciliation like charity begins at home. We begin by making sure that we have forgiven anyone who has offended us and we ask for and accept forgiveness of those whom we may have offended — and I think that is the more difficult thing to do. But I also believe there is a ripple effect. We make sure that all is right between us, our family, our neighbors and friends, and that will influence what goes on in the wider world around us. Because of all the connections that link us one to another, there is nothing for good or for ill that does not affect everything and everyone else. An act of kindness, of forgiveness here in Cleveland can be felt on the other side of the world. And that, dear friends, is how we truly become "ambassadors of Christ."

—taken from the writings of Father Leo Murphy, S.J., which appear on the internet.

LENTEN NOTES:

During this sacred time, each of us is called to spiritual growth — particularly through a turning away from sin. Lent is a time for "new beginnings" — a time to grow in our relationship with God and each other. There are 3 major spiritual practices during Lent to which Scripture calls us: **prayer**, **fasting**, and **almsgiving**.

—LENTEN REGULATIONS:

Good Friday is a day of **fast** for all between the ages of eighteen and fifty-nine. Fasting means that one full meal for the day is allowed, along with two light meals [snacks]. No eating between meals. Those not included in these "ages" are encouraged to take upon themselves some aspects of the fast, whenever possible.

All Fridays during Lent are days of **abstinence** from meat, for those who are fourteen and older. Again, those not included in these "ages" are encouraged to participate whenever possible.

—SCHEDULE OF SPECIAL LENTEN EVENTS & SERVICES:

- **Telestai** presentation in Chapel on **Friday, Saturday & Sunday, April 8-9-10**
- **Lenten Communal Penance Service** will be on **Monday, April 4th** at 7:00 PM
- **Mass of the Lord's Supper** on **Holy Thursday, April 14th** at 7:00 PM.
- **Stations of the Cross** on **Good Friday, April 15th** at 1:30 PM.
- **Proclamation of the Passion, Veneration of the Cross and Communion Service** on **Good Friday, April 15th** at 3:00 PM.
- **Blessing of Easter Foods** will be at **12:00 noon** on **Saturday, April 16th**.
- **Easter Vigil Service** will be at **8:45 PM** on **Saturday, April 16th**.
- **Easter Sunday Mass** will be at **10:00 AM** on **Sunday, April 17th**.



WHEN THE PIGS ARE EATING BETTER THAN YOU:

God is doing whatever it takes to bring us home. God is even willing to use the tragedies and mistakes of our life, to bless us and to lead us to growth.

There's an African story about a local tribal king, who had a very good friend from boyhood. The two would regularly go out hunting together. The king's friend was resolute in his conviction that no matter what happened, good things would come from it. Despite many doubts to the contrary, he continued to believe that all things worked for the good. One day when the king and his friend were out hunting, the king's gun jammed and it blew off his thumb. It was a terrible tragedy. The king was deeply shaken. But his friend in typical style said: "Don't worry, good will come from this." Now this so angered the king, that in a rage he sent his friend to prison. A couple months later the king was out hunting again in some rather dangerous territory. He was seized by a group of cannibals, who tied him and prepared to eat him. But just before they began, they noticed that his thumb was missing. Being superstitious, they believed that they should never eat anyone who was less than whole. So, they untied the king and set him free.

Realizing what had happened, the king repented that he had treated his friend so poorly. The loss of his thumb had indeed saved his life. So, the king went to the prison and apologized to his friend. "You were right," he said, "I should never have put you into prison, that was a terrible and unjust decision." The friend, in typical fashion, said: "Yes it was, but good came from it." "Good?" the king said, "what possible good could come from my decision to put my friend in prison?" "Well," said the friend, "had you not put me in prison, I would have been out hunting with you and the cannibals would have eaten me!"

