

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

**~ Prayer for Christmas ~**

[continued from last week]

**God of fulfilled promises,  
we are immersed  
in the reality of Christmas Day.  
We have seen  
that you are faithful to your word.  
We pray that  
our hope in your promises might grow,  
and our faith in you increase.**

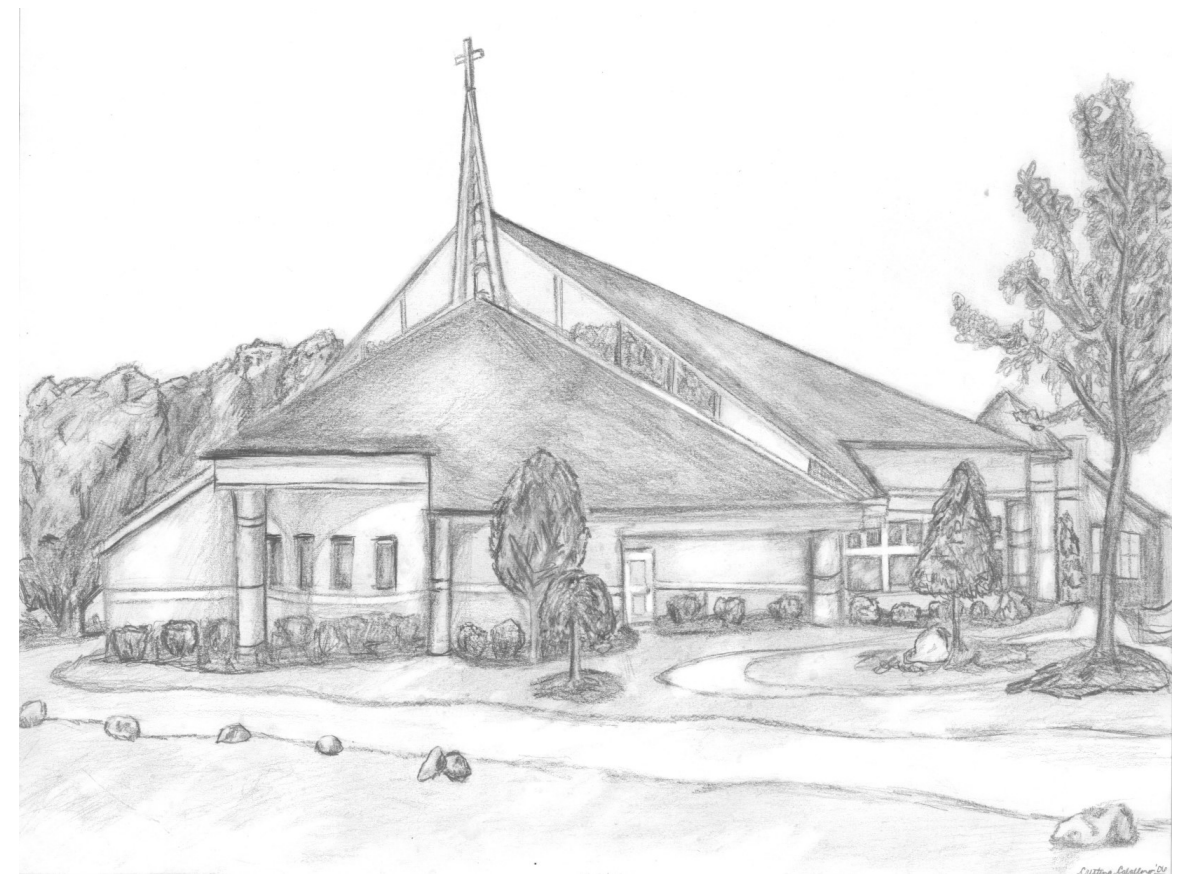
**In the mystery of the incarnation of your Son,  
you have shown us plainly  
that you are forever  
with us and for us,  
and you have proven  
that you will spare no cost  
to gather your scattered children  
to yourself.**

**Help us  
to be always mindful  
of what you have done  
on our behalf.**

**Renew in us  
a steadfast commitment  
to your Son Jesus Christ,  
our incarnate Lord  
and long awaited Redeemer.**

**Fill our hearts  
with the fire of zeal  
to bring his name,  
and with it, his love and peace  
to a weary world.  
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 [office] or 216-570-9276 [cell].  
e-mail: blazekj@gilmour.org

**THE GIFT OF TIME:**

Time is more than the passing of minutes each day — it is a gift from God where each moment is an opportunity to make an eternal impact in the life of another. Have you ever had the experience where you give a gift and are disappointed in how it is received? How did it make you feel? A harder question to ponder about this would be: “How do think God feels when he sees the different ways that we use his gift of time to us? Do you think that he ever watches us and wishes that we would get the big picture better?”



One of the biggest keys of biblical time management is to learn that time is a gift from God — one of the most precious that he bestows. We were placed here for a reason — a purpose — and each moment of our lives is a chance for us to live out that purpose. Change your viewpoint of time by thinking of each day that God gives you is his way of saying: “I am not done with my plans for you yet.”

Change the way you view time and the way you approach how you spend your time. If you do, you will change your life, and the lives of those around you. Look for ways each day that you can take your gift of time and invest it wisely into God’s purposes, and into the lives of others. Always remember that your time is precious, and it is one of the most special gifts that you receive and that you can share. Remember that giving undivided attention and love to people in your life will not cost you a thing, but the impact that it will leave on the recipient will be priceless.

Robert Merriweather said: “Time is the most precious gift one can give. Each moment is unique because it will never happen again. The gift of your time spent with others is the ultimate display of unconditional love.”

**“THANK YOU” FROM FATHER JOHN:**

A very special “thanks” to all who sent cards, gifts, remembrances and “goodies” during this Christmas season. Your prayers, kindness and special messages were truly appreciated. Also, a big thank you to all who contributed their time and talents to make our Christmas liturgies so special — Our Lady Chapel Council Members; Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors, Andy and the members of our Music Ministry Team; Ushers and Greeters; Patty Szaniszló, and all who helped decorate the Chapel — and especially each of you. Your presence brought a rich treasure to our lives. Thank you so much for your goodness. I continue to keep all of you in my prayers and Masses.

*Thank  
You*

**FAITH EDUCATION:**

Faith Education meets next on Sunday, January 8<sup>th</sup> and then again on Sunday, January 22<sup>nd</sup> at 8:45 AM. There will be no class on Sunday, January 15 due to the school being closed for the Martin Luther King holiday. As has been our custom in the past, our Faith Education Classes are followed by our 10 AM Mass which is held in the chapel. **If you have any questions, please contact Patty in the Chapel Office [440-473-3560].** Thank you.

