

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

**~ A Prayer for the 4<sup>th</sup> Week in Lent ~**

O Jesus,  
Light of the world,  
why were you born,  
and why did you die  
in such obscurity?  
Bethlehem was hardly a shining place —  
the stable hardly a burning stand  
for light to come into the world.

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

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

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

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

And so do I.  
Amen.

**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.*

**PENANCE SERVICE:**

Our community celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation will be held on **Monday, March 25<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM**. Our service is centered around reflections of the various characters involved in the passion and death of Jesus. There will also be songs and hymns, and a time to bring ourselves from our sinful ways back to the Lord. As we confront our own sinfulness, we realize that we, too, have a part to play in the death of Jesus. The service will last about 45 minutes. There will be a time for individual confessions following the service, for those who wish to avail themselves of this opportunity. Please join us.



**FAITH EDUCATION:**

Our Faith Education classes meet on **Sundays from 8:45—9:45 AM**. This is followed by **Mass in Our Lady Chapel at 10 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: April 7-14-21-28**. Thank you for taking care of this important responsibility.



**LENTEN NOTES:**

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

**—LENTEN DEVOTIONALS:**

On the table in the Narthex of the Chapel are 3 Lenten Devotionals for you. **The Little Purple Book** is a Young Person’s devotional. **The Little Black Book** is for High School and Adults. Finally, **The Word Among Us** is a Scripture centered devotional based on the daily scripture readings.

**—LENTEN REGULATIONS:**

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

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



**MEN’S RETREAT — SAVE THE DATE:**

**Thursday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, from 6:00—8:30 PM** will be our annual **Spring Men’s Retreat**. All men of Our Lady Chapel and the Gilmour Academy Men’s Club and their guests are invited to join us. We will begin with **Mass in Our Lady Chapel at 6:00 PM, and then move to the Center for Performing Arts for a light supper, and our evening of discussion, led by Fr. John**. We are requesting a free will offering for the evening. If you cannot make it for Mass or for dinner, you are still welcome to attend the evening of spiritual conversation — come when you are able! Mark the date on your calendars and give yourself a treat in the Lord! **Sign up on the retreat sheet located on the easel in the narthex of Our Lady Chapel or contact Patty in the Chapel Office (440) 473-3560 or [szaniszlop@gilmour.org](mailto:szaniszlop@gilmour.org)**



**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

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

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:**

- For our Muslim brothers and sisters during this time of Ramadan
- For an end to the war between Israel and Hamas.
- For an end to the war between Russia and Ukraine.
- For an end to violence as a means to resolve differences.
- 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 John Lennon, [\*55], father of John [\*78] and James [\*80] Lennon, grandfather of Jimmy [\*30], Casey [\*30], & Katelyn [\*32].
- For Frank Urankar, former Gilmour teacher, father of Thomas [\*78], and uncle of Stanley [\*69], Paul [\*75], Anthony [\*79].
- For Betsy Lee Lator, grandmother of Katie Winovich Chapman [\*13]
- For Father Jim Blantz, C.S.C.
- For Kimberly Nemeth.
- For Father Dick Laurick, C.S.C.
- For Sister Laura Wingert, S.N.D.
- For Margot Giordano, mother of David [\*75], Anthony [\*76], and Monica [\*83] Giordano, grandmother of Christina [\*05] and Anthony [\*07] Giordano
- For Inge Schmidt, mother of Megan [\*05] and Peter [\*09] Schmidt-Sane.
- For Richard Jeffreys [\*59]
- For Dennis Brennan [\*59], brother of Thomas [\*61] and James [\*71] Brennan

**ATTENDANCE:**

If you attend Mass regularly here at Our Lady Chapel, it would be helpful if you filled out a Registration 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.

**WEEKLY OFFERING:**

Baskets are located on the pillars just inside the center door when you enter the chapel. Please place your offering in the basket. Baskets will not be passed during the offertory time. Your offering will help offset chapel daily operating expenses. When you choose to use the envelopes, you can request a printout of your offerings for the year to submit to the IRS. God bless you.

**Total Offerings: Saturday [3/2/24] ----- \$ 25.00**  
**Total Offerings: Sunday [3/3/24] ----- \$ 561.00**

**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

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

**PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:**

- For John Zippay, family friend of Bernadette and Stephen Ritley, who is critically ill.
- For Jill Thompson, who is undergoing treatment for mental health issues.
- 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 Chuck Campanella, father of Anthony Campanella, who continues in rehab.
- 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 Josephine Fernando, mother of Melvin [\*83] and Raymond [\*88] Fernando, mother-in-law of Imelda Deogracias Fernando [\*88], who is ill.
- For Pam Spicer, wife of former Gilmour coach, Bob Spicer, who is under the care of hospice.
- For Richard DeBacco, father of Michelle Chiacchiarri [\*96], father-in-law of Mark Chiacchiarri [\*94], grandfather of Aurelia [\*28] and Olivia [\*30] Chiacchiarri, who is undergoing treatment for lymphoma
- For Marc Williams who is critically ill with ALS
- For Shobir Corraya, brother of Brother Victor Corraya, C.S.C., who is undergoing treatment for a brain hemorrhage.
- For Frances Meyers who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Michael Nestor [\*98], who is under the care of hospice.
- For Janie Brooks, mother of Trustee, Sherri Beedles, grandmother of Alexander Beedles [\*22], who is ill.
- For Tom Ward, uncle-in-law of Housekeeping associate, Natasha, who is undergoing treatment and surgery for a serious infection.
- For Debbie Langer, friend of Cindy Frimel, who was diagnosed with brain cancer.
- For Denise Mardano, who is battling liver cancer.
- For Sheila Fitzpatrick, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Joseph Michael, father of former Gilmour LS religion teacher, Colleen Michael, who is undergoing treatment for ALS.
- For Joseph Szejkowski, who is undergoing treatment for Lymphoma.
- For Fathers Don Dilg, C.S.C., and Ken Molinaro, C.S.C., who are all under the care of hospice.
- For Ursula Wyras, mother of Janet Heryak, grandmother of Lillian [\*09], Rosa [\*12] and Edwin [\*17] Heryak, who is undergoing medical treatment



