

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

~ **A Prayer of Rejoicing** ~

I praise you, Lord,  
and ask,  
who am I,  
A small one of the earth,  
that the word of the Lord  
should come to me?

Open my ears  
that it may be a word  
that compels me  
to do what is right and just.  
Open my heart  
that it maybe a word of rejoicing.

O Majesty,  
O Splendor  
greater than the mountains and the sky!  
I am a child of earth  
who adores you,  
and loves you,  
and lives  
because you have desired me.

Praised be God  
whose greatness  
has reached to the ends of the earth.  
Let me live  
n your presence  
and give thanks  
through your name!  
Amen.

**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

# 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.*

**THE MYSTERY OF ADVENT:**

Mary's song of praise — the Magnificat — is much more than the words of a young girl giving thanks to God [Luke 1:46-55]. It is a radical vision of a world made new. The lowliest are called blessed; the hungry are satisfied; the rich are sent away empty; the mighty powers are brought low; the proud are scattered; the humble are exalted. Unsurprising, this passage has been banned in several countries during periods of unrest — including in India during British occupation, Guatemala in the 1980's, and Argentina in the 1970's. German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was eventually executed by the Nazis, called it “the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung.” It is a rallying cry for believers in God's kingdom on Earth, for the oppressed and downtrodden across time and space, and for those who seek justice in this life — not just the next. This is among the most powerful scriptures we have. It is a roadmap toward building a world where joy can be shared by all, equally.

The Magnificat is a rare example in the Bible when we are given direct access not just to a woman's words, but to her thoughts, beliefs, even dreams. Mary's dream of the future and her skillful interpretation of what God is creating is full of joy, even amid the uncertainty of a changing world, even amid the strain of waiting for something new. She recognizes God's goodness within the disruption of the status quo, in the promise of justice and a better life. She envisions the world that Jesus's birth is meant to begin — a world of broken rules, radical generosity, and unabashed equity — and she finds it joyful to behold.

Let Mary's joy be our joy. Feed the hungry; exalt the humble; turn every hierarchy on its head. Do what Jesus and Mary both realized they were born to do — and what each of us was baptized to take on. Find joy in the disruptive work of birthing the Kingdom of God.

—taken from the writings of Jennifer Vosters, which appears on the internet

**ADVENT PENANCE SERVICE:**

On **Monday, December 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM**, we will celebrate our **Advent Communal Penance Service**. This service will consist of scriptural reflections by those involved in the Christmas Story. There will also be songs and hymns, and a time to straighten the paths of our lives to ease the arrival of our God. Each of us needs to truly hear in our heart the message of John the Baptist: “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand” [see Mark 1:15]. The service will last about 45 minutes. There will be an opportunity for individual reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation following the service. Please join

**ADVENT DEVOTIONS:**

On the table in the narthex of the Chapel are several Advent devotionals to assist you in your spiritual journey during this season of Advent. We hope that you will make use of them for you and your family. [1] **The Little Blue Book** with daily readings and devotions. This book corresponds to “The Little Black Book” that is so popular during Lent. [2] The daily scripture devotion, **The Word Among Us**, is available. It lists the scripture passage for the day along with a short reflection on one of the passages.

**CHRISTMAS FLOWERS AND DECORATIONS:**

During this Christmas season, we would like to thank all those who have helped us by making memorial offerings. May 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 Thomas Hughes**, and 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” and give to Father John or place it in the offering basket. 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 OTHERS:**

- For an end to the war between Israel and Hamas.
- For an end to the war between Russia and Ukraine.
- For a couple experiencing difficulty in becoming pregnant
- For an end to violence as a means to resolve differences.
- 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.

**PRAYERS FOR THE DECEASED:**

- For Eleanor DeMarco, mother of Chapel Associate, Patty Szanislo, and Kathy DeMarco [anniversary]
- For Joseph Mazanetz.
- For Skylar Schrams ['14], cousin of Natalie Kalfas ['12].
- For Mercedes Hronek
- For Hatti Spagnolo, mother of Dennis Spagnolo ['84]
- For Brother Robert Dierker, C.S.C.
- For Cynthia Carter.
- For Mary Jiannetti, great-aunt of AVI associate, Captri.
- For Tim Cooper, brother of Father Jeff Cooper, C.S.C.
- For Thomas McClaughlin, father of Kaley ['17] and former Gilmour Student, Aidan McClaughlin
- For Connor Davis ['14], brother of Kelly ['16] and Brian ['20] Davis

**SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — JANUARY 20<sup>th</sup>:**

Our Savior Lutheran Church, across the street from Gilmour, has a Food Pantry which distributes food to the community on **the third Saturday of each month**. They welcome volunteers. **On Saturday morning at 9 AM, they need help setting up items for distribution and preparing for the food pantry to open. It serves around 150 clients each time. The food pantry is then open from 9:30 AM—1:30 PM on Saturday.**

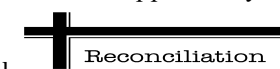


Our Savior Lutheran's Food Pantry was formed to serve those in emergency situations and/or with on-going need in the cities of Mayfield Heights, Mayfield Village, Highland Heights and Gates Mills. The Food Pantry respects social and cultural diversity and upholds the worth and dignity of those it serves. 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 us know in the chapel office [440-473-3560] if you would like more information or if you would like to help.** This is a wonderful way to serve others. Please consider this opportunity.