Even our greatest disappointments can lead to blessings. Even our most foolish decisions can lead to growth. This is what we as Christians believe. We do not believe that is the way the world is. We believe that is the way God is. God is doing whatever it takes to bring us home. That is why for a Christian, despair is never a final option. Even if we have rejected our father, squandered our inheritance, and find ourselves feeding slop to hogs. Even if the person we love the most has been taken from us. Even if we have lost our health or our reputation. Even if we have made disastrous decisions and sinned so grievously that, like the prodigal son, we feel that we are no longer worthy to be God's child. Even then, God is doing whatever it takes to bring us home.

Therefore, the next time you have to face evil in the eye, the next time that you realize what a mess you have made of your life, the next time you know that the pigs are eating better than you are — do not despair. Turn around and start home. The way back may be crooked and difficult, but it is a road that has been prepared for you. Do not forget that when you come to the end of that road, you will not face rejection but welcome. You will not encounter a cold shoulder, but a loving embrace.

—taken from the writings of Father George Smiga, 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.



would like to work one of the tractors. "Are you kidding? Of course." So Grandpa taught him who to run one of the big rigs. Frankie took to it like a natural. Even Grandpa was shocked at how easily he learned it. So, he told Frankie: "Next summer, if you want, you can come a month before your parents and help me out at the farm running a tractor." Of course Frankie wanted to do this. That whole school year, he was looking forward to going to his grandfather's farm.

When the summer came, with just a day or two of training by Grandpa, Frankie was there — a little guy on a big rig. Now Grandpa told Frankie that he could only run the tractor in the morning. After lunch, Grandpa wanted him to play with the other children from the local farms. So that was his summer — working the tractor in the morning, swimming, fishing and just having fun with the other kids in the afternoon.

And then the Fourth of July approached. One of the kids had firecrackers. Grandpa saw them and told Frankie that he had to be very careful. This was a dry summer, and a little spark could set off a huge fire that would destroy all the crops. Frankie and the others could only set off the fireworks away from the fields. So they decided to play with them near the farmhouse — actually, right under the kitchen window. Grandma was furious. "You children need to get away from the house. You'll destroy my baking." So the kids went about halfway between the farmhouse and the fields.

Soon most of the fireworks were gone, except for the sparklers. Someone got the idea that they should light sparklers and throw them. They would look just like comets. "Cool!" Frankie agreed. So they started throwing lit sparklers. Then they decided to see who could throw one the farthest. You know what happened — one of the sparklers set the grass on fire.

The children tried to stomp the flames out, but the fire quickly spread to the fields. The entire crop, acres and acres of corn, went up in flames. The firemen came, the neighboring farmers came, but the best they could do was save the farmhouse and the barn. At the end of the day, Grandpa saw all his hard work destroyed. Exhausted, covered in soot and sweat, he asked: "Where's Frankie?" "Has anyone seen Frankie?" No one had.

Grandma began to cry, perhaps Frankie had died in the flames. Then Grandpa said: "I think I know where he is." So Grandpa went down to the swimming hole. And there was Frankie, sitting on a rock, sweaty, filthy, shaking and crying. When he saw his Grandfather approaching, he was convinced that he would get clobbered. Certainly, his grandfather wouldn't want to have anything to do with him anymore. But Grandpa went up to him, put his arm around him and said: "Boy, let's go home." At the end of the summer he even invited Frankie to come back the next year.

Frankie didn't just learn a lesson about obedience; after all, none of this would have happened if he had listened to his Grandpa. More than this, Frankie learned a profound lesson about mercy and forgiveness. Frankie told this story many years later — after he was ordained a priest. You see, he wanted others to experience the mercy and love of God as he had experienced it in his grandfather. He wanted to be a vehicle of God's love for others. He had to become a priest.

The Forgiving Father does not want us sitting in misery on our rocks, overwhelmed with guilt and shame. No, the Forgiving Father wants to embrace us and bring us home.