**CHRISTMAS FLOWERS:**

During this Christmas season, we again are accepting memorial donations to help deflect the cost of our Christmas Flowers. We pray that our floral decorations and this season remind all of us of those special relationships which we hold close to our heart. Please keep the following people in your prayers: **In memory of Roger Mallik, Gil Plavcan, Sadie Tackla, Thomas Hughes, the Blazek and Rezabek Families.** If you would like to make a memorial offering, please place it in an envelope marked “Memorial Offering, Christmas Decorations”, along with the names of your loved ones that you would like to remember, and give to Father John or place it in the offering basket. **The collections baskets are at the center doors of the chapel.** God bless all of you.

**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

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

**PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:**

- For Kim Clark, who is undergoing treatment for an aggressive form of cancer.
- For David Martin, who is recovering from triple Bypass Surgery
- For Bill McGinley, father of Chief Academic Officer, Elizabeth Edmondson, and grandfather of Mollie [\*21] and Abby [\*23] Edmondson, who is hospitalized with a serious infection

**FOR THE DECEASED:**

- For Brother Thomas Moser, C.S.C.
- For Margaret Kahl.
- For Sister Esther Black, C.S.C.
- For Darleen Lonardo, mother of Joseph [\*00], and grandmother of Giana [\*22] and Angelina [\*22] Lonardo.
- For Mary Haag, mother of Father Ralph Haag, C.S.C.
- For Patricia Dailey, mother of Brother Robert Dailey, C.S.C.
- /For John Rooney, uncle of Art [\*70] and Jim [\*86] Rooney

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:**

- For the Holy Cross Religious in Haiti, and for the people of that country, which is under siege because of political and civil strife.
- For a person who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For a family going through a difficult time.
- For an end to violence and racial injustice in our society.
- 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.

**CHRISTMAS SHATTERS THE CONTAINERS OF OUR EXPECTATIONS:**

That’s what infants can do. God’s power works through a lot of things, but it works with a special power through vulnerability and helplessness. Intimacy is predicated on vulnerability. You cannot overpower another person to make him or her love you unless you overpower his or her heart the way an infant does.

We can seduce each other through attractiveness, draw admiration through our talents, and intimidate each other through superior strength, but none of these will ultimately provide the basis for a shared community of life for long; only the powerlessness and innocence of a baby can provide that.

God’s power — like a baby sleeping in its crib — lies in our world as a quiet invitation, not as a threat or coercion. When Christ took on flesh in our world in Bethlehem two thousand years ago, and then died seemingly helpless on a cross in Jerusalem some thirty years later, this is what was revealed: the God who is incarnated in Jesus Christ enters into human suffering rather than stands clear of it, is in solidarity with us rather than standing apart from us, manifests that the route to glory is downward rather than upward, stands with the poor and powerless rather than with the rich and powerful, invites rather than coerces, and is more manifest in a baby than in a superstar. —Father Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I.



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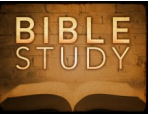
**PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:**

- For Pope Benedict XVI who is critically ill.
- For Brother James Newberry, C.S.C., who is seriously ill with multiple health problems.
- For Beverly Jacklitch, mother of Kitchen Associate, Susan Jacklitch, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Paula Smith, mother of Tyler [\*10] and Alec [\*13] Smith, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Jacqueline Schmidt, [\*13], Lower School toddler instructor, who is recovering from foot surgery.
- For Findley Stay, husband of former Gilmour Instructor, Emily Stay, father of Allen Stay [\*87], who is undergoing treatment for a serious blood disorder.
- For Andy Andino, Sr., father of Music Director, Andy Andino, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Jill Shemory, mother of Adam [\*08], who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Ethel Nagy, mother of Lazlo Nagy, grandmother of Rich [\*16] and Josh Nagy., who is seriously ill.
- For Carol Lowen, mother of Denise Shade, grandmother of Madeline, Michael, and Charles Shade, who is undergoing treatment for Breast Cancer.
- For Sue Elliott, who is critically ill with complications of Parkinson’s Disease.
- For Cameron Monesmith, who is recovering from Brain surgery
- For Baylea O’Brian, friend of former Gilmour Teacher, Erin Thompson, who is undergoing treatment for Hodgkins Lymphoma
- For Walter Carey, who is undergoing treatment for leukemia.
- For Pat Malak, who is seriously ill.
- For Carol Triplett, sister of Linda McGraw, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Judy Collins, aunt of Chief Academic Officer, Elizabeth Edmondson, great-aunt of Mollie [\*21] and Abbie [\*23] Edmondson, who is undergoing treatment for brain cancer.
- For Marina McCarter, grandmother of Aaron [\*25] and Mason [\*28] McCarter, who is ill
- For Michael Bares, brother of James [\*80] Bares and Religion Instructor, Eileen Pryatel, uncle of Michael [\*08, Meghan [\*13] , and Kevin [\*15] Pryatel, who is undergoing treatment for cancer, and recovering from cancer surgery.
- For Susan Plavcan, sister-in-law of Linda McGraw, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For James Law, husband of LS resource associate, Elana Law, who is undergoing treatment for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- For Fletcher Linsz, brother of Logan Linsz [\*26], who is undergoing treatment for Hodgkin Lymphoma.
- For Michael Nestor [\*98], who is undergoing treatment for a rare form of cancer.
- For Bernice Girgash, aunt of Basketball Coach and Counselor, Dan DeCrane, and great-aunt of Mackenzie DeCrane [\*36], 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 Chiacchiari, mother of Mark [\*94], mother-in-law of Michelle DeBacco [\*96], grandmother of Aurelia [\*28], and Olivia [\*30] Chiacchiari, 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.



**NEXT BIBLE STUDY — THURSDAY, JANUARY 5<sup>th</sup>:**

**Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Thursday, 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: Jesus as Emmanuel — God with us**

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, January 1: <b>Motherhood of God</b>	<b>10:00 AM</b> In Person & Live Stream
Monday, January 2: <b>St. Basil the Great</b>	<b>Check with Office for time</b>
Tuesday, January 3:	<b>Check with Office for time</b>
Wednesday, January 4: <b>St. Elizabeth Ann Seton</b>	<b>Check with Office for time</b>
Thursday, January 5: <b>St. John Neumann</b>	<b>Check with Office for time</b>
Friday, January 6: <b>St. André Bassette</b>	<b>Check with Office for time</b>
Saturday, January 7: <b>Epiphany</b>	<b>5:00 PM</b> In Person
Sunday, January 8: <b>Epiphany</b>	<b>10:00 AM</b> In Person & Live Stream

**THE DIVINE WORD OF HOPE:**

The small child of Bethlehem, the unknown young man of Nazareth, the rejected preacher, the naked man on the cross, he asks for my full attention. The work of our salvation takes place in the midst of a world that continues to shout, scream, and overwhelm us with its claims and promises. But the promise is hidden in the shoot that sprouts from the stump, a shoot that hardly anyone notices [see Isaiah 11:1]



I remember seeing a film on the human misery and devastation brought by the bomb on Hiroshima. Among all the scenes of terror and despair emerged one image of a man quietly writing a word in calligraphy. All his attention was directed to writing that one word. That image made this gruesome film a hopeful film. Isn’t that what God is doing? Writing the divine word of hope in the midst of our dark world?