**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].

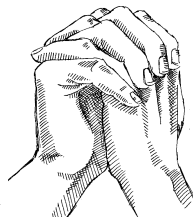


**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

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

**PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:**

- For Father Larry Jerge, C.S.C., who is under the care of Hospice.
- For Loretta Seidl, sister of Brother Robert Lavelle, C.S.C., who is undergoing medical treatment.
- For John Zippay, family friend of Bernadette and Stephen Ritley, who is critically ill.
- For Sister Mary Ann Lavelle, C.S.J., sister of Brother Robert Lavelle, C.S.C., who is in hospice care.
- For Jill Thompson, who is undergoing treatment for mental health issues.
- For Patty Szaniszlo, Chapel Office Associate, who is recovering from hip replacement surgery.
- For Nora Beach, wife of former Gilmour Religion Instructor, Bob Beach, mother of Hannah [‘98] and Miriam [‘99] Beach, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Jennifer Burger [‘06], sister of Rachel [‘10] and Paul [‘16] Burger, who is undergoing treatment for rare form of breast cancer.
- For Maria Ruiz, mother of Elina Gurney, grandmother of Joseph and Christina Gurney, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Chuck Shade, father of Loren Shade, grandfather of Michael, Madeline, and Charles Shade, who is in seriously ill with several health issues.
- For Chuck Campanella, father of Anthony Campanella, who continues in rehab following serious surgery.
- 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 Mike Heryak, husband of Janet, father of Lillian [‘09], Rosa [‘12] and Edwin [‘17] Heryak, who is seriously ill.
- For John Roddy, brother of Tim Roddy [‘87], and brother of Gilmour Marketing associate, Mary Roddy Stretar, uncle of Katie Stretar [‘29], and cousin of Daniel [‘83], Mike [‘85], and Matt [‘86] Roddy, who is undergoing treatment for a recurrence of cancer.
- For James Farmer, father of DEI director, JaiCynthia Farmer, who is recovering from a serious heart-related issue.
- For Robert O’Neill, grandfather of Bobby O’Neill [‘33], who is undergoing treatment for bladder cancer.
- For Debbie Marcum, former assistant in the Lower School, who is recovering from a severe heart attack.
- For Josephine Fernando, mother of Melvin [‘83] and Raymond [‘88] Fernando, mother-in-law of Imelda Deogracias Fernando [‘88], who is ill.
- For Lincoln Nye, brother of Maddie Nye [‘25], and former Gilmour student, who is undergoing medical treatment.
- For JoAnne Fisher, wife of Jim, mother of Bill [‘2010] and PJ, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.



**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.



**NEXT BIBLE STUDY — WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3<sup>rd</sup>:**

Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Wednesday, January 3<sup>rd</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: Epiphany**

Mark your calendars and be part of this wonderful activity that will deepen your spiritual journey. We will meet every other week — topic to be decided at the end of the previous meeting. Join us. You’ll have a blast, and celebrate your faith along the way..

**SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:**

Sunday, December 17: 3 <sup>rd</sup> Week in Advent	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream
Monday, December 18:	NO MASS
Tuesday, December 19:	NO MASS
Wednesday, December 20:	NO MASS
Thursday, December 21:	NO MASS
Friday, December 22:	NO MASS
Saturday, December 23: 4 <sup>th</sup> Week in Advent	5:00 PM In Person only
Sunday, December 24: 4 <sup>th</sup> Week in Advent	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream
Sunday, December 24: Christmas Eve	4:00 PM In Person & Live Stream
Monday, December 25: Christmas Day	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream

**2024 CALENDARS:**

Calendars for the year 2024 are available for your taking. Besides having space for you to write your family appointments, the calendar also contains information about Mass and Reconciliation times here at Our Lady Chapel. We wish to thank the Schulte-Mahon-Murphy Funeral Homes for their generous donation of these 2022 Calendars to us. Please feel free to take as many calendars as you would like. Thank you.



**WONDER and AWE:**

Wonder requires a person not to forget themselves but to feel themselves so acutely that their connectedness to every created thing comes into focus. In sacred awe, we are a part of the story.

—Cole Arthur Riley

**REFLECTION FOR THE WEEK:**

Advent is such a hopeful time! We adults understand preparing space for the graces of the coming Christ, making room in our hearts for peace and promise of Christmas. I love the mindful effort, particularly in the midst of all the other preparations that seem to draw our attention from this more sacred task.

Next Thursday, December 21<sup>st</sup>, is one of the darkest nights of the year. Yet, within the framework of this darkness, this 3<sup>rd</sup> Week in Advent presents us with the theme of being joyful or glad. The prophet Isaiah announces a coming of One Who has the mission of bringing release, healing, and the proclamation of good news [Isaiah 61:1-11]. We also hear John the Baptist tell us that he is not the “light”, but announces the presence of the “light” [John 1:6-8, 19-28]. Thus, from within the darkness of our lives, we cry out for a personal increase in hope and joy with the realization that we are not alone — personally nor collectively. The Light is coming to dispel what is dark within and around us.

In the creation narrative of the Book of Genesis, God is presented as saying: “Let there be light” [Genesis 1:3]. Isaiah also talks about “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shown” [Isaiah 9:2]. It seems that God’s light got turned to darkness along the way, but God seems to keep saying: “Let there be more light.”

We have an expression which is used when we come to understand something — “I see.” We refer to others from whom we keep secrets as “being in the dark”. Those whom we consider not as smart as ourselves, we name: “lights out” or “not the brightest bulb on the tree.”

A second form of darkness is a mood of spirit. We have the phrase: “doom and gloom”. It refers to statements or personalities of pessimism or hopelessness. We can often invite them to “lighten up”. But God’s grace always comes to our rescue. St. Paul reminds us in his writing to the Church at Thessalonica: “rejoice always.” And then he continues: “in all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God” [1Thessalonians 5:16-24]. Being happy and grateful at all times is a constant work of God’s grace, and God’s will is to bring us out of our sadness. We all have hard times and it is not unfaithful to weep and wonder “why us?” God does not ask us to be inhuman in our reactions and responses. Denial is not a faith response either. God is always saying, “Let there be some light, sometime!”

There are also various forms of visual darkness or blindness. We all can be blinded by what we do see. The familiar objects and persons around us can be treated as if we do not see them for what they are. We become blind to them by their closeness to us — family-members, friends, neighbors, and fellow workers can all become foggy figures. It is often when they move away to a greater distance — by job relocation, death, or our lack of personal attention — that we come to see them more clearly.

The word “expectation” means literally: “watching out,” or “looking out”. What we visually see is often determined by what we are specifically looking out for. There might be other objects or persons in the field, but we get blinded to them because of our exact focus. Expectations can limit our vision both physically and spiritually. We are blinded by what we want to see or don’t want to see.

Pre-judging anything or anyone is a form of keeping them in the dark. Color, forms, actions, and gestures may not conform to our way of seeing things as acceptable. My “view” of you or them can be disturbed by the distance I keep. Keeping things at a safe distance will also keep them distorted and safe for my security of selfishness. God continues saying, “Let there be brighter light!”

We are waiting for the Light to uncover us — to take off the blinders by which we walk in ignorance, sadness, and distrust. Jesus as the Light illumines ourselves to ourselves and says: “Now what do you say of yourself?” The joy to which we are invited is the sense that we are of and in God.