This is Laetare Sunday — the Sunday where we express joy that the celebration of our redemption is only three weeks away. But there is more to our joy than that. This is the Sunday when we come to a more profound understanding of how deep our Father's love is for us. He doesn't care about what we have done. He doesn't care about how we have hurt him — whether its squandering his money, running away from home and embracing a horrible life, destroying his hard work in the fields, or whatever it is that might lead us to sit on a rock shuddering in shame. All that God the Father cares about is that we were lost, but now are found. He just wants to put his arm around us and say: "Let's go home."

Three stories — one a parable and two real life stories — give us a hint at how deep is God's mercy, and how profound is his compassion. May we have the humility to seek forgiveness. And may we forgive others as we have been forgiven.

—taken from the writings of Monsignor Joseph Pellegrino which appear on the internet 13

STORIES OF MERCY and COMPASSION:

A Prodigal son. A Forgiving Father. We have heard Jesus tell this parable [see Luke 15:1-3, 11-32] so many times that most of us can repeat it almost line for line. It is such a beautiful story told by the Lord with so much drama that we can vividly picture each scene. We can see the nasty younger son, demanding his piece of the inheritance so he can spend it foolishly. We see the scene of his wild parties, and then his so-called friends deserting him when his money ran out. We can picture his disgust at the smell of the pigs, and here he was, a Jew, feeding pigs and longing to eat pig slop.

We can picture the father, looking out across the fields every day, hoping that perhaps his son will return; and then the tears of joy when he saw the boy. We can picture the older brother, furious that the one who had caused his family so much pain was now being welcomed back into the fold. And we can see the pain of the father when the older brother refuses to join in the Banquet of the Father's Love.

Perhaps, though, the parable is so familiar that it has lost its impact. I want to share two true stories with you to help you — and me — restore the parable's impact, and, perhaps, come a deeper understanding of the Jesus' whole point — the healing mercy of God the Father.

Recently I had dinner with a close friend — a doctor who I've known since she was a 15 year-old girl. She currently runs a free clinic. Now, I had breakfast with her about eight months ago. At that time, she told me the story of a young girl she was trying to help. I asked her at dinner how the girl was doing, and my doctor friend told me the rest of the story.

What had happened was that about three years ago, when the young girl was 15, she got into a huge fight with her parents. She decided to run away. She ended up roaming around an expensive mall where she lived. A young man approached her and asked her if she wanted to go to a party. That was all that it took. That very night she was drugged and sold to numerous men. She was taken away and hidden in the horrible underbelly created by sex traffickers. The men who stole her convinced her that her parents would be ashamed with what she had been doing — as though it was all her fault. How could they explain her to their friends? They convinced her that her parents would be better off if they just thought she was dead. They certainly would never want to see her again. Eventually, she decided that she had no choice but to embrace the appalling life thrust upon her.

Three years went by before she got away from her captives and went to the free clinic. She would not tell anyone there her name — she didn't want them to contact her parents. She was too embarrassed. My doctor friend met with her over and over, and established a rapport with her. After about three months, the doctor finally convinced her that all her parents wanted was to have her back again. So she told the doctor her name. With the doctor and others leading her in prayer, she prayed for her parents.

Then she made the call. Can you imagine the joy of those parents who had feared that their daughter was dead and then heard her voice on the phone? Volunteers brought her home. Can you imagine the hugs and kisses and tears of joy? This daughter who was lost has now come back home.

The parents didn't care about her running away. Nor did they care about the things she was forced to do, or eventually chose to do — they only cared that their daughter was back. That is a hint of the joy that God our Father has when someone who has run away from him comes back home. God is that forgiving Father who just wants to have his wayward children back.

The second story I want to share with you is the story of Frankie and the farm. Frankie's family lived in the suburbs, but the family had grandparents who had a large farm in another state. Every summer, Frankie's family would spend two weeks on the farm with grandma and grandpa. The kids loved it. They would play with the animals, go swimming and fishing. Every day was an adventure.