**EUCHARISTIC 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.



**NEXT BIBLE STUDY — WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27<sup>th</sup>:**

**Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Wednesday, March 27<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: Holy Week**

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, March 10: 4 <sup>th</sup> Week in Lent	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream
Monday, March 11:	NO MASS
Tuesday, March 12:	NO MASS
Wednesday, March 13:	NO MASS
Thursday, March 14:	8:30 AM; 8:45 AM; 2:00 PM
Friday, March 15:	NO MASS
Saturday, March 16: 5 <sup>th</sup> Week in Lent	5:00 PM In Person only
Sunday, March 17: 5 <sup>th</sup> Week in Lent	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream

**WOMEN’S EVENING OF RETREAT — SAVE THE DATE:**

**Tuesday, May 7<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 PM – 8:30 PM will be our annual Women’s Spring Retreat.** All women of Our Lady Chapel and the Gilmour Academy Women’s Club and their guests are invited to join us. We will begin with **Mass in Our Lady Chapel at 6:00 PM, and then move to the Center for Performing Arts for a light supper, and our evening of discussion, led by Fr. John.** We are requesting a free will offering for the evening. If you cannot make it for Mass or for dinner, you are still welcome to attend the evening of spiritual conversation — come when you are able! Mark the date on your calendars and give yourself a treat in the Lord! **Sign up on the retreat sheet located on the easel in the narthex of Our Lady Chapel or contact Patty in the Chapel Office (440) 473-3560 or [szaniszlop@gilmour.org](mailto:szaniszlop@gilmour.org)**



**THE HUMAN SPIRIT:**

There is nothing more difficult yet more gratifying in our society than living with sincere, active, constructive hope for the human spirit.

—Maria Popova



**REFLECTION FOR THE WEEK:**

We are half way through Lent, and we still find ourselves praying for more cleansing and more purity in our relationship with Jesus. Purity in the time and setting of Jesus meant orderedness — it meant having right relationships with God, and thereby with all others and all of creation. We are freed through our faith in Jesus and his resurrection, but we are not freed from our own self-imposed exiles. Israel was loved always by God, but they did not always use well the freedom which that love provided. We can grow quite accustomed and flippant with our being loved through Jesus — taking it for granted rather than as granted through the Spirit.

We do not hear often in our liturgies from the writings known as The Books of Chronicles. They are generally a collection of histories representing the personal love of God for Israel — especially involving the rebuilding of the holy temple in Jerusalem. Besides recounting the history recorded in Genesis and the other books of the Pentateuch, the chronicler adds other events not found elsewhere.

Israel had grown slack and easy about their cultic practices centering around the temple [2 Chronicles 36:14-23]. They began to compromise their faith and practice, and soon became immersed in the secular ways of their pagan neighbors.

Many of us know firsthand about going our own way when it is not the right way. Perhaps we did not deliberately start out with the wrong path in mind, but we made some bad choices. And when we added more bad choices, we may have found ourselves further from home than we had anticipated. We found it hard to return to the good path — perhaps even doubting whether we belonged there at all.

In Israel's case, we might say that too much of a good thing leads Israel away from their relationship with their God and subsequently into exile. Enter a stranger — a powerful king of Persia who makes quite a bold statement, and then a stranger proclamation of freedom for the captive people of Israel. Cyrus is inspired to claim that all the kingdoms of the earth have been given him by God. The unusual proclamation is that all the people who belong — even in part to the people of Israel — must return and he will rebuild the temple which was destroyed in punishment. He leads them back and blesses them with the words: “and may his God go with him.” Stories with second chances encourage us, as we know that we often need them.

Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus ought to be prayed over very slowly [Ephesians 2:4-10]. Especially worthy of personal reflection are the words that remind us that we have been saved by a tremendous gift of “grace” — and not by our works. Ah, but we are created again by “grace” to do those “good works” which flow from that same participation in God's holiness and life — which is “grace” itself. These words need to be at the heart of our life of faith.

For the Israelites, conquest and captivity brought the humiliation of defeat and the remorse that comes from recognizing the goodness they had lost. In the story of their captivity, mercy came through the motivation of an outsider-king, who grants a reprieve from this captivity and allows these people to return to their land and rebuild their temple. Query — who do you think motivated that king? Sometimes mercy comes from unlikely sources. Thus, this grace takes form in a longing on the part of the people to return home, and the openness of a pagan king. God uses Cyrus' worldly desire to maintain peace to rescue his people and bring them back home. Today this grace comes in the person of Jesus.

Enter Nicodemus, a Jewish leader who comes to Jesus in the dead of night. Imagine, Jesus sitting in the dark of night with a small candle in front of them. Jesus is reading from a scroll and making comments about how he himself will be lifted up — as was the bronze serpent lifted up by Moses in the desert — so as to heal all who looked upon it [John 3:14-21].

Nicodemus shakes his head in a gesture of befuddlement. What began for him as a secret search to

**PAYING ATTENTION TO THE PROPHETS:**

At times I'm criticized for giving “depressing” homilies. Probably a valid critique. I suppose one reason for my bleak approach to preaching is that I try to give homilies based on the Scripture readings of the day. As any serious student of the Bible knows, our sacred authors are normally motivated to write only when they surface problems in their communities. Rarely do any of these unique individuals sit down on a beautiful, sunny day, no care in the world, put stylus to papyrus and produce an inspired work.

Should they have background music playing as they write, I'm certain it would be a specific cut from *The Music Man*: “Trouble, trouble, trouble! We got trouble right here in . . .”

Our Chronicles author leaves no doubt about the trouble he's facing [2 Chronicles 36:14-23]. Though the Chosen People have recently been freed from their Babylonian Exile, many in his community seem to have forgotten what originally triggered that nation-changing experience. The Chronicler clicks off their offenses — turning from God, practicing idolatry, introducing pagan worship in the Jerusalem temple — these are just a few of their blatant sins. But the most horrendous of their transgressions is one we Catholics were never taught to confess — ignoring and mocking the prophets in their midst — they “scoffed at the Lord's prophets, until the anger of God against his people was so inflamed that there was no remedy.”