**LIVING THE MYSTERY:**

Have you ever seen the movie: *Simon Birch*? It’s the story of a young boy with dwarfism who is convinced God made him for a “special heroic purpose.” Though almost everyone — including his pastor — tries to talk him out of his fantasy. The ending of the movie eventually proves his conviction had been correct all along. Though the plot might seem somewhat “hammy,” the sacred authors for this 3<sup>rd</sup> Week in Advent can certainly connect with it. Paul states it clearly — “May the God of peace make you perfectly holy” [1 Thessalonians 5:16-24].

His community in Thessalonica understands that “holy” doesn’t mean pious, describing the way you hold your hands or raise your eyes heavenward when you pray. Holy simply means “other” — distinct from those around you, just as God is other from every other person around him/her.

One of the characteristics which makes us unique is the conviction that God has given each of us — like Simon Birch — a specific purpose in life. That assurance isn’t an essential part of our personality just because we’re followers of Jesus. The prophet Isaiah calls our attention to it 500 years before Jesus’ birth — “The spirit of Yahweh is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners” [Isaiah 61:1-11]. The prophet’s life is consumed with God’s plan to help the helpless. If God is going to bring the world “justice” — good personal relationships — that justice must start with Isaiah’s personal relationships with others — something he’s convinced he’s specifically called by God to carry out. It’s a major part of his holiness.

According to the four Christian evangelists — with the exception of Jesus of Nazareth — no one in salvation history has a more unique purpose in life than John the Baptizer. He’s the precursor of Jesus the Messiah. As John the Evangelist tells us, John the Baptist is the one who prepares the way for the one who comes after him — the one whose sandal strap he’s not even “worthy to untie” [John 1:6-8, 19-28].

Scholars are convinced that Jesus’ first followers seem to be the only people who eventually believed this special precursor had that mission. Historically, John himself most probably never understood that to be his God-given role in life. It’s possible that John went to his death convinced he’d failed in his mission — to help people experience God in their daily lives. Does this sound familiar? It is pretty safe to assume that only after reaching heaven’s confines was John finally able to put all the individual pieces together.

Holy people face a daunting problem — though they believe God’s designated them for a specific purpose in life, they rarely know what that specific purpose is. Perhaps that’s why Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they constantly have to “hang loose.” While they’re waiting for that purpose to show itself, they must “in all circumstances give thanks, not quench the Spirit, and not despise prophetic utterances.” What Paul is saying here is that the Thessalonian community needs to always be open to surfacing God’s will in their lives. Meanwhile they’re to “test everything, retain what is good, and refrain from every kind of evil.”

Paul simply tells his community that they are to spend their lives becoming other Christs — no one could be holier. Yet even in Gethsemane the historical Jesus argued with God about his purpose in life. If God’s Son had to wait until Easter Sunday morning to definitely appreciate his life’s purpose, who are we?

Most of us have at least a few more years to go.

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

**IMPORTANT:**

Your gifts can take you somewhere, but you need character to keep you there.



Christmas. For ages, scholars have debated about the identity of the Servant of Isaiah's songs [see Isaiah 42, 49, 50, and 52]. The early Christians felt the servant described Jesus, the long-awaited, surprising, Messiah. Others suggest that the servant depicts Israel herself as God's chosen. But especially in light of praying the Magnificat with Mary, we might look at how she and John the Baptist invite us to become servants of the Lord with them.

The first attitude we learn from Isaiah, Mary and John is that they focus on God. Isaiah says: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" [Isaiah 61:1-11]; Mary sings: "My soul rejoices in God, my savior;" and the baptizer proclaims: "I am not the Christ, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie" [John 1:6-8, 19-28].

What would change in our lives if we would say with conviction: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me"? Sometimes we may proclaim something like that by our conviction that our opinion is infallible — The mother of one of my closest friends used to say: "I've thought about it, and I'm right!" Of course, her tongue was blatantly planted in her cheek as she said it. Supposing that we've got it absolutely right ends up being the polar opposite of prophecy. Mary and John — our guides — remind us that prophets don't proclaim their opinions. They invite others into an awareness of God's love, of the gift of God's Spirit — they proclaim that grace that awaits us just around the bend if only we will be open to it.

Secondly, as Mary in Cain's book challenged the boy Jesus, the prophet calls us into an ever-greater awareness of the needs of others and our potential to respond. Isaiah's servant, like Jesus, recognized that being anointed was a job description. They were to bear genuinely good news, to listen attentively to the sorrowful and to help free others from whatever might bind them.

Mary's response, her open-ended "Here I am, thy will be done," became her life's orientation. Paul preached the same message from a different angle when he said: "Do not quench the Spirit" [1 Thessalonians 5:16-24]. How often do we feel a twinge about not responding or not knowing how to respond to something that is going wrong? We think of hunger in the world, wars, division, or discrimination against others for their orientation, ethnicity, age, gender, etc., and we ask: "But what can I do?"

The fact that the question even arises in us is a sign of the Spirit, who will never call us to try something we cannot do. Paul tells us: "Pray without ceasing." If our prayer says: "Here I am, I come to do your will," we will eventually understand what we can do, even if it is no more than to stand silently by another, never pretending to understand all that is going on in them.

Ultimately, John the Baptizer reminds us that the coming of God's reign is gift and grace. We cannot make it happen any more than the rooster makes the sun rise. Nevertheless, like John, we can live like prophets, helping others catch a hint that there is something good afoot, something deeper, and more meaningful than society offers. That's what it means to prepare the way.

Today, the Spirit of the Lord urges us to rejoice because we know that the hungry can be fed and the brokenhearted healed. We rejoice because, like John, we can point toward a road that leads to something unimaginably wonderful. With Paul, we can proclaim one infallible message: "The one who calls you is faithful" and will lead creation into fulfillment.

Mary sings of what God is working in our midst, Isaiah describes it, John announces that it's coming and Paul reminds us that God does great things, not just "once a long time ago," but today, among and through us. That's divinely subversive!

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



The Creator still works out our fuller creation and asks us to let go of false images of God and especially ourselves. As the Light draws closer to us, He Who is always desirous of moving closer to us, we will see ourselves more clearly, but as we say, "in a new light". If we stay in the shadows we will never see our features and our gifts. When we allow the Light to come closer, we will see things perhaps we wish not to see. Our faults, our lack of response might be too real, but the Light is embracing, not accusing. In that Light we were created and in that Light we receive our re-creation. That is the good news — the cause of rejoicing.