When Frankie was 11 — the summer just before his sixth grade — his grandpa asked him if he

**SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — APRIL 16th:**

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. In this critical time, this is a wonderful way to serve others. Please consider this opportunity.

**READINGS FOR THE WEEK:**

Monday: Isaiah 65:17-21, John 4:43-54

Tuesday: Ezekiel 47:1-9, John 5:1-16

Wednesday: Isaiah 49:8-15, John 5:17-30

Thursday: Exodus 32:7-14, John 5:31-47

Friday: Wisdom 2:1-22, John 7:1-30

Saturday: Jeremiah 11:18-20, John 7:40-53

5th Week in Lent: Isaiah 43:16-21, Philippians 3:8-14, John 8:1-11

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. 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].**

**A GREAT PHILOSOPHY:**

Each day I move toward that which I do not understand. The result is a continuous accidental learning which constantly shapes my life.

—Yo-Yo Ma

ENCOUNTERING THE FATHER CHANGES EVERYTHING:

For about six weeks I had been battling anxiety surrounding my ability to discern the Father's voice and lies that said I never really heard it at all. I was struggling to receive the Father's love and feeling guilty in every moment of joy for fear that my joy was false, and that my Father was disappointed because I was imperfect. It was hard even to listen to praise and worship music because the lyrics that proclaimed the Father's reckless love for me jostled against a lie of worthlessness I had built up within.

But my Father is relentless and that day in Mass, He said enough. I knelt down in my pew with the Eucharist in me and tried to take deep breaths and invite the Father's peace into my heart. Then in prayer, I saw an image — I stood as a little boy before God the Father, who knelt down so we could look each other in the eyes. Then I heard His voice — a voice so strong and firm, yet so gentle and tender; a voice that shakes the Earth, yet sings me to sleep every night. "Nick, look at me. Look at my face. I love you so much, I promise. And you're doing such a good job. You're doing such a good job my son, and I am so proud of you."

At the sound of His voice, I felt my frozen heart turn back to flesh. But, He wasn't finished yet. The choir's voices swelled in crescendo, and my Father reached out His strong arms and pulled me into a warm, deep embrace. And in that moment, in the Father's embrace, I knew nothing else. Nothing mattered except the beat of our two hearts pulsing together, the warmth of His arms holding me to Himself, and the scratch of His beard on the top of my cheek. In the Father's embrace, I found myself again. After fighting off lies and hurt and shame, in His love, my identity as a beloved son showed through.

Now, I should emphasize that I don't have a mystical experience every time I receive the Eucharist, and even after my beautiful image of God the Father, I have not been permanently healed of anxiety and shame. The point of my story is the love of God — my perfect Father.

As Catholics, we know God to be a communion of three divine persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — one God, three persons, existing in an eternal exchange of love. The story of salvation history tells us that the Father sent His only Son to Earth, and that the Holy Spirit is the very love that the Father and Son have for one another. These three persons existing in a loving communion constitute God's identity, and without any of these identities, God would cease to be His true self.

For the majority of my life, I didn't know God as Father. Jesus was more tangible because I could see Him in Renaissance paintings and on crosses around my friends' necks, and the Holy Spirit was basically the magic colorful wind in Pocahontas that tells her how to save the world. But, God the Father? For the longest time I would have struggled to describe Him to you. However, thanks be to God, last December, I encountered God the Father, and since then, my life has been changed. I have been brought into a deeper understanding of God's love than I ever thought possible.

On Father's Day, my family usually gets my dad a card that has a picture of a grill or a football or tools or beer — I'm probably not alone here. These popular images of earthly fatherhood are not entirely off base, but, of course, there's more to fatherhood than what we see at the Hallmark store. Even so, God the Father does resemble our earthly fathers in certain ways — He protects us, provides for us, leads us, and fixes things. But, God's fatherhood goes far beyond the "dad stereotypes" we find in popular culture, and it is quite unfair to our heavenly Father to let our perceptions of earthly fatherhood — good or bad — limit or taint His identity as our Father.