—Henri Nouwen



**A REFLECTION ON THIS WEEK'S THEME:**

The Scripture Readings for this New Year's Day — The Feast of Mary, Mother of God — begins with a prayer. Known as "Aaron's Blessing", these four lines from the Book of Numbers, written as a poem, may be one of the most powerful blessings in the Bible — one we have all heard many times in our lives.

The Lord bless you and keep you!  
The Lord let his face shine upon you,  
and be gracious to you!  
The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!

[Numbers 6:22-27]

To Christians, these four lines are so reassuring and filled with deep hope and promise. Just imagine that our Lord is there to watch over and keep each of us safe each moment of our lives. That he is looking down on us and sharing his infinite grace with us. And, that the Lord is there to give us the peace we all seek and so desperately need. What a truly wonderful gift we have received. What more could we ask from our God as we journey together into this new year?

The month, January, derives its name from the Roman god, Janus, who had two faces — one which looked backward and the other forward. This God became the deity of openings and closings, as well as beginnings and endings. We live with the endings of these past months and all that they offered. We live with the sorrows and joys, the wins and losses; we live with the new as gifts and the familiar with new vision. Some of the blessings of these past days may have not been received just yet, and so we live with the mysteries of our days as well as our futures.

We join Mary in reflecting upon all these things. We join the shepherds who returned from a mysterious experience, praising and glorifying God for all that had happened to them as they walk back into their usual, but now, new lives [Luke 2:16-21].

We can pray for peace in our world — our country, our families, and our own hearts. There is much mystery to ponder and much of it has to do with relationships between and among persons, cultures, religions, nations, and between ourselves and God.

But let's take a step back to reflect. The Book of Numbers is one of the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures — the Torah. These books record the history of God's relationship with the people of Israel. They describe the Hebrew concept of creation, the founding by God of the nation of Israel, and how exactly the people of that nation are to keep that holy relationship alive and orderly.

In the midst of this Book is a conversation — or blessing — that God has with Moses [Numbers 6:22-27]. The central message is about how Aaron and his sons are to call down God's blessings on Israel. The words are a liturgical formula which, when spoken, will bring down God's blessing. It is important to notice that God requires an instrument — a mediator — whose faith is necessary and whose words God employs to be active among the people. God is using human persons and human actions to make known and to make real God's loving actions. Is it magic — mumbo jumbo as it were? It can be interpreted that way, but deeper than mere words is the divine use of the human to relate significantly with the people of Israel.

Luke's Gospel for this Feast of Mary, Mother of God, shows the first worshiping community as returning to their "sheepful" lives. It is January for them. They leave, giving thanks for what they have seen and heard. Perhaps, they even turn their heads to catch sight of the stable and then move forward to their futures influenced by all that they had heard and seen.

Mary, too, is having a January moment. She is turning over all these things in her heart — not just

**GOD'S MESSAGE IS LIFE GIVING:**

We actually know very little about the mother of Jesus of Nazareth. Except for Luke, the evangelists didn't write much about her, and the earliest Christian author, Paul, only refers to her in passing [Galatians 4:4-7] — "God sent his Son, born of a woman." Though many of us Catholics don't like to admit it, the first gospel writer, Mark, tells us that Mary was one of Jesus' family members who one day "came to seize him" because they thought he was "out of his mind" [see Mark 3]. If we only had Mark's gospel, I don't think we'd have many churches named "St. Mary's."

In some sense, it isn't important to know what the evangelists tell us about her historically. What is important is to gather how they have her react to her son and his message. No one uses her better than Luke. Throughout his gospel, she's Jesus' perfect disciple. And Luke has a simple definition of that special person — he or she is someone who first listens to God's word and then carries it out [see Luke 11:28].

Most of us are familiar with John Williams' well-known score for the movie *Jaws* — especially the two-note ostinato which warns of the shark's appearance. When we hear it, we know something bad is about to happen. In a parallel — but totally different way — whenever Mary appears in Luke's gospel, he plays her theme song — almost always mentioning something about hearing God's word and/or carrying it out. The classic reference is when Jesus responds to a person in the crowd and says: "While he was speaking, a woman from the crowd called out and said to him: 'Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.' Jesus replied: 'Rather blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it' " If Mary is a significant figure for Luke, it's not because she's Jesus' mother — it's because she best carries out her son's command to listen and act.

The evangelist's emphasis on Mary as Jesus' perfect follower also seems to be behind his remark in Luke's Gospel that "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart" [Luke 2:16-21]. Before acting, other Christs must do a lot of reflecting simply to know exactly what God wants them to do.

Yet we can never forget that the historic Mary heard and carried out God's word as a 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE Palestinian Jew — not the European, blue-eyed Gentile young woman that we're familiar seeing in our modern pictures and statues of her. Paul reminds his Galatian community that Jesus was "born under the law." Luke likewise reminds his Gentile community about one of the practical implications of keeping that law: "When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel".

Mary didn't hear God's word in a church, during a celebration of the Eucharist, or while listening to one of the gospels. She heard that word in a synagogue, reciting her Sabbath meal prayers, or while listening to the Hebrew Scriptures. God's word in that Jewish context eventually led her son, herself, and people like Paul to go beyond the limits of that historical context and discover God who is present and working in all people — not just Jews.

Perhaps January 1<sup>st</sup> is the best day to hear the famous blessing of Aaron [Numbers 6:22-27]. Though originally a Jewish fertility blessing, its words have evolved into sentiments all people of God share. Jesus' mother must have frequently employed it. May we, like Mary, not only hear these thoughts about peace, but during this year actually commit ourselves to doing what's necessary to make that peace a reality.

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

**LIVING THE GIFT:**

Gratitude makes us feel bursting with delight, just to remember the gifts we have received. Thus we are doubly blessed when we receive something. For the gift itself and later, in recall, for the miracle of having been given it.

—MJ Ryan

**MOVING FROM ADORATION TO MYSTICISM:**

Most liturgists will tell us that, in spite of the hype of Christmas, Easter is the center of the church year. Yet, there would be no Easter without a Nativity, no cross or Resurrection without an Incarnation. That brings us to the feast we celebrate this weekend — the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.

This title, Mother of God, has been at the heart of immense, intense theological debate. It's not hard to understand why some considered the very idea as blasphemous — how could a creature be mother to God? Yet, that is exactly what the somewhat strange translation of the Nicene Creed defends with the phrase that describes Jesus Christ as “incarnate of the Virgin Mary.” It may seem simple to say that through Mary, Christ is flesh of our flesh. It becomes a bit more shocking to say that God — the creator of the universe — chooses to be dependent on humanity in order to become one of us. The title Mother of God necessarily infers an almost scandalous degree of mutuality between humanity and divinity.