We cannot love that which we do not know — ourselves, each other, creation, or God. The Light has come to reveal as much as we can know about all four. God does not want to keep us in the "dark" about ourselves. What blinds us could be fear or false humility. The Light calls us out into the bright idea God has of us and for us. The darkness prevents us from accepting others upon whom the Light has shined in the form of sacredness. God sees them as sacraments — outward signs of God's love. The Light has entered our world to focus our vision upon the Source and what the Source is all about. The Source is about us and our final and eternal Light shining now and forever. God still says: "That there be a joyful light and lots of it."

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

### ON THE GOODNESS OF FLESH:

For many people, religion has something do with fighting the flesh, taming it, beating it down, bringing it to submission so that the spirit can soar untrammelled by anything so mundane as a body. The flesh becomes the enemy of religion, the impediment to goodness, the pulsing, impulsive, lively gift that we're all meant to fear.

That's where Christianity comes in. Christianity is based on the goodness of flesh — or to put it another way, if human flesh was good enough for Jesus, who of us can afford to reject it? To be human is to be flesh. To be holy is to glory in it.

The very scandal of Christianity lies in the fact that it sees divinity in humanity. It's a hard idea to swallow. Every major religion recognizes the role of the Creator in the development of life, of course. But in it? Part of it? Identified with it? Many religions look at God as distant — God looks down from the heavens of the world religions and pronounce laws or grapple with demons or pass judgment from on high. Only Christianity argues that the Creator has taken on the flesh and blood of creation in order to bring us to assert the divine in ourselves.

In the Christmas story, we see God become helpless, become like us, become subject to the tensions of growth, become flesh so we might have the confidence to recognize that we have the stuff it takes to become like God. So what is this about renouncing the flesh? How can we call the way God made us inherently bad as philosophers have done since the time of Aristotle?

The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning says of it: "Earth is crammed with heaven." The flesh, in other words, is all we have. It is our glory. It is our power. It is sweet. It is beautiful. And it is the clay out of which we shape a better tomorrow.

—taken from the writings of Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B., which appear on the internet



### FAITH EDUCATION:

Our Faith Education classes have begun. Our Faith Education classes meet on **Sundays from 8:45—9:45 AM**. Please join us as we come together to begin our faith journey for this year by entering into prayer and worship together. If you have any questions, please contact Patty in the Chapel Office [[440-473-3560]. **Upcoming class dates: January 7-21-28.** Thank you for taking care of this important responsibility.



**THE ROLE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST UNFOLDS:**

We turn to John's Gospel [1:6-8, 19-28] on this 3<sup>rd</sup> Week in Advent, and we consider the person and role of John the Baptist. John's Gospel for this 3<sup>rd</sup> Week in Advent is really in two parts. The first is John's famous prologue which opens with the words: "In the beginning was the Word." The second part gives us an account of John the Baptist's ministry of preparing for the coming of Jesus.

The first part is a kind of poetic and theological introduction to the entrance of John the Baptist. Some scholars think that this introduction of John was probably the original opening of the Gospel before the Prologue was added. It is thought that they were stuck in the middle of the prologue by a later editor. These things should not bother us too much especially as the editors of the Lectionary have put the two sections dealing with John the Baptist together for us.

John the Baptist is described as "a man sent by God." John the Baptist surely is a man; he is not divine. He is a man sent by God. But nonetheless, John the Baptist is different — he is a man with a divine mission. No one else in this Gospel, except Jesus, is described as being sent by God, and perhaps for this reason John the Evangelist is very concerned that things should be absolutely clear, and that there should be no confusion between John the Baptist and Jesus.

We are told that John "was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light." It is supposed that this line was inserted because some of John the Baptist's followers were still around and perhaps exaggerated his role and may well have given him the title of "The Light". So although John the Evangelist exalts John the Baptist, he also makes it clear that John the Baptist's role was to be a witness and not to supplant the one whom he was foreshadowing. Another thing that is made clear is that the Baptist's mission was to everyone. From the very beginning John's Gospel stresses that salvation is ultimately for all.

This brings us to John's encounter with his interrogators. John's responses and very similar to those of Jesus which are found later in John's Gospel [see John 8:25]. In both cases, the responses were meant to make the listeners pause and think about what was meant.

John declares that he is not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet; these are all what is known as Eschatological titles — names by which the Messiah might be known. We understand the first two but the title Prophet should be understood as being shorthand for Moses. What they meant was: "a Prophet like Moses". In the Jewish mind, the Christ — in other words the Messiah — is normally accompanied by the two great patriarchs — Elijah and Moses. This is brought home to us when in the Synoptic Gospels we find Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus on the Mount of the Transfiguration [see Matthew 17 and Luke 9].

When John is pressed further to identify himself, he declares that he is "a voice crying in the wilderness" — thus identifying himself with the Isaiah [see Isaiah 40]. In its original context, this voice in the wilderness which cried out "prepare the way of the Lord" referred to the angels who prepared the way through the desert for the Chosen People to return to the Promised Land from their exile in Babylon.

So, it is within this understanding that John applies this movement of the Spirit and applies it to his role in preparing the way for God to come to his people. John then goes on to say that he is not even worthy to undo the strap of the sandals of the one for whom he is preparing the way. The phrase about the sandals is interesting because this was the task given to the very lowest of all the servants in a household. In saying this, John is presented as a model of humility — one of the first characteristics of a disciple of Christ.

John the Baptist has often been described as the Last of the Old Testament Prophets, but maybe he ought to be regarded more as one of the first New Testament disciples of Christ. We refer to him as "Saint" John the Baptist and this title places him firmly in the New Testament camp. John the Baptist is first and foremost a proclaimer of the coming of the Kingdom. He fearlessly witnesses to Christ — "He came as a witness — a witness to speak for the light."



who fear exhibitionism.

Beyond this radical intimacy, the union among ourselves in the "communion of saints" is also a presence to each other beyond distance. Inside the body of Christ, we are present to each other and carry each other across the miles. Everything we do — good or bad — affects all the others. For this reason the church teaches that there is no such thing as a private act — of sin, virtue, or anything else. Nothing is private inside a body — everything affects everything. Moreover our union with each other links us, even beyond death. Inside the "communion of saints," we believe that our loved ones who have died are alive, still with us, and able to communicate with us and we with them.