The heart of God reaches far beyond our traditional notions of manhood and masculinity; yet there is something very special and perhaps even necessary about the children of God relating to Him as Father.



That's why Jesus taught us to call God "Father" in the Lord's prayer [see Luke 11:2-4], and why Christ gave men the gift of priesthood, so they might reflect God's divine Fatherhood in this world.

Moreover, in the midst of attacks on the family, there exists a parallel crisis of fatherhood. So many young people are wounded — mentally, emotionally, and physically by their fathers, and many others grow up with distant or entirely absent fathers. In far too many hearts there throbs a deep "father wound" left by dads who were abusive, neglectful, absent, or just lazy. The devil delights in these wounds because he knows these are perfect avenues for keeping us at a distance from our heavenly Father, and for further skewing our image of fatherhood into something toxic and painful.

However, Christ implores us not to give up on our Father. In fact, Christ's entire ministry points us back to the Father — from the parable of the prodigal son [see Luke 15:11-32], to His farewell sermon at the last supper [see John 14-17], to His dying breath and shout of "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" [see Luke 23:46]. Jesus reveals to us the truth of God's identity as Father — a Father who is strong and firm, yet simultaneously gentle and tender. A Father whom Jesus calls "Abba" and whom we might call "Papa" [Romans 8:15].

Christ draws us into His Church to point our attention, through Himself, to His Father so that we might encounter Him in the sacraments. Jesus cries out to His Father in times of distress [see Mark 14:36], gives thanks to the Father in times of joy [see Luke 10:21], and lifts up His apostles and followers to His Father [see John 17:20-26]. We are called to mirror Christ in all three of these ways in order to experience the same intimacy with the Father that Christ enjoys [see John 17:21]. In His ministry as the good shepherd, Christ shares with His followers the heart of His Father and loves them with the Father's love.

Throughout the Gospels, Christ gives thanks to His Father for His apostles and other followers, praying that His community of disciples might experience a loving union that mirrors that of Himself and His Father. Through His parables and ministry, Jesus shows us that His Father's heart is relentless like the good shepherd [see Luke 15:4], strong like solid ground [see Luke 6:48], and tender like the father of the prodigal son [see Luke 15:20]. Christ desires that we should know and love His Father just as He does, that we might have such intimacy with the Father to follow Christ's example and cry out "Abba" or "Papa." Not only does Christ desire this intimacy for us, He goes so far as to make it attainable through His life, death, and Resurrection.

In His life, Christ models perfect intimacy with the Father, so, as we die to ourselves and become more like Jesus, we also journey deeper into relationship with the Father. In the Christian life, we might mirror Jesus through our charity shown to others, our increased conviction to grow in holiness, or our continued participation in the sacraments. Every time we love as Christ loved, see ourselves and others as He sees us, and receive His Body, we become more and more like Jesus. Jesus gives us these outlets for the transformation of our hearts not because He thinks He's all that and wants everyone to be just like Him, but because He desires with all of His being that we should know and love the Father just as He does. Jesus prays to His Father that the love which they share might be in the hearts of all His disciples [see John 17:26], making us ever more like Jesus and ever more in love with His Father.

The Father has created you to share in His divine love and He loves you just as much as He loves Jesus. As a beloved son or daughter of the Father, you have been wonderfully made with a heart that beats for communion with the divine and for the Father's warm, deep embrace. No matter your relationship with your earthly father, your heavenly Father relentlessly pursues you and has no plans of ever leaving you alone.

He's ready and waiting for you to run into His arms, to hear His heartbeat against yours, and to feel His beard tickle your cheek. No amount of shame, regret, or mistakes can stop Him from chasing after your heart. The Father's arms are open wide to welcome you home — all He waits for is your yes. A yes to His heart and invitation into infinite, intimate love. All He wants is to assure you that you're doing a good job and that He is so, so proud of you.

—written by Nick Bernard, a campus minister