One response to this would be to write it all off as hifalutin theology — too convoluted to consider on the morning after New Year's Eve. On the other hand, there might be no more appropriate day to contemplate this mystery than the one on which many of us have made ourselves particularly aware of the limitations of our own incarnation and are looking toward starting anew.

The Scripture Readings for this Feast reveal a crescendoing process that invites us to move through God's blessing on all creation, to adoption, to the intimacy of shared life. For Christians, this is a summary of the history of salvation and ultimately an invitation to mysticism.

Now, lest we think that this is just too much — even for New Year's Day — we can turn to Luke's Gospel as a simple story that invites us to more than we might ask or imagine. Luke tells us that the first nonfamily members to discover Emmanuel were shepherds — denigrated folks of meager means whose work required very little in the way of intelligence or creativity. Perhaps their poverty and lack of sophistication opened them to wonders that the “wise and the learned” knew too much to comprehend. They had been told not to fear and to go find a savior whose circumstances were as humble as their own. And that was exactly what they found — an infant cared for by two migrants who had made him a bed in a cattle crib. Somehow, for these shepherds, that was enough to make them spread the message to whoever would listen.

What the Scripture Readings really tell us is that the shepherds might represent the movement from the blessing described in the Book of Numbers to the joy of experiencing the Spirit's work in them that Paul described to the Galatians. The cry “Abba, Father!” could be the gist of their glad tidings to others.

The Feast of Mary, Mother of God moves us from adoration to mysticism, in Mary who “kept all these things in her heart” [Luke 2:16-21]. Luke's Gospel emphasizes that the birth of Christ came to pass because Mary identified herself as the servant of the Lord who, like her son, made it her life's goal that God's will be done through her. The birth of Christ — God's personal incarnation in history — took place through Mary's collaboration. She made herself available for God to do what God could not do without her.

This brings us to two of Christianity's most radical claims. First, the fact that God depended on Mary for the Incarnation reveals that God's power is vulnerable love that has nothing to do with domination. More radically, Mary is not unique: Jesus himself said: “My mother and my brothers and sisters are those who hear the word of God and act on it” [Luke 8:21]. Thus, as Meister Eckhart explained 700 years ago: “We are all meant to be mothers of God.”

The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, invites us to marvel at the God who comes to us in loving vulnerability and dependence. Following Mary, we are called to do nothing less than repeat her words: “May it be done in me according to your will” [Luke 1:38]. Christ is always needing to be born in and among us, and that calls for every year to be a New Year.

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



her head. She has heard the shepherds speaking of angel-messages, so she recalls her own angel-conference. Reflect — the word means literally, “bending back”. The past is somehow preparation for the future, and so, she too, is allowing mystery to be a permanent companion escorting her into her future.

The prescriptions of the Law are part of their Jewish faith, and so Joseph and Mary take the baby to fulfill the covenantal gesture of naming the child and so bring him into the Holy People of God. The name given to Him, in Hebrew, means “The Lord Saves”, or “Jehovah Saves”, or “He Who saves the People”. Thus, the name given to Jesus announces a man who has a mission.

But Jesus' mission is meant to involve all of us. God told Moses to tell Aaron and his sons just how they were to bless the Israelites. God through an angel told Mary how she would bless the world. The shepherds who came, saw, and left, knew that they were blessed. There is a great deal of human instrumentality going on. Jesus' mission is to give flesh to the blessing of Aaron and his sons. The Lord in Christ is blessing and keeping us. The Lord's face has been shining upon us since his face was shined by the star at Bethlehem. He is ever gracious to us and continues looking upon us and offering us His peace. We look back and can see how these have taken place in our lives. And the future — that's a blessing too.

Human beings continue to be the way which God uses to continue blessing and being gracious in this world. Once Jesus made His home in our personal stables, it would have to be all played out on the field of flesh and blood. Once Jesus blest the flesh it became our meeting tent — our sacred space — where He has chosen to meet us, look upon us, and bless us. And then, like the shepherds, we are sent forward to be a blessing to each other. What a better world it would be

- If we thought of and treated our family, coworkers, neighbors and even strangers the way God does us.
- If we were to let our faces shine upon those in need and let them know we were there for them, willing to serve and assist them.
- If we were kind and gracious to all and shared our peace with each of them, so they might know that the world is not filled with the wicked people and acts of brutality that dominate our news.
- If we shared the same compassion and forgiveness that God pours down upon us in an unending stream, on those who have wronged us.

This year, in addition to the usual exercise more, lose some weight, learn a new language resolutions, let's resolve to make one to be more conscious about sharing the infinite blessings we receive from God with everyone we come in contact with. Happy New Year!

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

**ST. ADALBERT SCHOOL SUPPORT CONTINUES:**

Student enrollment at St. Adalbert School has doubled. The need for ongoing support is important — especially at this time. **Therefore we have decided to continue to support for school supplies, responding to their monthly needs. Currently they have a great need for Backpacks, socks and underwear — grades K-8. They also requested 1-Subject Spiral Notebooks.** Any and all quantities of these supplies are welcome!

Here is how you can be a part of this outreach. Simply shop for items on the list. Kindly **return the items** whenever you come to Our Lady Chapel. **If you do not have time to shop, simply place an envelope in the collection basket and mark it “St. Adalbert's” or drop it off in the chapel office.** Together, we work and plant our seeds of hope and goodness to this community. Thank you in advance for your generosity and helping the children of St. Adalberts! Contact Patty in the Chapel Office [440-473-3560] if you have any questions.



**CHERISHING THE MEMORIES IN OUR HEART:**

In a number of places, Luke’s Gospel records the fact that “Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart” [Luke 2:16-21]. And not just Mary, but all mothers do this — they store up memories of their children, to keep them, hold on to them, to treasure them lest they ever be lost. And mothers are not the only ones who do this — all of us do. We all keep memories in our hearts, continuing to reflect on them as the months and years and decades go by.

As we begin this New Year, what are the memories of 2022 that you and I are keeping, storing, and holding in our hearts? Was this a good year or a hard year? A happy year or a sad year? A year of health or a year of illness? A year of gain or a year of loss? A year of pain or a year of peace? Did the year just past seem to fly by, or did it creep at a snail’s pace?

Our physical hearts have only four chambers, but our souls’ hearts have many more than four. What memories have filled the many chambers of our hearts over the past year? Are we holding some hurtful memories alongside the happy ones? Are we holding on to some resentments and grudges? Have we refreshed our heart’s chambers with compassion, forgiveness, and peace-finally-made?

Is there a chamber in our heart now empty because we’ve lost someone whom we loved? Have we locked up that empty place — or left it open, inviting consoling and healing memories of our beloved to restore and refresh us?