To believe this is to be both consoled and challenged. Consoled, in knowing that we carry each other in love and union, across all distance — even through death. But challenged too in knowing that everything we do — be it ever so private — is either a bad virus or a healthy enzyme affecting the overall health of the body of Christ and the family of humanity.

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

**SCHEDULE OF ADVENT/CHRISTMAS SERVICES:**

- **Sunday, December 17** — **Decoration of the Chapel for Christmas** following the 10 AM Mass
- **Monday, December 18** — **Communal Penance Service at 7:00 PM**
- **Sunday, December 24** — **10:00 AM** — Mass for the **4th Week in Advent**  
— **4:00 PM** — **Christmas Eve Mass**
- **Monday, December 25** — **Christmas Day Mass at 10:00 AM**
- **Sunday, December 31** — **10:00 AM** — Mass for the **Feast of the Holy Family**.  
— There will be **no vigil Mass on New Year's Eve this year** because New Year's Day is not a Holy Day because it falls on a Monday

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

Our RCIA program will begin shortly. If you have been thinking about investigating the Catholic faith, or if you know someone who has been thinking about it; if you have been away from the Catholic Church for a while, or are interested in learning more about the Catholic faith; if you know someone who is not fully initiated [Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation] in their Catholic faith — then consider joining or having them join our RCIA program. **Please contact Father John [440-473-3560] for more information.**

**RUN THE RACE:**

To be alive in this beautiful, self-organizing universe — to participate in the dance of life with senses to perceive it, lungs that breathe it, organs that draw nourishment from it — is a wonder beyond words.

**DIVINELY SUBVERSIVE:**

In Jesuit Father Bill Cain's rendition of *The Diary of Jesus Christ*, we hear Jesus talk about listening to his mother sing her favorite song: the "Magnificat." What an event that must have been. In the prayer, Jesus challenges Mary, saying that the promises of the song may have been true "once, a long time ago" [Luke 1:46-55]. When Mary challenges Jesus to do his part, he learns how very subversive it is to sing that the hungry will be filled and the rich sent away empty. The Magnificat isn't a lullaby, but a prophetic proclamation.

Between Isaiah, Mary's song, Paul's message to the Thessalonians and the evangelist John's description of John the Baptist, we get more than enough calls to prophecy in this last week before

**THE MYSTICAL BODY:**

I am done with great things and big plans, great institutions and big success. I am for those tiny, invisible loving human forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, which, if given time, will rend the hardest monument of pride. The deep, important things that most affect us are usually not big and showy, but tiny, perhaps even imperceptible.

We see the truth of this just by looking at the human body. How little of it we see from the outside. Inside a human body are countless hidden, silent processes, all going on at once. Cells are growing and dividing, enzymes are fighting viruses, nerves are carrying messages “to and fro”, cancerous cells are being attacked by the immune system, even while the hair are greying, the body is digesting food, and is imperceptibly aging. Whether we are healthy or sick at a given moment depends largely on countless, silent, hidden processes.

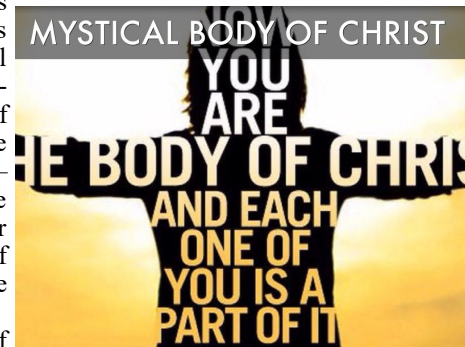
Moreover, inside all this, there is an even more-complex web of hidden connections between these various processes. Everything is interconnected — no part does anything that doesn’t affect everything else.

This is true too of any social body. Every community or society has a certain visible life that can be seen and whose overt interconnections, to an extent, can be grasped, charted, and written up into textbooks. But, just as with the human body, most of the deep things in a community are under the surface, invisible, silent, available only through another kind of instrument, the intuitive gaze of the mystic, novelist, poet, or artist.

And all of this is even more true of the body of Christ — the community of the baptized, the sincere. Most of the important processes there are also invisible.

The union among ourselves in the “communion of saints” is also a presence to each other beyond distance. Like any other body, partly this body is visible — physical, historical, something that can be observed from the outside. Historical Christianity, the churches, in their concrete history, are the visible body of Christ — people, institutions, buildings, virtue and sin enfleshed in history. But the body of Christ is more than meets the physical eye — a billion times more. As in every body, countless, silent, invisible processes are going on beneath. Inside the body of Christ, as in all bodies, there are deadly viruses, an immune system, cancer-cells, and health-carrying enzymes. What’s deepest inside of life is not visible to the naked eye. Thus, for example, Therese of Lisieux — with her highly-tuned mystical sense — understood her hidden life in a monastery as a part of the immune-system inside the body of Christ. Without ever leaving the small town of Lisieux she touched the lives of millions of people. That shouldn’t be surprising, given that the invisible interconnections inside of a body.

It is this background too that can help give us a sense of the mystical union we have with each other inside “the communion of saints.” What precisely is this? It’s the belief that there exists among us, among all of us who have been baptized — at a level too deep for words — a union that is as real, intimate, and physical as is a sexual union. Wild as this sounds, it is clearly taught in scripture [see 1 Corinthians 7]; it lies at the root of the Christian understanding of the Eucharist. For the early Christians, celebrating Eucharist together was an act of intimacy akin to sexual union. That was one of the reasons they surrounded the Eucharist with the kind reverence and discretion that judicious lovers employ. For example, they practiced a certain discipline they called the “discipline arcani.” This was a custom within which they didn’t allow anyone who wasn’t fully initiated to be present at the Eucharist, much like healthy lovers



Before one can be a witness to Christ, one has to recognize Christ. This is not an ability everyone has. Not everyone can see Christ’s presence and action in the world. Not everyone is aware of how he influences even their own lives.

In this season of Advent, when we are making our preparations for the celebration of Christmas — spiritual and otherwise — we ought to think about the role of John the Baptist and how similar it is to our role towards the people of today.

John the Baptist seems to come from another world, he proclaims a message, he prepares the way for and points out the Savior to the men and women of his day. We too come from another world than that of the people among whom we live. It might not be a desert, but it is different because our values are not the values of this world, our outlook is not the same as those of the people around us.