Accustomed to obeying canon law, papal decrees, and episcopal regulations, we easily forget the normal way God's will is discovered in Scripture is by surfacing and obeying the prophets God continually sends to us. Not knowing the five or six rules for distinguishing real prophets from fake prophets is as inexcusable as not knowing the difference between mortal and venial sin. Yet I'd hate to give an exam on the former to a normal Sunday Mass crowd.

The Pauline disciple responsible for Paul's letter to the Ephesians [2:3-10] addresses a different problem. Seems some in his community are looking at salvation as something they've accomplished through their own actions — not something the risen Jesus freely offers. Paul reminds his readers that it is “by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast.” Our good works don't cause salvation — they're simply the things saved people do. Of course, as the late Marcus Borg pointed out in *Speaking Christian*: biblical salvation doesn't refer primarily to “getting into heaven.” It's a much broader concept.

In his Gospel, John agrees [John 3:14-21]. Jesus points out that eternal life isn't an experience which begins after our physical death; it's already starting right here and now. The evangelist struggles against those who believe “the light” is still in the future. For those who believe, it's already at work in their daily lives.

One last point. Notice what our Chronicles author says about Cyrus. Though this 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE Persian king isn't even Jewish, he's the person that God has designated to liberate the Chosen People from the Babylonian Exile.

One constant message of biblical prophets — one with which conservatives have huge problems — is that God can work in our lives in many different ways through many different people.

I once asked Carroll Stuhlmueller about his view of current prophets. Refusing to share his list, he replied: “If I told you, and my names ever got out, I'd never again be permitted in any Catholic pulpit for the rest of my life!” Now that's a problem!

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

**VALUE OF COMMUNITY:**

The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members, a heart of grace, and a soul generated by love.

—Coretta Scott King

Israel's exile in Babylon seems to result as a punishment for their adding "infidelity to infidelity" [2 Chronicles 36:14-23]. We also hear that the compassionate Lord sent messengers to the people, but that those messengers were mocked and their message ignored. As a result, the people were conquered, their city sacked, and the survivors made slaves. Did God do that?

In John's Gospel, we listen in as Jesus and Nicodemus converse [John 3:14-21]. When Jesus says that the Son of Man will be lifted up so that all who see him will have eternal life, the "lifting up," refers to the cross and resurrection as one event of divine self-revelation. While that may seem obvious, we shouldn't think the same of the expression "eternal life." It's easy to assume that "eternal life" refers to immortality or heaven, but the *New American Bible* tells us that the term in John 3:15 stresses "quality of life rather than duration." Spanish Scripture scholar José Antonio Pagola tells us that the eternal life Jesus promises begins in this life and reaches its fullness in our definitive encounter with God. That means that eternal life is nothing less than union with God.

Writing to the Ephesians, Paul falls all over himself in trying to explain his sense of this communion. Paul mentions grace three times — insisting over and again that we are saved through grace — that is, through God's favor rather than any merit of our own. This grace comes from God, whom Paul describes as rich in mercy, immeasurably giving and great in loving. These teachings about God's grace lead to his conclusion that we are God's own handiwork, created for union with Christ and to continue his work [Ephesians 2:4-10].

How do these ideas help us to reflect on the existence of a good God and a world in which unspeakable evil seems to run rampant?

Before we can respond, we need to examine the question itself. This question assumes that God intervenes directly in the events of history. Is that not one of our many assumptions that has more to do with our theories than with what Jesus revealed about his Father? Yes, Jesus taught that not a sparrow would fall without God's awareness, but that awareness does not prevent the fall of the sparrow. Jesus told Nicodemus that God has no intention of punishing anyone; rather God looks to saving by drawing people into the communion of eternal life. Jesus' being "lifted up," had nothing to do with condemnation or compensation for human evil. Instead, it exposed God's loving solidarity with all who suffer and revealed that suffering and evil will never have the last word.

Paul ended his description of God and grace by saying that we are created in Christ Jesus to continue his good works. If God could do it all, there would be no need for our good works. But the Incarnation itself revealed that God works through human flesh, here now as the body of Christ throughout the world. Even the author of the Book of Chronicles admits that God sends messengers "early and often." We have had the prophets, Jesus, the saints and all who strive to be the body of Christ in our world. What happens to them? Like Jesus, they are often mocked, and scoffed at — even assassinated. What does this teach us?

Jesus said that he was sent into the world so that all who believe could enjoy not a life free of suffering, but communion with God — eternal life. Jesus died in faithfulness to his vocation to embody God's love in the world. He was slain because the love of God threatened the powers such that they tried to eliminate him. In that most evil of circumstances, God did not stop it, but brought life out of death.

God created, not to control us, but to entice us toward communion. If we believe that God works through us, instead of asking "Why does God let it happen?," the prophetic question is: "How can people who believe in God and the power of love let it happen?"

Looking to Jesus, we know where the answer can lead.

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



gain some wisdom, leads to an invitation to believe. This is true wisdom for Jesus — but not yet for Nicodemus.

John is not telling us a story or parable here — rather he is unfolding a theological insight into the heart of the message of Jesus. God loves this world — and has always loved it — into a further revelation of that love. John writes that God loved this world in this particular way — God sent the Son to offer eternal life. This saving of the world is not merely the judicial non-condemnation of its inhabitants, but saving the world from not being a revelation place. The inhabitants are saved from the dark of not knowing who they are — saved from not knowing the good works for which they were also saved.

John's Gospel ends with a favorite theme — that of light battling darkness. Jesus as the light both enlightens those who see him and believe in him, but calls to all to come out into the light and do those works which are lights by which the goodness of God might be seen as well.