In the past year, did our heart expand to accommodate everything that came our way — peace and pain alike? Did our heart enlarge to welcome God’s grace in our joys and his gentle touch upon our difficult days? In 2022, did we turn to the Lord to lean on his strength in our weakness, to depend on his counsel in our doubt, to seek his wisdom in our confusion, to reach for his companionship in our loneliness?

Mary would come, eventually, to keep in her heart not only the joyful recollections of Jesus’ birth — the star, the angels, the shepherds — but also the painful memories of her Son’s suffering and death. And so, it is with us, too. Our hearts are the storehouses of all that has shaped us to be the persons we are becoming and have become — the persons God is calling us to become.

Our hearts are the Lord’s dwelling place where he comes to forgive our sins, to heal our wounds, to calm our fears, and to give us the peace that comes only from his heart, from his hand.

This New Year’s day might be a good time for us to take a little stroll through the chambers of our hearts and, with the Lord’s help, empty out and sweep out what might be better left behind as a new year begins. If we’ve been living in the chambers of sadness, it might be time, again, to enter the chambers of gladness — and ask the Lord to make his presence known and felt again — in the good memories we’ve held and kept in our hearts.

I know that many — in not most — of us have long abandoned New Year’s Resolutions, but if we’re going to explore the chambers of our hearts, then some resolutions might be in order. Make sure there is service in your heart’s chamber — to your parish faith community, as well as the community at large. And if your schedule, responsibilities, and/or health make it almost impossible to do so — and if that’s the case, I ask you to consider resolving to pray for your parish faith community each day in 2023 for its renewed vitality and growth in the new year.

For sure, the year ahead will find its own share of blessings and sorrows filling our hearts, but with the Lord’s help we can come to accept and even treasure it all and find peace in good times and hard times alike. Every week we come to the Lord’s table and here we keep the memories of Christ’s birth, not just at Christmas time but every week, and we keep the memory of his suffering, death and resurrection. And every week the Lord who gave his life for us on the Cross fills our hearts with his living presence in the bread and cup of Communion in the Eucharist.

Pray that in 2023 we, like Mary, Mother of Jesus, Mother of God, Mother of the Church, will keep in our hearts the memories of our blessings and treasure them in peace, in a new year of grace.

—taken from the writings of Father Austin Fleming, which appear on the internet

Annie Sullivan who with infinite patience, understanding, and gentleness, is trying to coax us out of the darkness, inarticulateness, deafness, and chaos into which we were born.

That’s not to say that what passes today for preaching, theology, and pastoral practice is not full of valuable truth, interesting insights, and prophetic challenge. There’s lots of good theology around. But what’s more absent are the loving sounds and coaxing words, along with the gentle cadence, that we first heard from our mothers when they lured us into self-awareness. What’s needed in theology, spirituality, and church circles are caressing, gentle, beckoning voices that, with the patience and love of an Annie Sullivan, try to teach us how to speak and to enter a world whose complexity and hugeness dwarfs and frightens us. It’s not easy to be led out of darkness. The search for God is very much the search to hear the divine in our “mother tongue.”

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

**READINGS FOR THE WEEK:**

- Monday:** 1 John 2:22-28, Matthew 23:8-12
- Tuesday:** 1 John 2:29-3:6, John 1:29-34
- Wednesday:** 1 John 3:7-10, John 1:35-42
- Thursday:** 1 John 3:11-21, John 1:43-51
- Friday:** 1 John 5:5-13, Mark 1:7-11
- Saturday:** 1 John 5:14-21, John 2:1-11

**Feast of the Epiphany:** Isaiah 60:1-6, Ephesians 3:2-6, Matthew 2:1-12

**CHAPEL ENVELOPES:**

There are many ways that you can support our Holy Cross Mission and support Our Lady Chapel. You can place your offering at the door of the chapel as you enter; you can use our on-line donation link; or you can mail in your offerings to the Chapel itself — whatever best serves your needs. If you need a supply of envelopes, please pick them up off the table in the Narthex of the Chapel when you come to Mass. Or you can call the office or stop in to request them. **If you would like us to send you a supply of**

**WEEKLY OFFERING:**

**Thank you to those who have begun to send in weekly offerings. We really appreciate it.** Thanks for not forgetting about us.

**Offerings-----[Saturday, December 24]----[Mass, Online, Mail-in]----- \$ 1,525.00**

**Offerings-----[Sunday, December 25]----- \$ 1,239.71**

**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].





**THE MOTHER TONGUE:**

Hans Urs Von Balthazar once wrote: “After a Mother has smiled for a long time at her child, the child will begin to smile back; she has awakened love in its heart, and in awakening love in its heart, she awakes also recognition.”

Awakening love and recognition within a child’s heart is a result of more than just the mother’s smile, her voice is also important. Mothers don’t just cuddle babies and smile at them, they also speak to them. It’s this, hearing the mother’s voice beckoning the child to come outwards towards a bigger world even when there isn’t yet any real understanding of what’s being said, that’s vital in bringing a child to self-awareness and speech. We come out of the darkness and chaos of infancy precisely to the extent that we are called out by voices that cajole, caress, reassure, and keep forever luring us beyond ourselves.

During the early critical months of a child’s life, it’s the mother’s voice that does most of this. That’s why the first language we learn is called our “mother tongue.” There are no “father tongues.” It’s the mother’s voice that first caressed us and lured us out of unthinking, inarticulate darkness. Rainer Marie Rilke says that an infant’s journey into human awareness depends upon the mother’s voice displacing “the surging abyss.”

Language philosophers agree. In their view, language structures consciousness and creates the very possibility of thought and feeling. Before we can use a language, we’re trapped inside a darkness and chaos that leave us unable to think or speak as human beings.

We see this illustrated in the case of Helen Keller, who was born blind and deaf and was taught to speak only by the extraordinary efforts of a gifted teacher, Annie Sullivan. In a real sense, Annie Sullivan, Helen’s teacher, broke open the world for her. By teaching her language, Annie Sullivan precisely brought Helen Keller out of darkness and chaos, and opened up for her the possibility of freedom, thought, deeper feeling, self-expression, and the awareness of love.

Perhaps no image is more valuable than this to help us understand how the Word of God is meant to work in our lives. All preaching, teaching, theology, and pastoral practice is really in function of letting God’s voice become the smiling, beckoning, caressing, cajoling, luring voice of the mother, calling us out of fear, darkness, chaos, and muted frustration to freedom, thought, self-expression, and the awareness of love.

The purpose of God’s word is not, first of all, to challenge us towards charity, social justice, morality, or even to the worship of something higher or to form community among ourselves — important though these are in themselves. Christ came, as God’s incarnate Word, to bring us life, light, and love. This means that Christ came to do what our mother tongue does — namely, to call us out beyond the fear, darkness, and chaos that prevents us from entering the world of self-expression, thought, and conscious love.