And we have a message — indeed it is the very same message as John the Baptist — Repent and believe the Good News. And we point to the Savior. Our task is to help our families, friends and neighbors to see Christ, to help them to recognize the subtle signs of his presence and action in our world. This is a great work — a prophetic task; and by undertaking these responsibilities and carrying them out conscientiously, we can be sure that we are changing the world, making it a better place and enabling many others to embrace the salvation Christ won for us.

Let us then apply ourselves with renewed zeal and devotion to this task of being modern day John the Baptists — not seeking glory for ourselves, but by every thought and action doing our best to point to Jesus Christ, the one true Savior of the World.

—taken from the writings of Father Alex McAllister S.D.S., which appear on the internet

**JOY — A TRUE GIFT FROM GOD:**

A few months after the Apostle Paul evangelized the Thessalonians in the year 50 AD, he sent them a letter — the earliest of the 27 books in the New Testament. Traditionally, the third Week in Advent — which features the witness of the great prophet John the Baptist — has been known as “Gaudete Sunday” — the Latin word for “Rejoice”. In his letter, Paul supports this theme — “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” [1 Thessalonians 5:16-24]. He then adds the pointed directive: “Do not quench the Spirit, but test everything, and retain what is good.” Paul concludes with a hopeful reminder that God is faithful to the divine promise of salvation.

What are we to make of Paul’s admonition to rejoice always? It is important to determine what the word “joy” means in the Christian tradition. Joy is not the same as happiness which depends on external factors being favorable. On the contrary, joy is an inner disposition — a deep abiding sense of peace that results from knowing that God loves us unconditionally, and from being in proper relationships with others. Directly sought, joy eludes us — it comes, rather, as a by-product of trust in God’s compassionate love for us. The English author C.S Lewis said he was “surprised by joy” — suggesting that joy was an undeserved gift from God and an unexpected blessing.

Paul suggests that there is a connection between rejoicing always and praying without ceasing. Prayer is a form of truth telling which helps us develop and maintain proper relationships with God, others, nature, and ourselves. When tempted to quench the Spirit, prayer opens our hearts to the Holy Spirit whose fruits include joy. As temples of the Holy Spirit, it is possible to retain a joyful heart even in the midst of the crosses of life that sadden us. “Rejoice always” does not have to be a glib phrase easily ignored — it can be a catalyst for spiritual growth leading to a joy that passes all understanding [see Philippians 4:7].

Throughout his life, Pope Francis has exuded joy. Even in his elderly years, Pope Francis continues to be a living example of a joyful spirit. In his public appearances, the pope continues to lead prayers, to



give talks, to meet with the famous, and to reach out to those who are poor, ill, imprisoned and marginalized. His ready smile and calm demeanor suggest an inner peace with God and himself. We know that he nourishes his soul with a daily regimen of prayer, scripture reading, meditation and private devotions. His openness to dialogue and his calm response to critics suggest an integrated and joyful spiritual life.

Pope Francis' inner joy finds expression in his teaching, including his major writings: *The Joy of the Gospel* and *The Joy of Love*. For Francis, a Christian "who loves Christ is full of joy and radiates joy" and does not "look like someone who just came from a funeral." In a talk to young people, he said if we are close to Christ, "we will have joy in our hearts and a smile on our face." Recognizing that following Christ demands accepting the cross, Francis still contends that the authentic Christian life is "full of joy." Reflecting on the life and teaching of Pope Francis adds credibility to Paul's admonition to rejoice always.

Who do you know that exudes Christian joy?

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

### JOY AND HOW TO GET IT:

Joy and how to get it. That is what all the Scripture Readings point to for this 3<sup>rd</sup> Week in Advent. "Rejoice always," Paul tells us in a letter to the Thessalonians. Both John the Baptist and Isaiah show us how to find that joy when they say: "Make straight the way of the Lord." God is coming and bringing joy. What we need to do is remove all the obstacles that might stand in God's way — to "make straight the way of the Lord."

This is where things get difficult. Because, as much as we want joy, it is not easy to remove the obstacles from the Lord's way. In fact, it is one of the ironies of the holiday season that the very traditions that we use to build up our joy, can in fact block it. You know what I am talking about. We all have holiday traditions, expectations that we feel we must meet during the next week or so. We want to decorate our homes for Christmas. So we go out and buy a tree. We set it up. We put lights on it. We put ornaments on it. We hang up the wreath. We put lights on our roof, lights on our shrubbery. We set the manger out. We breathe a sigh of relief. We did it. It's done. But, where is the joy?

We want to exchange gifts at Christmas time to show the gift that Christ is for us. So we wrack our brains trying to think what people want. We run to the mall. We buy presents. We take them home. We wrap them up. We put them under the tree. On Christmas morning we un-wrap them. We thank everyone for giving them to us. We throw the wrapping away. We take the gifts the mall to exchange them. We have honored the tradition. We did it. But, where is the joy?

It's one of the ironies of this season that the very things that we do to increase joy at times prevent joy. We are so busy celebrating Christmas that we effectively block Christ's coming. So the question is what can we do about this? How can we avoid the irony of defeating our own good intentions?

Here's a thought. It deals with Christmas dinner. You know already, who is going to be sharing Christmas dinner with you. You have the list. What I am going to suggest is that this week is that you get in touch with those people, and ask them to bring something with them when they come to eat — not a vegetable; not a dessert; but a memory.

Ask the people that are coming to your Christmas dinner to bring with them an answer to this question: "What is your deepest memory of Christmas?" The question is intentionally vague. What "deepest" means is up to the person who answers it. Some might choose to share a memory of the Christmas on which they received the biggest present. Others might choose a Christmas on which they needed the most courage. Still others might select a Christmas on which they were most thankful or when they recognized what the true

christmas  
memories

more fraternal."

Jesus is there. He has found us. Now, the whole focus of our lives has changed. With Jesus in our lives, we are mature adults, living in His Love. Rejoice in the Lord.

Listen to what the Prophet Isaiah says: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord, and a day of vindication by our God" [Isaiah 61:1-11].

These words were read by Jesus Himself in the Synagogue of Nazareth in what we can call His first sermon [see Luke 4:18-19]. As Christian to the heart of our being, we also proclaim these words. We are anointed by God. We are baptized. And we are sent. We are sent to bring joy to the world. We are to bring glad tidings to the poor — news that God knows their plight and will care for them through His people here on earth, the Church. We are to tell the heart broken that God hears their cries. If they are mourning the loss of a loved one, they need to hear that the Lord has conquered death and that those who have let Him into their lives will live with Him forever. If their hearts are broken by events beyond their control — the loss of a job, the loss of a marriage, or any series of events that make them feel abandoned by the world, alone in society — they need to know that Jesus is the Mender of Broken Hearts. If they are held captive by others, or perhaps by their own addictions, they need to know that Jesus provides freedom and liberty. They do not have to spend the rest of their lives as victims of society. With Jesus they can be victors — not victims.