In these days of Lent, we are invited to live in the experience of being so loved by God that by that grace, that we will light up this world's darkness. Our faith should not stay in our head. It should be reflected in our hearts, arms, legs, fingers, and toes as we do works that proceed from love of God and love of neighbor, which St. Augustine described as medicine that we need from the Church. The Church is indeed a hospital for sinners, and we must come with a desire to become well, not merely to reflect on our symptoms.

And so, in these days of Lent we can go, Nicodemus-like, in the secrecy of our private prayer, to celebrate more publicly, the death and resurrection which infinitely consummates God's love for us. We are called to get in touch with our little exiles — our secret ways of avoiding our living faithfully God's calls and invitations. Lent is a prayerful time to rake away the coverings of deadly winter so that Jesus' personal love can rise, spring-like in our spirits and actions.

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

## GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS:

I often end my morning prayer by praying that I will meet the day's challenges in ways that please God. As eighteenth-century French Jesuit priest Jean Pierre de Caussade wrote: "In the morning, you can anticipate the various situations, interior and exterior, in which you will probably find yourself during the day, and then set yourself this question: At that juncture or in this or that situation what shall I say to God, what act shall I perform?"

Depending on our respective faith traditions, discerning how to please God may lead us in varying directions. For example, God wants us to obey the Ten Commandments, or to cover our heads in church. He wants us to go to weekly Mass, or to tithe. He wants us to know the Bible backwards and forwards.

As demonstrations of our willingness to serve God, there is nothing wrong with any of these practices. But sometimes we make them the ends of our devotion, rather than the means to loving God. We regard pious behavior as the substance of our faith, not merely its outward expression. We follow the letter of God's law without seeking authentic interior holiness. In going through the motions, we miss the meaning. These are the modern-day equivalents of the Israelites' "burnt offerings" — the highest form of Old Testament sacrifice. But God did not delight in them.

What delights God is for us to offer him hearts broken by awareness of our shortcomings. What delights God is for us to give him our spirits crushed by a sense of our sinfulness. What delights God is to restore those broken hearts and shattered spirits with his mercy, setting us back on our feet to go out to the world and spread his love. Merciful and loving God, Accept with compassion and kindness all the brokenness that I offer up to you today, and turn it into joy. Amen.

—taken from the writings of Betsy Cahill which appear on the internet. 5





**COLLECTIVE MEMORY:**

The readings for this 4<sup>th</sup> Week in Lent are all about salvation. We read first from a book in the Old Testament that does not appear in the weekend liturgies very often — the Book of Chronicles. The Book gives us an account of the great exile known as the Babylonian Captivity that occurred in 586 BC. The particular event described is truly extraordinary. After over four hundred years of rule by the descendants of King David, the Kingdom of Judah was overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, and the majority of the Jews were taken into captivity.

One sure way to keep a whole people in slavery is to destroy their hope. Since the hope of a nation is often expressed in its religion, Nebuchadnezzar lost no time in destroying the Temple in Jerusalem. He was convinced that this would send the people into despair and they would become more easily manageable. Nebuchadnezzar thought that the Israelites would conclude that their God was weak and powerless since he could not even defend his own Temple.

But, of course, the very opposite happened. The Prophet Jeremiah had foretold these events and the people came to understand that the destruction of the Temple and their enslavement was not a result of the weakness of God — rather it was due to their own infidelity. They interpreted the Captivity as appropriate punishment by God for disobeying him rather than viewing it as constituting any inadequacy on his part.

The Captivity lasted seventy years, and then God moved the heart of the new ruler of Babylon — the Persian King Cyrus — to release them and to rebuild the Temple [2 Chronicles 36:14-23]. This must have seemed quite incredible to the People of Israel. They had been lamenting their lot in Babylon — “By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. On the aspens of that land we hung up our harps. There our captors asked us for the lyrics of our songs. Our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said: ‘Sing us the songs of Zion!’ How could we sing a song of the Lord while in a foreign land?” [Psalm 137]. And then this new pagan king suddenly expresses his belief in their God and says that he has been instructed by him to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. This was surely a most extraordinary miracle and a profound vindication of the God of their ancestors — a faith strengthened and renewed rather than extinguished by seventy long years of captivity. Just imagine their rejoicing as they returned home to freedom. This can only be described as a profound experience of salvation.

We should also remember that this wasn’t the first time that the People of Israel had experienced captivity and exile. Recall the Exile into Egypt in the time of the Pharaohs and how Moses led the Chosen People through the Red Sea and then through forty years in the desert until they reached the Promised Land of Canaan [see Exodus]. These experiences of salvation were deeply ingrained in the history and culture of Israel. You could not think of a better way of preparing a race of people for the definitive saving event of all time — the salvation won by Jesus Christ.

The only trouble with us humans is that we have a tendency to forget. We continually forget even the most important lessons in life. And, as a people, the Jews were no different in that they continually forgot the lessons of the deepest experiences they had collectively endured.

Jesus explains this to Nicodemus [John 3:14-23]. He tells him how what Moses achieved was going to happen once again — but in a greater and more definitive way. This time there would be no exile into slavery, no journey through the desert, and no glorious entry into the Promised Land. There would be no captivity in Babylon, no sudden change of heart by a pagan Emperor. This time the circumstances would be almost banal. A squalid betrayal by a once loyal brother, an arrest in a garden in the middle of the night, a trumped-up trial, the exchange of his life for that of a rebel and the crucifixion by the Romans on behalf of a corrupt Jewish priesthood.



And so, should we all. We shouldn’t feel guilty for exercising the gifts that God gave us, even though our motivations will never be completely pure. Whenever we use a God-given talent to do something well, God takes pleasure in it ... and so too should we.

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

**BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON:**

On our recent visit to Holy Cross Seminary in Pune, one of the seminarians asked how our vows can be understood as the path to true freedom, when at times we can experience them as restricting or impinging our own agency. It is probably a question that has crossed many of our hearts at times during our religious lives, when “it has become all burden and no delight”.

The responsorial psalm for this Fourth Week in gives us the answer by inviting us to remember and never forget [see Psalm 137] — “By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. On the aspens of that land we hung up our harps. There our captors asked us for the lyrics of our songs. Our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said: “Sing us the songs of Zion!”