Christ, as Word, is analogous to Annie Sullivan trying to help Helen Keller break through the chaos of being trapped inside herself, unaware of deeper consciousness, unable to speak, and blocked from fully entering human life. It’s no accident that the gospels speak of Christ as “the Word” because Christianity is more a particular kind of language — a “mother tongue” — than it is a religion.

Religion doesn’t always understand itself in that way. In our theology schools, in our church circles, and in our preaching and religious teaching, in general there is too little of Annie Sullivan and too much a using of God’s word for every other kind purpose. If we look at a sampling of religious literature of any persuasion — the preaching, teaching, and writing of liberals and conservatives alike within any denomination — or at the language that drives social justice spiritualities, academic theology, devotional literature, new age spiritualities, or the theologies of other world religions, we will find, with few salient exceptions, too little that sounds like a “mother tongue.” For the most part, we will search in vain for an

**LIVING UNDER THE GAZE:**

“Today is gonna be a Mommy-and-me day,” my preschool-aged son told me recently. He was perched on the kitchen countertop — his favorite spot in the mornings, where he likes to sit while watching me unload the dishwasher.

“Oh, is it?” I said, my hands full of damp plates. This was news to me. “What does that mean? What are we going to do?”

“We’re gonna read books and put stickers on walls, and you’re gonna watch me play,” he told me. “And then at the end of the day you’re gonna make dinner and I’m gonna sit here and watch you, and we’re gonna smile at each other.”

I am not the best version of myself in the mornings. I am grumpy and anxious, and any suggestion of a deviation from the day’s planned activities usually makes me bare my teeth like a threatened Rottweiler. But my son’s little itinerary pierced me through the heart. I stopped what I was doing and looked at him. We smiled at each other.

I wrote down what he said because I didn’t want to forget it — ever. It wasn’t just that he wanted to spend the day with me. That was sweet. But what really got me in the feels was how he described it. Us watching each other, smiling at each other, turning our faces to each other in love. It was astonishing in its simplicity.

There are a lot of different kinds of prayer — a lot of different ways to be with God, to adore him, to sit in his presence. But I think the way that I like best is exactly what my son described for his Mommy-and-me day — the way that famous peasant of Ars described to St. John Vianney two centuries ago. I like when God and I sit and look at each other.

If you are blessed, as I have been, to have a warm relationship with your parents, you know the power of their gaze. You know what it is to lock eyes with them during one of life’s profound moments — a moment of sadness, a moment of triumph, a moment of joy, a moment of confusion. You know that words are not necessary; sometimes they even get in the way. What you need is in the gaze.

When I reflect on the various ways I have experienced God “letting His face shine upon” me, I keep coming back to His mother. How often, for me, has God chosen Mary to communicate His kindness, His love, His protection, and His faithfulness. How often has He desired her to be the Theotokos, the “God-bearer,” in my life. How often is her intercession and encouragement the means by which He turns His gaze upon me.

I think of a small Christ child sitting cross-legged on the ground two thousand years ago, watching his mother go about some domestic work as the sun rises over Nazareth. She looks up, absent-mindedly, and sees the God of Heaven and Earth smiling at her. She smiles back. Without words, they communicate. This happened for her every day.

I think of Mary at the foot of the cross, gazing up at the face she knows better than her own. The forehead is streaked with blood and the mouth is contorted in agony, and all who look upon him are stricken with despair. But not Mary. Mary sees the face of a feeble infant staring up at her from a manger. Mary sees the face of salvation. Mary sees hope. They lock eyes. Without words, they communicate.

Whatever this year brings you — be it good fortune or great trials or a mix of both — may you remember that through it all, you are under the gaze of the one who has loved you since the beginning of creation.

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

**BRILLIANCE:**

I must be willing to give up what I am in order to become what I will be.

—Albert Einstein

**AN AMAZING PORTRAIT:**

Mary was the key player in a centuries-old drama that is still running its course. She conceived and bore a Son contrary to all medical laws. Though unmarried, she brushed aside all thoughts of abortion. By holding to her fiat, she turned history upside down. Her affirmation to the angel was not the stuttering response of a naïve woman, but a mature affirmation that cost her a lifetime of service. She was docile and obedient, but future events would prove her gallant and assertive too.

Beginning with the birth of her Son, she must be counted among the homeless of the world. She severed the umbilical cord holding her to the Child. Her Boy, though divine, was but clay in her sculptor's hands. From day one, she knew what it meant to be on the run as she fled to protect the Child's life.

She was marked as the mother of an illegitimate Babe. There were ugly names for her and the Boy. They were used. She did not understand her restless Son, but she neither browbeat Him nor did she crush His dreams. She worked from early AM to late PM. She baked their bread daily and carried their water on her head in tall jars from a nearby stream.

After her husband's death, she was without funds and without job market talents. She and her Boy lived below the official poverty level. She did not self-destruct when her Son's sudden exit worsened her economic straits, nor did she consider demanding income from Him.

She studied His adventurous career with enthusiasm, and endangered her own life by joining Him on His lecture dates. At times she felt that His mission was doomed to failure, but she always sustained Him. Her *Magnificat*, spoken as a girl, reveals her even then as a revolutionary regarding the poor. The record will not allow her to be painted as a moderate.

She was completely aware of the world about her and its difficulties. James Tahaney says she taught us "love is an active verb, and love is a synonym for grow." She was with her Son when He was murdered, and was not cowed by His assassins. She did not blame God for the death of her Son.

After His Ascension, she stood alone, but she remained undaunted. She said "yes" to life every step of the way. She needed no Women's Liberation, for she was already free. No woman in history holds more titles than she — one hundred seventeen at the last count. And the number still grows.

A peasant to the last, yet Harvard historian Henry Adams calls her "the most powerful religious symbol in fifteen hundred years of Western history." Helen of Troy may have launched a thousand ships, but the woman from Nazareth has launched a million artists. For twenty centuries, they have saluted her with oils, marble, music, pen, and now graphic art and computer. Lippi, Botticelli, and El Greco would have judged their opus incomplete unless they had painted her on canvas.

Dante called her "daughter of her Son." Chaucer hailed her as "of all flowers flower." Wordsworth wrote of her as "our tainted nature's solitary boast." Gerard Manly Hopkins compared her to the "air we breathe." Coventry Patmore said she is our "only refuge from an abstract Christ." Flannery O'Connor said life without her would be similar to life without sleep.

Her favorite composer was JS Bach, for he began each work with the words "Jesus, help" and ended with "To God alone be glory." Her favorite saint is the little-known Alphege. He wrote centuries ago: "The one who does not think of the wants of the poor is not a member of the Body of Christ." St. John Vianney said that she will only allow herself rest after all her children have been saved. A theologian says her cult has been fostered more by poets than by his peers.