It is up to us to lead people to the victory of Jesus Christ. We do this by sharing our joy with them. "I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul." I was lost, but now I am found. We were all lost, but He found us. His Grace is Amazing.

How can we be anything other than positive? Rejoice!

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

### 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.



### ATTENDANCE:

If you attend Mass regularly here at Our Lady Chapel, it would be helpful if you filled out a form [name, address, phone number, children, etc.] indicating this fact, if you have not already done so. Such information not only helps us to know who is attending Our Lady Chapel; it also is of great assistance to us in record keeping [for our friend, the IRS] of any contributions which you may make.

### ENVELOPES:

- When you need a **new supply** of envelopes, please feel free to take a supply of them from the table in the vestibule, or call Father John at the Campus Ministry Office [473-3560].
- When you **use** your envelope, please make sure that **your number** is on it. If you need to know your number, please call the Campus Ministry Office. Thanks.

### GREATNESS:

Greatness can not be given to you. It is earned by giving yourself to others.



**REJOICE! WE HAVE BEEN FOUND**

Negative! Negative! Negative! “The kids are doing this. The seniors are doing that. This is what is going on in our world, and it is wrong. This is why our country is going to hell in a handbag. And Catholics are joining in, or not doing enough about it.” Negative! Negative! Negative!

“You really told them, Father. That was a great sermon. It’s about time someone said that about those people.” And so people are entertained at Mass as they hear about other people’s failings. The priest’s words are followed with applause — “Way to stick it to them, Father.”

This is not what the Church should be about. The direction of negativity is on a mean road — an unkind road — of arrogance. Where is the joy of Jesus Christ in all this negativity? Pope Francis tried to change the tone of the preaching in the Church when he issued the apostolic exhortation, *The Gospel of Joy*. The Pope’s exhortation took the world by storm. It committed the Church to reassess its methods and goals. Pope Francis called us to communicate the joy of the Gospel to the world. He told us that the main concern of the Church must be to bring the joy of Jesus Christ to the entire world.

For too long our Church has been associated with expounding the same moral topics over and over again. Many Bishops, Priests, and Deacons have reduced the vast richness of our faith to our positions on topics such as abortion and gay marriage. As a result, instead of being encouraged to bring the joy of the Gospel to the world, people are confronted, even harangued with these topics. How are people to experience and communicate the joy of the Gospel when all they hear from the pulpit are negatives? Pope Francis was not telling us to back down from Church teaching. He simply told us to stop pounding our positions into the people.

This 3<sup>rd</sup> Week in Advent is “Gaudete Sunday” — “Rejoice Sunday”. And so Paul tells us — and the Church at Thessalonica — “Brothers and sisters, rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. May the God of peace make you perfectly holy, and may you entirely — spirit, soul, and body — be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it” [1 Thessalonians 5:16-24].



Sometimes, the priest will wear a Rose-colored vestment to remind us that this is a time of great expectations. We have every reason to be full of joy. Rejoice, Christmas is almost here. Rejoice, not so much that we have found Christ, but rejoice that He has found us.

There are certainly times that each of us feel lost. There are times that we feel alone. But we are not lost. Christ has found us. We are not alone. He is with us. With Jesus in our lives, the crises we face become challenges, but not devastating events — a loved one becomes sick, or even dies; we become sick and receive the diagnosis that our condition is terminal; a marriage falls apart; a job is lost; a friend is lost. Whatever the crisis, we know that the final result will be union with God. Jesus is with us always — particularly in the worst of our times. Rejoice in the Lord.

Seventeen years ago, our beautiful late Holy Father, Pope St. John Paul II, told the youth of the world to be attune to the presence of Christ in their inmost desires. His words were meant for all of us: “It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness. He is waiting for you when nothing else ever satisfies you. He is the beauty to which you are so attracted. It is He who provokes you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise. It is He that urges you to shed the masks of a false life. It is He who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle. It is Jesus who stirs up in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be grounded down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and

meaning of Christmas is. Whatever answers people bring are acceptable. Then make sure that sometime during Christmas dinner you provide a time to simply go around the table and let everyone share their memory. Some might do it in just a few sentences. Others might choose to embellish it a bit. It is, however, my conviction that if you do this simple exercise, you will deepen the joy of the holiday. More importantly, you will “Make straight the way of the Lord.”

Now, why do I say that? It flows from what we believe. We believe that Jesus is “Emmanuel: God with us.” In this season we celebrate the mystery that God became human in Jesus. We believe that God continues to be found in our humanity — in our relationships, in our connectedness to one another. So, whenever we share ourselves with one another, whenever we tell one another what is really in our hearts, God is there. Joy is there.

That is why the holiday traditions do not work on their own. We can spend all kinds of money and time buying special foods and preparing them for Christmas dinner, but the joy is not in the food. The joy is in the people. The simple exercise that I am suggesting provides a way in which families can talk to one another. It allows them to see something of what the people they love really value. How important it is for children to hear what their parents value about Christmas. For all that we do for our children, how important it is to hear what they remember. What a gift it would be for everyone to hear what Grandma remembers, perhaps from a time before all of us were born. What a surprise for us to hear what our six-year-old remembers from last Christmas — a Christmas that we have already forgotten.

“What is your deepest memory of Christmas?” It is a simple question, but it is a spiritual question. Because when we reveal the truth that is within us, we reveal God within us. It is not the money that we spend or the traditions that we honor, but the truth that we share that “Makes straight the way of the Lord.” So, take some steps to make sure that you have a way of sharing truth with the people you love this Christmas. Take some time to share yourself. It will not be a wasted effort. Because when we share who we are, what we value, what we believe with each other, we not only find joy. We also find Christ.

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

**LOVING FULLY:**

How can my life be a reflection of divine love in this time and place? The classic Christian phrase for discipleship — the imitation of Christ — means that we were made by God to become like God, loving all others, loving universally. More than any historical figure I know, St. Francis of Assisi imitated Christ. Some call Francis the second Christ. His poverty of spirit, humility, and selflessness reveal a life lived in union.