“How could we sing a song of the Lord while in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to my palate if I do not remember you — if I do not consider Jerusalem my greatest joy” [Psalm 137:1-6].

Memory is an essential component of faith. Our Scriptures are replete with reminders to remember the concrete actions and manifestations of God’s love, mercy, and compassion in order to sustain and strengthen our faith. Jesus Himself, when He confronts the disciples for having “little faith,” lovingly challenges them: “Do you not remember...” [see Matthew 16:5-12]. The message is clear: good memory leads to faith and fidelity.

As we continue our Lenten journey, one of our most urgent tasks is to renew and sharpen our memories: that “by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God” [Ephesians 2:8]; that “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life” [John 3:16]; and that our vows “are an act of love for the God who first loved us”

These words of Scripture and our Constitutions help us renew and sharpen our memory, moving us to call to mind and heart countless moments of God’s love, mercy, and compassion in our lives and ministry. As we practice this holy memory, we will see the path of freedom opening up for us through our vows. For, indeed, “we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them” [Ephesians 2:10].

—Father Andrew Gawrych, C.S.C.

**ALWAYS REMEMBER:**

Circumstances have no power over you. One day you’re in traffic and it bothers you. The next day you’re in a great mood and it doesn’t. It’s not the traffic. If it was it would always cause the same response. It’s not the event or circumstance. It’s always your state of mind.

**A GOD WHO GAMBLES ON LOVE:**

Why does God let it happen? We might be talking about the death of a child, an unjust war, the loss of young people to gang life, or even a tornado or flood. Some people blame God, and then decide to give up on believing, concluding that God is either unkind or untrustworthy. Others are convinced that tragedy is a punishment, even if they can’t name the offense. Still others defend God with justifying explanations like “We can’t understand the divine ways,” or “Somehow it’s for the best.” Innocent suffering is one of the most serious problems religions have had to face over the eons and across the globe.

**GOD’S PLEASURE IN OUR ACTION:**

For six months, while undergoing treatment for cancer, I was working on a reduced schedule. The medical treatments, while somewhat debilitating, left me still enough health and energy to carry on the administrative duties in my present ministry, but they didn’t allow me any extra energy to teach classes or to offer any lectures, workshops, or retreats at outside venues, something I normally do. I joked with my family and friends that I was “under house arrest”; but I was so grateful for the energy that I still had, that I did not deem being unable to teach and give lectures as a sacrifice. I was focused on staying healthy, and the health that I was given was appreciated as a great grace.

A month later, the medical treatments ended and, soon after, most of my normal energies returned and I resumed a normal schedule that included again teaching inside a classroom. Having been on the sidelines for a half year left me a little nervous as I entered the classroom for my first three-hour session. My nervousness passed quickly as the class robustly engaged the topic and, after the three hours, I walked out of the class feeling a wonderful energy that I hadn’t felt for six months. Teaching — which I consider both my profession and my vocation — lifted both my heart and my body in a way that it hadn’t been lifted in months. It was the missing tonic.

At first, I felt some anxiety and guilt about this. What really triggered that wonderful feeling and burst of energy? Narcissism? Pride? Was I basking in the capacity to demonstrate some cleverness and learning and then drink in the students’ admiration? Did I feel good because my ego got stroked? Was my teaching really about furthering God’s kingdom or about stroking my ego?

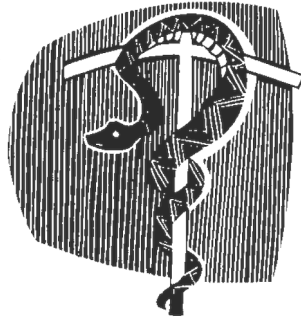
I am not alone with these questions. These are valid questions for anyone who draws energy from his or her work — especially if, because of that work, he or she drinks in a fair amount of adulation. Our motivations are never completely pure. Indeed, if we are fully honest with ourselves, we have to admit that there is always some degree of self-serving in our service of others. But, mixed as our motives will always be, something else, something much more positive, needs to be factored into this, namely, the fact that God gave us our various talents and that God feels good about us using them.

Eric Liddell, the Olympic runner, whose story is featured in the Oscar-winning movie, *Chariots of Fire*, once made this comment: “When I run, I feel God’s pleasure.” He didn’t make this comment lightly. As his biography and *Chariots of Fire* make clear, Eric Liddell, in his quest to win an Olympic gold medal was motivated more by his faith than by his own ego. His faith had him believe that, since God gave him this unique talent, God, not unlike any proud parent, took a genuine delight in seeing him use that gift. In his heart, he sensed that God was pleased whenever he exercised that talent to its optimum. Moreover, that inner sense that God was happy with his use of his talent filled him, Eric, with a wonderful energy whenever he ran.

Seen from that perspective, we see that the root and source of his motivation and pleasure in running was, ultimately, not his desire to win gold medals and popular adulation, though clearly no one is immune to these. Rather he was motivated by an inner sense that God had given him a special gift, that God wanted him to use that gift to its fullest, and that God was happy when he optimized that gift. Like everyone else who is human, he, no doubt, enjoyed the adulation he received for his successes, but he knew too that the deepest joy he felt in using his gift had its ultimate source in God and not his own ego.

And this, I believe, is true of us, everybody. When anyone uses properly the gifts that God gave him or her, God will take pleasure in that. After all God gave us that gift and that gift was given us for a reason.

Not long after I felt that burst of pleasure and energy from again teaching inside a classroom, I was talking to a colleague — a very gifted young teacher just beginning his teaching career. He shared about how much he enjoys teaching but how he worries too that the pleasure he derives from it is somehow too much connected to his ego. I gave him the Liddell quote, assuring him that, whenever he teaches well, God takes pleasure in it. He much appreciated Liddell’s comment.



What we have been speaking about is mostly the memory of things long-past. But we know that there are different kinds of memory. We are all familiar with short-term memory — we remember where we left our car in the supermarket car park. But we don’t retain this information for long; otherwise our minds would be clogged up with a lot of unnecessary data.