Though she was illiterate, no woman has had more volumes penned about her, nor more universities named after her. She is the only woman in its history to have appeared on *Time* magazine's cover eleven times. *Time*'s editors call her the most celebrated woman who ever lived.

She needs none of us — it is we who need her.

—taken from the writings of Father James Gilhooley which appear on the internet



Saint Pope Paul VI gave permission for this feast to be either Mary Mother of God, or the World Day of Prayers for Peace. For years, I have asked myself: "Why can't the Church make up its mind?" Now, I am beginning to realize that the two celebrations are really integral to each other. To be Mother of God, is to be a carrier of the Prince of Peace. To ensure peace in the world, we have to, like Mary — "Hear the Word of God and treasure it".

"Pray for us sinners, holy Mother of God." Help us to live up to our capability of making the Eternal Word present in the world. Pray for us to your son. Ask Him for the grace that we might be so permeated with the spiritual that we might make the spiritual physical. Help us to live the Life of Christ. Help us to be People of Peace. —taken from the writings for Monsignor Joseph Pellegrino, which appear on the internet

**LIVING THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE INCARNATION:**

On this feast celebrating Mary as the Mother of God, Paul's letter to the Church at Galatia [4:4-7] highlights the message of the child Jesus: "the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb" [Luke 2:16-21]. Luke also tells us that after the visit of the shepherds, "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." It would many years before her son would begin his public ministry.

In Paul's letter, he presents his understanding of Christ's message: In the fullness of time, "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom them under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons and daughters." We can infer from this that Jesus is both true God and true man — Son of God and Son of Mary. God authorized Jesus to transform his followers from slavery under the Jewish Law to freedom as God's children. When Paul's letter to the Church at Galatia was written around 50 AD, it was customary to appoint a legal guardian to manage the affairs of underage heirs. Paul saw the Jewish Law functioning like a guardian for underage believers. With the coming of Christ, believers were no longer minors in need of guidance by the Law; they became legal heirs, adopted children of the Father, and temples of the Holy Spirit who can pray: "Abba, Father!"

Let us imagine some Christians making New Year's resolutions based what Paul wrote. A parishioner resolves to attend a series of lectures on Christology in order to gain a better understanding of Jesu as true God and true man. A lawyer, who recognizes lingering remnants of Catholic legalism in the practice of his faith, resolves to be more loving toward his family and friends. A nun who spends at least a half hour in private prayer each day resolves to say fewer words and to listen more to the promptings of the Spirit. A high school religion teacher who has only a vague understanding of how Christ saved us, resolves to read a book summarizing various theological explanations — including Paul's notion of paying a ransom.

What helpful New Year's resolution could you make based on what Paul wrote?

—taken from the writings of Father Jim Bacik 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.





**LISTENING TO THE WORD WITH HER HEART:**

On the octave day of Christmas, we celebrate the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. This puts a deep theological focus on the Christmas celebration. Going back to our dogmatic theology — the study of the truths of the faith — we focus in on who this Jesus is. By asking the “who” question — as distinguished from the “what” question — we are looking to the person of the Lord. If I asked you, “what are you,” you would respond: an American, a human being, a Buc fan, or something like that. If I asked you, “who are you,” you would respond: “I’m Fred Jones, the son of Bill and Martha Jones. If we asked Jesus “What are you”, the response would be that he is both divine and human, God and man. If we ask him, “Who are you?”, his response would be in the order of: “I am the Eternal Word of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, who took on humanity on Christmas Day.” Today’s feast — Mary Mother of God — emphasizes the person, the “who” of Jesus. When we pray: “Holy Mary, Mother of God” we are not suggesting that Mary is a goddess that gave birth to a god. She did not create divinity within her, but she did give birth to a child who was for all eternity the Eternal Word of God. Many artists of past centuries depicted Mary nursing the Baby Jesus. Sadly, many of us Americans are still so affected by Puritanism that we see nursing in a sexual light instead of a maternal light. What the artists are saying is that Mary was the mother of the Lord in all ways, nurturing him during his infancy with her body.

What the artists are also saying is that just as Mary nurtured Jesus, so she cares for and nurtures all the children entrusted to her by her son — “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners.” There is another ancient depiction of Mary that could illicit the scorn of the so-called intelligentsia if they just stayed on the fringe level of the paintings. Many of the Medieval and Renaissance Masters have depicted the Annunciation. Some showed the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit as rays of light enveloping Mary. Many showed this overshadowing as rays of light entering into Mary through one of her ears. This is not a Puritanic avoidance of sexuality. Certainly, the Medieval and Renaissance Masters were not concerned with that. Nor is this a childish understanding of how Mary became pregnant — on the same terms of a child coming from the stork. It is a lot deeper than this — profound in fact. What this is saying is that the Eternal Word of God was heard by Mary and given sanctuary within her. St. Augustine put it this way; he said: “Mary, full of grace, first conceived Jesus in her heart before she conceived him in her womb.”

There is a power to faith — a primacy of faith — that manifests itself in the physical world. Saturated with the Word of God, the person of faith naturally gives birth to the presence of Christ in the world. I am not just speaking about Mary, Mother of God. I am speaking about us — you and me — Christians, people who make the Word of God present in the world by allowing ourselves to be overshadowed with his presence. Faith is not a matter of dogmas, nor is it a purely spiritual entity hidden from the world. Faith is the integration of the spiritual and physical, the invisible and visible dimensions of a human person. Faith makes God present in the world. Many times people will speak about a meeting with the Holy Father, or with a deeply and truly spiritual person and say: “I felt that I was in the presence of God.” They were. And we are. People of true and deep faith make God present in our parish, our community, our country and our world.

People of deep, true faith are at peace, not because they are withdrawn from the world, but because they have the power to withstand the force of the world that would try to devastate them. “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners” — we are sinners because so often we refuse to allow the Word to become Flesh within our lives. And because we are sinners, we are often in turmoil; for sin is turmoil, chaos. But, if we allow the grace of God to work in us and through us — if we allow his word to take flesh — then we can live in peace. We can be people of peace.

**SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — JANUARY 21<sup>st</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).** This is a wonderful way to serve others. Please consider this opportunity.

**EUCCHARISTIC MINISTERS:**

We are currently discerning a new group of Eucharistic Ministers who would undergo training within the next month. If you feel that the Lord is calling you to this ministry, we would be delighted to include you in that ministry here at Our Lady Chapel. Both adults and teens [must be a Senior in High School] are welcome to participate in this very special ministry. We are in need of ministers for both our Saturday evening and Sunday morning Masses. **Contact Father John or the chapel office [440-473-3560] if you feel called to this ministry.** We are always in need of Eucharistic Ministers.