In his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis writes: “I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God’s creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.

“Saint Francis’ response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus — as in ‘What’s in it for me?’ — for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.

Jesus told us: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind” [Luke 10:27]. He called us to a presence that is a broader and deeper kind of knowing than just cognitive thinking. Thinking knows things by objectifying them, capturing them as an object of knowledge. But presence knows things by refusing to objectify them; instead it shares in their very subjectivity. Presence allows full give and take. Martin Buber summed it up in his often-quoted phrase: “All real living is meeting.”

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

**WHY PRAYING MATTERS EVEN WHEN YOU CAN'T FIND GOD:**

My favorite thing about prayer is how ordinary it is. My prayer life mostly consists of things like sitting in silence and going to Mass; and most of the time I don't feel anything especially significant or exciting. Most of the time, the silence is just silence, and the Mass is predictable. But that's why I love it. I love its simplicity because it is always valuable — even when it doesn't feel like it is.

Not that long ago I probably wouldn't have said that. I would have associated prayer with wanting something spectacular to happen — an overwhelming peace, an all-consuming joy, a sense of purpose or a message from the Holy Spirit. I've seen people become overtaken with the Spirit and speak in tongues, and for so long I wanted to be that person. I wanted the special gift or intimate experience that would prove that God loved me and that He was paying attention to me. When it didn't happen, all I could think was: "What about me? Why don't I deserve your attention, God?"

What I didn't realize then was that my desire for the right feeling or a special experience was really the result of my doubt. I had been told that God loved me, but I wanted evidence. I had been told that God had great plans for me, but I wanted a sign. I am supposed to believe that God is with me always, but I didn't feel Him — so I didn't believe it.

Sometimes I did feel peace or joy, and I was reassured, but as soon as the good feelings went away, the old questions came back — "God, do you still love me? Are you really there?" — and I became discouraged. If I'm being honest, I was more of a "Catholic thrill-seeker" than a Catholic disciple. I wasn't interested in being a faithful follower, so much as I was looking for the next "spiritual high." I doubted that God loved me because I didn't feel anything in prayer — so my prayer became little more than seeking out the right emotions.



But getting the right feelings wasn't what I needed. Instead of asking for the Holy Spirit to give me a certain experience, I should have asked for healing. What I really needed was the grace to face my doubts that God could love me, that He really wouldn't leave me when I didn't feel His presence.

One of the tragedies of always looking to achieve the right feeling or experience in prayer is that we miss the gift that God is trying to give us in that moment. And the easiest way to miss it is by comparison. "God knows what you need." That's what my youth minister would always tell us before adoration on retreat. He would remind us all to trust God and to be open to whatever God wanted to tell us that night. But I would still find myself wanting to pay attention to everyone else — to be worrying about how they were praying, why they were so emotional, and, of course, why I wasn't having such an intense encounter, too.

On my first retreat in my freshman year, I remember everyone leaving adoration so exhilarated and excited to talk about their experiences. I tried to seem interested as I was listening, but I hadn't felt anything. In fact, I was quite exhausted and had almost dozed off more than once. The thoughts began spinning in my head that I had done something wrong — that God had forgotten about me, that He just didn't care that much. In only a few minutes, all the beautiful things I had learned on that retreat were wiped from my mind because I hadn't felt something.

I didn't understand that God gives to us in all kinds of ways — sometimes the gift is a special experience or feeling His presence in peace or consolation, but sometimes the gift is not feeling anything. Between all my expectations and all my worrying, I was missing the gift of not feeling something. I was missing the gift of the silence.

The gift of feeling nothing in prayer — of spiritual dryness — is that I'm forced to reckon with myself exactly as I am. I would much prefer for the Holy Spirit to swoop in with some extraordinary experience so that I wouldn't have to confront my doubts and wounds and questions, but in the silence I

have to do just that. I have to be able to sit with God and let Him love me as I am.

When I sit in silence — and the silence is just silence — I can't run from the thoughts that distract me, from the worry that I'll never be good enough for God, or from the truth that, apart from Him, I am nothing. I have nothing of my own to offer Him because even the smallest of my prayers are only made possible by His grace. Even as I sit in the silence, He sustains me in being; my heart beats by His power. Then, all I can do is let Him love me, receiving fully whatever He chooses to give.

Pope Francis said: "He prefers to let Himself be contained in little things — dwelling in littleness and living the reality of one's everyday life: this is exquisitely divine." The times when we feel nothing in prayer, or when it appears that God has left us, are often the times of great spiritual growth and healing. These times help us to realize our littleness, and to see God's presence in our everyday lives. They are an opportunity and an invitation to worship God for His own sake — not for what we want from Him. They are an invitation to be loved by Him in unexpected ways.

I love it when prayer is ordinary because it reminds me that the Holy Spirit is present not only in spectacular moments, but in every moment, and it gives me the opportunity to sit with my God, allowing Him to love me as I am, with all my restlessness and doubts. It's only when I face those doubts and ask God to face them with me that I can have an authentic relationship with Him. Then I learn to trust that God doesn't need me to be anyone other than who I am right now in order for Him to love me.

—taken from the writings of Sophia Swinford, a Life Teen associate.

**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 Chapel. If you are unable to join us, there are many resources available for you on the Life Teen website — [lifeteen.com](http://lifeteen.com). There are numerous blogs and videos for you to



connect with. The Life Teen national office continues to release many new programs. **Please contact Father John for more information. And please join us each Sunday for our Mass at 10 AM — in person or live-streamed, and then come to our Life Teen/EDGE gathering after Mass.** And above all, let us continue to join each other in prayer. **Father John is available for you. Please contact him [cell: 216-570-9276].**

**READINGS FOR THE WEEK:**

**Monday:** Jeremiah 23:5-8, Matthew 1:18-25

**Tuesday:** Judges 13:2-25, Luke 1:5-25

**Wednesday:** Isaiah 7:10-14, Luke 1:26-38

**Thursday:** Song of Songs 2:8-14, Zephaniah 3:14-18, Luke 1:39-45

**Friday:** 1 Samuel 1:24-28, Luke 1:46-56

**Saturday:** Malachi 3:1-24, Luke 1:57-66

**4<sup>th</sup> Week in Advent:** 2 Samuel 7:1-16, Romans 16:25-27, Luke 1:26-38

**ENCOUNTER:**

When people's stories are recognized, it does something: It creates a possibility.

—John Powell