Then there is long-term memory. This is more difficult. We often remember scenes from our childhood or significant events. Sometimes events flood unbidden into our minds — things that we thought were long forgotten.

And there is collective memory. This is the memory of a whole nation or community. It is about the significance of their history. A good example would be the memory of the holocaust for the Jews of today. Keeping these events alive is important in order to maintain the identity of the community concerned.

The events of the Exodus and the Captivity have been highly significant for the Jews down through the ages. These events demonstrated their chosen-ness by God which was precisely what they considered made them different from all the other nations of the earth. These were extremely strong experiences of salvation which affected a whole people for many generations. They were powerful demonstrations of God’s love despite the infidelity of a considerable proportion of the nation.

And yet, by the time of Jesus, these things were being forgotten. The priests especially were caught up in a highly clerical religion which exploited the people and which ensured places of privilege from themselves. This was accompanied by highly inappropriate collusion between them and the Roman invaders.

Jesus tells Nicodemus what is about to happen. He reveals to this important member of the Jewish hierarchy that God is now going to intervene in a most spectacular way, and is going to definitively bring about salvation — not merely for the Jewish people, but for the whole human race.

Memory remains important because it is our collective memory which communicates this extraordinary intervention of God in the history of the world to future generations. We keep this memory fresh by constantly reading the scriptures, and by gathering together to celebrate the Eucharist each week. These are the means by which the Good News of the Kingdom is kept alive in the world today.

At the consecration of every Mass, Jesus says to us: “Do this in memory of me.” It is his memory that we keep alive; it is his salvation that we celebrate; it is his Kingdom that we look forward to so much.

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

**SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — MARCH 16<sup>th</sup>:**

Our Savior Lutheran Church — across the street from the Chapel — 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 unloading the trailers and setting up items for distribution and preparing for the food pantry to open. It serves around 150 clients each time. The food pantry serves clients 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.

**INTELLIGENCE and NATURE:**

While calling ourselves intelligent, we’ve lost touch with the natural world. As a result, we’ve lost touch with our own souls. I believe we can’t access our full intelligence and wisdom without some real connection to nature.

—Father Richard Rohr, O.F.M.



**THE WORLD GOD LOVES:**

Catholics are often lacking in their understanding of the scriptures. Whereas other Christians can quote chapter and verse, Catholics often struggle to keep the characters and the stories straight. Therefore, it is likely that when a Catholic sees a reference to Scripture such as John 3:16 — on a bumper sticker or held up in the end zone of a football game — it might not be apparent to which verse that reference points. The reason I bring up John 3:16 today is because this verse in John's Gospel for this 4<sup>th</sup> Week in Lent — “God so loved the world that God gave His only Son, that all who believe in Him might not perish but might find eternal life.”

Some Christians keep writing this verse on everything that they can find because they are convinced that this verse, above all others, sums up the entire Gospel. I would agree that this verse is an excellent summary of the Gospel — out of love for the world, God gave us Jesus that we might find eternal life. But the question I would like to pose today is: What does it mean to believe in Him, to believe in Jesus, and how far does that belief in Jesus extend? I pose this question because I think that most of us understand “believing in Jesus” in much too narrow a way. We limit “believing in Jesus” to our acceptance of Christ in our hearts. John 3:16 is used by many Christians to promote the truth that we must accept Jesus as our Savior. This is certainly essential, but it is also incomplete. To limit the presence of Christ only to my particular choice of Him, is not big enough. Christ is present in ways that are beyond my heart, beyond my faith community, even beyond those who believe in Him. Because God so loves the world, we believe that Christ's presence continues in the world, in all aspects of world, even where Christ's name is not known or honored.

Our Jewish ancestors in faith provide a good example of this kind of faith. Hundreds of years before Christ, the Jews were conquered by Babylon, and the Babylonians burned their temple and destroyed Jerusalem and took the Jews into captivity. In that captivity, which lasted for many decades, Yahweh — the God of Israel seemed to have no power. Yet when a Persian King by the name of Cyrus invaded Babylon and allowed the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem, our Jewish ancestors dared to believe that it was their God, Yahweh, working through King Cyrus, to bring them home [2 Chronicles 36:14-23].

Now Cyrus was not a Jew. He did not believe in the God of Israel. Yet the Jewish captives insisted that even without Cyrus knowing it, their God was working through his victory to return them to Jerusalem. The Jews saw God's influence in the political events of its time. It is God who directs the policies of Cyrus, who had no faith in the God of Israel.

This kind of Jewish belief should be an example to us. For we believe that the same God of Israel now works through God's Messiah, who is Jesus. We believe that the power of God and God's Messiah influences the entire world — that Jesus has an impact upon the political events of our times, even in situations where there is no recognition of his name.

This kind of faith is not easy. It is difficult to look at the violence and the mixed motives present in the Israel-Hamas Conflict, or the Russian-Ukraine Conflict and believe that Christ is somehow active there. Yet Christians are called to trust that God loves these people and will guide them, whether they know the name of Jesus or not. It is difficult to look at the hatred and violence of the world and believe that Christ's power is somehow active there, and that God loves both Jews and Palestinians and is working to bring about peace. It is difficult to imagine that Christ is present in Washington or on Wall Street, where so many of the decisions made in those halls of power seem to be based only on self-interest and greed. Yet Christians believe that Christ is the Light of the World and that Light continues to shine whenever and wherever darkness is found.

Believing that Christ is present in all places, is not magic. By believing in this way, we do not imagine that things will always get better and never get worse. And, of course, when we believe in this way we are challenged to contribute our own energies and influence in building God's kingdom. But prior



a good laugh, tell Him your plans.” It is easy to be disappointed in the world, in our lives, and particularly in ourselves. We have a choice, though. We can wallow in our grief, or we can take a huge step of faith and just ask God to make sense out of what appears to be nonsense. We let Him take control. And He does.

Life is too difficult to handle alone. We need help — all of us. God doesn't want us to be in grief — He wants to heal us with His Love. We have Him. We need to trust in Him. Through it all God will take control.