**POPE FRANCIS ON THE WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR PEACE:**

“Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” [1 Thessalonians 5:1-2]. With these words, the Apostle Paul encouraged the Thessalonian community to remain steadfast, their hearts and feet firmly planted and their gaze fixed on the world around them and the events of history — even as they awaited the Lord’s return. When tragic events seem to overwhelm our lives, and we feel plunged into a dark and difficult maelstrom of injustice and suffering, we are likewise called to keep our hearts open to hope and to trust in God, who makes himself present, accompanies us with tenderness, sustains us in our weariness and, above all, guides our path. For this reason, Saint Paul constantly exhorts the community to be vigilant, seeking goodness, justice and truth: “So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober” [1 Thessalonians 5:6]. His words are an invitation to remain alert and not to withdraw into fear, sorrow, or resignation, or to yield to distraction or discouragement. Instead, we should be like sentinels keeping watch and ready to glimpse the first light of dawn, even at the darkest hour.

Covid-19 plunged us into a dark night. It destabilized our daily lives, upset our plans and routines, and disrupted the apparent tranquility of even the most affluent societies. It generated disorientation and suffering and caused the death of great numbers of our brothers and sisters. Amid a whirlwind of unexpected challenges and facing a situation confusing even from a scientific standpoint, the world’s healthcare workers mobilized to relieve immense suffering and to seek possible remedies. At the same

time, political authorities had to take measures to organize and manage efforts to respond to the emergency.

In addition to its physical aspects, Covid-19 led to a general malaise in many individuals and families — the long periods of isolation and the various restrictions on freedom contributed to this malaise, with significant long-term effects.

Nor can we overlook the fractures in our social and economic order that the pandemic exposed, and the contradictions and inequalities that it brought to the fore. It threatened the job security of many individuals and aggravated the ever-increasing problem of loneliness in our societies — particularly on the part of the poor and those in need. We need but think of the millions of informal workers in many parts of the world left without a job and without any support during the time of the lockdown.

Only rarely do individuals and societies achieve progress in conditions that generate such feelings of despondency and bitterness, which weaken efforts to ensure peace while provoking social conflict, frustration and various forms of violence. Indeed, the pandemic seems to have upset even the most peaceful parts of our world, and exposed any number of forms of fragility.

Three years later, the time is right to question, learn, grow and allow ourselves to be transformed as individuals and as communities; this is a privileged moment to prepare for “the day of the Lord”. I have already observed on a number of occasions that we never emerge the same from times of crisis — we emerge either better or worse. Today we are being asked: What did we learn from the pandemic? What new paths should we follow to cast off the shackles of our old habits, to be better prepared, to dare new things? What signs of life and hope can we see, to help us move forward and try to make our world a better place?

Certainly, after directly experiencing the fragility of our own lives and the world around us, we can say that the greatest lesson we learned from Covid-19 was the realization that we all need one another. That our greatest and yet most fragile treasure is our shared humanity as brothers and sisters, children of God. And that none of us can be saved alone. Consequently, we urgently need to join together in seeking and promoting the universal values that can guide the growth of this human fraternity. We also learned that the trust we put in progress, technology and the effects of globalization was not only excessive, but turned into an individualistic and idolatrous intoxication, compromising the very promise of justice, harmony and peace that we so ardently sought. In our fast-paced world, the widespread problems of inequality, injustice, poverty, and marginalization continue to fuel unrest and conflict, and generate violence and even wars.

The pandemic brought all this to the fore, yet it also had its positive effects. These include a chastened return to humility, a rethinking of certain consumeristic excesses, and a renewed sense of solidarity that has made us more sensitive to the suffering of others and more responsive to their needs. We can also think of the efforts, which in some cases proved truly heroic, made by all those people who worked tirelessly to help everyone emerge from the crisis and its turmoil as best they could.

This experience has made us all the more aware of the need for everyone — including peoples and nations — to restore the word “together” to a central place. For it is together, in fraternity and solidarity, that we build peace, ensure justice, and emerge from the greatest disasters. Indeed, the most effective responses to the pandemic came from social groups, public and private institutions, and international organizations that put aside their particular interests and joined forces to meet the challenges. Only the peace that comes from a fraternal and disinterested love can help us overcome personal, societal and global crises.

Even so, at the very moment when we dared to hope that the darkest hours of the Covid-19 pandemic were over, a terrible new disaster befell humanity. We witnessed the onslaught of another



scourge — another war, to some extent like that of Covid-19, but driven by culpable human decisions. The war in Ukraine is reaping innocent victims and spreading insecurity, not only among those directly affected, but in a widespread and indiscriminate way for everyone, also for those who, even thousands of kilometers away, suffer its collateral effects — we need but think of grain shortages and fuel prices.

Clearly, this is not the post-Covid era we had hoped for or expected. This war — together with all the other conflicts around the globe — represents a setback for the whole of humanity, and not merely for the parties directly involved. While a vaccine has been found for Covid-19, suitable solutions have not yet been found for the war. Certainly, the virus of war is more difficult to overcome than the viruses that compromise our bodies, because it comes, not from outside of us, but from within the human heart corrupted by sin [see Mark 7:17-23].

What then is being asked of us? First of all, to let our hearts be changed by our experience of the crisis, to let God, at this time in history, transform our customary criteria for viewing the world around us. We can no longer think exclusively of carving out space for our personal or national interests; instead, we must think in terms of the common good, recognizing that we belong to a greater community, and opening our minds and hearts to universal human fraternity. We cannot continue to focus simply on preserving ourselves; rather, the time has come for all of us to endeavor to heal our society and our planet, to lay the foundations for a more just and peaceful world, and to commit ourselves seriously to pursuing a good that is truly common.

In order to do this, and to live better lives after the Covid-19 emergency, we cannot ignore one fundamental fact: namely that the many moral, social, political and economic crises we are experiencing are all interconnected, and what we see as isolated problems are actually causes and effects of one another. Consequently, we are called to confront the challenges of our world in a spirit of responsibility and compassion. We must revisit the issue of ensuring public health for all. We must promote actions that enhance peace and put an end to the conflicts and wars that continue to spawn poverty and death. We urgently need to join in caring for our common home and in implementing clear and effective measures to combat climate change. We need to battle the virus of inequality and to ensure food and dignified labor for all, supporting those who lack even a minimum wage and find themselves in great difficulty. The scandal of entire peoples starving remains an open wound. We also need to develop suitable policies for welcoming and integrating migrants and those whom our societies discard. Only by responding generously to these situations, with an altruism inspired by God’s infinite and merciful love, will we be able to build a new world and contribute to the extension of his kingdom, which is a kingdom of love, justice and peace.

In sharing these reflections, it is my hope that in the coming New Year we can journey together, valuing the lessons that history has to teach us. I offer my best wishes to Heads of State and Government, to Heads of International Organizations, and to the leaders of the different religions. To all men and women of good will I express my prayerful trust that, as artisans of peace, they may work, day by day, to make this a good year! May Mary Immaculate, Mother of Jesus and Queen of Peace, intercede for us and for the whole world.

—Francis

### 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].**