When we are convinced that we can't handle things by ourselves — and call upon God for help — we are at our strongest. Now we appreciate our need for Him in our lives. When we put all in His hands and act according to our consciences — even though this may be difficult and painful — then in our weakness we are strong.

God is in control. We have to tell ourselves that over and over again. If only we would allow Him to be our strength, then nothing can defeat us. Not even the worst cross we could imagine can destroy His Love in our lives. All we need is the humility and the courage to trust God to be our strength.

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

**READINGS FOR THE WEEK:**

<b>Monday:</b>	Isaiah 65:17-21, John 4:42-54
<b>Tuesday:</b>	Ezekiel 47:1-12, John 5:1-16
<b>Wednesday:</b>	Isaiah 48:8-15, John 5:17-30
<b>Thursday:</b>	Exodus 32:7-14, John 5:31-47
<b>Friday:</b>	Wisdom 2:1-22, John 7:1-30
<b>Saturday:</b>	Jeremiah 11:18-20, John 7:40-53
<b>5<sup>th</sup> Week in Lent:</b>	Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 5:7-9, John 12:20-33

**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].**

**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].





**GOD IS IN CONTROL:**

The historian who wrote the Second Book of Chronicles looked back at the Babylonian Captivity and saw the hand of God [2 Chronicles 36:14-23]. The Jewish people had practiced infidelity after infidelity, abomination after abomination. The prophets had been persecuted or ignored. Finally, God permitted a foreign people — the Babylonians — to conquer Judah, sack Jerusalem, and destroy the Temple. The vast majority of the people were deported into slavery in Babylon. They were marched across the desert bound together with rings through their noses. A good time was not had by all. This all happened in 588 B.C.

In Babylon the Hebrew people were completely powerless. The prophets had told them that God was only punishing them for a while — then they would be freed to return home. It seemed to be an impossible situation. The Babylonians were certainly not going to let them go. The Jews had no way of rebelling. How could it happen that they could return to Jerusalem? Nothing changed for 60 years. But then God worked his wonders. The Babylonians were conquered by their Northern neighbors — the Persians. According to the Chronicler, Cyrus, King of Persia, saw his conquests as gifts from God. He therefore immediately released the Jewish people so they could return to their land to rebuild the Temple to God in Jerusalem and thank their God for King Cyrus.

Throughout this whole account there is no doubt in the Chronicler's mind that God is in control of the world and of his people. This same thought is reflected in Paul's Letter to the Church at Ephesus [2:4-10] — "God has made us his handiwork," St. Paul writes. He has given us a place in the heavens. He has created us in Christ "to lead the life of good deeds which he has prepared for us in advance." Nothing is outside of God's grasp and power. He who is in control of the universe has called us to join him in his recreation of the world in Christ Jesus.

Keeping all this in mind, we can understand the significance of John's Gospel — God has sent his Son who will be raised up so that those who look upon him with faith may have eternal life. The sign of their faith is that they will do their deeds in the light [John 3:14-21].

The sign of God's power is the cross. The Son of Man is lifted up so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. Jesus died for us to restore us to God's intended place for humankind in the order of creation. At the same time, the cross is the sign of contradiction. Christ, put to death, is in control of the universe. What appears as defeat is really victory because the sacrifice of Christ initiates the reign of God. At his weakest, Jesus is the strongest. God is in control. He turns defeat into victory for those with a living faith in him.

We need to recognize this in our own struggles in life. When in our weakness, we are united to Christ's cross, we are at our strongest. We may be full of pain. Perhaps we have lost a loved one — a son, daughter, brother, sister, mother or father, grandmother or grandfather dies. The grief comes upon us in waves. One minute we are numb, the next we are beyond consolation. But through it all we do believe in God. We call upon Him. We give Him our pain. And eventually we realize that He is carrying us through our sorrows. Our grief has become our prayer. Through it all, we have become stronger. All because we let God take control.

Maybe, we have had a terrible disappointment. A job we thought was untouchable comes to a sudden end. The college we had our heart set on does not accept us — or is more than our family can afford. We realize that a person we thought was a friend was really just using us. A relationship comes to an end, a marriage, a deep relationship of love, or a friendship we have valued over the years. Perhaps life is not turning out the way we expected. Saint Teresa of Calcutta once said: "If you want to give God



God  
is in  
control

to our efforts and prior to any kind of success, those who "believe in Jesus" must hold to an optimism that God is present in ways that go beyond my heart, beyond my faith community, even beyond all people of good will. "Believing in Jesus" challenges us to believe that God intends to save not only me, not only my church community, but the entire world which God so loves—all of it

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

**SALVATION IS A GIFT:**

The second chapter of Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus emphasizes God's merciful love for us manifested in our intimate union with Christ — "Even when we were dead in our transgressions, God brought us to life with Christ, raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens" [Ephesians 2:4-10]. Our salvation is already accomplished. As we walk this earth, we already share in the death, resurrection and glorification of Christ. This great gift is not due to us by virtue of our good works, but is received as an unmerited gift of God, showing "the immeasurable riches of his grace." Although we already share in Christ's saving work, we still await the final definitive victory of God's merciful love. We are already God's "handiwork" — created anew in Christ — but we are called to continue to grow closer to the Lord and to share more completely by "good works" in his mission to save the world.

Paul gives us much to think about. He explicitly warns us against boasting about our good works. We cannot claim before God that we have earned salvation by our exemplary behavior. As Paul puts it: "For by grace you have been saved through faith." Salvation is a free gift of God beyond anything we could possibly merit or earn. A proper response is gratitude — not pride of accomplishment. A Catholic accountant who is very proud that his spiritual ledger shows far more virtue than vice could respond to Paul's letter by relying less on his good works and more on God's mercy as the only true source of salvation.

Paul's emphasis is on God's unconditional love and immeasurable mercy. This is good news for those who suffer from various forms of spiritual anxiety — fear of damnation, unrealistic guilt feelings, excessive worry about mortal sins, inability to accept divine forgiveness. Paul suggests a radical solution to all such negative feelings — trust in God's mercy rather than our own accomplishments. It helps to spend more time cultivating our intimate relationship with Christ and less time worrying about sins and failures.

Ann, a cradle Catholic happily married with three adult children (two still practicing Catholics) and six grandchildren [one with serious emotional problems] lived her whole life with a legalistic outlook on her Catholic faith. In her late 50's, she took a course in contemporary theology that proved to be life-transforming. She came to see her Catholic faith not as a series of demanding rules but as a liberating commitment to Christ. Over time, her new theological insights gradually touched her heart, enabling her to put greater trust in God, while worrying less about possible sins. This freed her for a more joyful approach to life and improved relationships with family and friends. Whenever Ann hears this letter of Paul, she has an intuitive appreciation of its fundamental meaning and importance.

How can you trust God's mercy more, and your own accomplishments less?

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

**GOD NEEDS US:**

In principle, God would not need us, but He does, despite the fact that it involves taking on many of our limitations — we are all limited, or rather sinners, and He takes this on. Look, for example, at how much patience He had with the disciples — how often they did not understand His words [see Luke 9:51-56], at times they do not agree among themselves [see Mark 10:41], for a long time they are unable to accept some essential aspects of His preaching, such as service [see Luke 22:27]. And yet Jesus chose them and continued to believe in them.

—Pope Francis

## CONFESSIONS OF AN [ALMOST] ATHEIST:

“God isn’t real. Jesus didn’t rise from the dead. Nothing happens after you die.” These are just a few of the many thoughts that crept into my head during my freshman year of college. This wasn’t the first time I experienced doubt — but it was the first time these doubts felt like something more than just small thoughts in the back of my head. It began after being assigned a particular reading in one of my science classes. My textbook, while describing the beginning of the world, made the claim that God wasn’t necessary to kick-start the universe. It also said that existence of life on Earth can be traced back to an incredibly lucky bowl of primordial soup — not Adam and Eve. I had learned about evolution and the beginning of the world before, but I had never heard it said that these things were possible without God. Not long after this, I read and discussed a creation story from Greek mythology in a philosophy course. It seemed uncomfortably similar to the creation story found in the Bible, and I didn’t have a good answer to the question — “What proof do you have that the Christian story is the right one?”

I had definitely been challenged by people that didn’t believe in God, or disliked religion before, but they were usually pretty angry about something they heard in church, or were open with the fact that they didn’t want God to be real. In these situations, I wasn’t troubled by their lack of belief, and figured they’d come around when they were a little less upset or were ready to live a Christian life. Meanwhile, I had never been challenged by calm, intelligent, and respected college professors who didn’t mention atheism at all. They were simply trying to pass on knowledge and encourage their students to think hard about important issues, but at the same time were poking big holes in what I considered a pretty solid worldview, and I was at a loss on how to patch them back up. After all, I had just graduated from high school — what did I know compared to them?

I struggled with the material that I encountered in class for months. I remember walking back to my dorm after Mass one Sunday, looking at the sky, and feeling distraught that the canvas of clouds and tree tops maybe hadn’t been painted by God, and, instead, were just the result of a big, cosmic accident. It was incredibly scary to consider a world without God, or, on a different note, to consider that I was a member of the wrong religion and that God was quite upset with me for it. In spite of my fears, I eventually made a decision that I was done holding on to Catholicism and belief in God, if I didn’t have a good reason to do so. I just wanted to know the truth to the best of my ability — even if it was bleak and godless or required learning an entirely new religion.

I began using my free time to check out books, skim articles, listen to podcasts, and start conversations with anyone who looked like they might be interested in discussing the meaning of life with me. I even invited friends up to my dorm room to watch debates, lectures, and documentaries online with me. A few even took me up on it! Things like this went on for months, but I never stopped going to Mass, or stopped praying. I didn’t always feel like there was a good reason to be doing it, but that was the only way I knew how to handle difficult times. If God was out there, I wanted Him to know that I was searching for Him.

Then, while daydreaming in my dorm one day, it suddenly hit me that the Catholic faith I had been questioning so thoroughly was actually the most convincing to me. It happened so suddenly, but felt so clear. I wish I could say there was one book, one piece of evidence, or a heavenly apparition that convinced me of this, but there wasn’t. I just had a brief moment of clarity that made me realize Catholics seemed to have a detailed, intelligent, and reasonable response to just about any question you could think of regarding religion and God. I didn’t necessarily know all the answers yet, but I learned that they were out there waiting for me. It seemed to have always been that way, too, because within a few years of Christ’s death and Resurrection, there were already bishops writing detailed and well-reasoned defenses



of basic Christian beliefs.

I also realized that, despite what some atheist celebrities may say, science isn’t capable of disproving God. God exists outside of nature; God exists outside of time; and God transcends existence in the way that humans are capable of knowing it. Science simply isn’t capable of examining something that exists in this manner. This may be frustrating, but God possibly works this way to respect our free will — we wouldn’t be truly free to choose a Christian life if God was constantly hovering above us with watchful eyes for our entire lives.

Through my months of doubting, I learned that Catholicism and science weren’t in a battle for control, but were actually close allies. There is even a patron saint of scientists who was a Dominican friar, bishop, and scientist — St. Albert the Great. A passionate love for God has often been responsible for inspiring strong desires to discover how He created the world to function. Catholics can accept scientific discoveries — like the theory of evolution or the Big Bang — and recognize God as the first cause of all creation at the same time. Furthermore, Catholic scientists are actually credited with helping to advance these theories — and many, many other scientific developments. If you do some reading on Gregor Mendel, Laura Bassi, Georges Lemaitre, Mary Kenneth Keller, Roger Bacon, or Guy Consolmagno, you’ll learn even more about incredible, Catholic contributions to science.

Most significantly, I discovered there is amazing historical evidence to support Christ’s death and Resurrection. For example, the empty tomb of Jesus was first discovered by a group of His female followers — one of whom happened to be the first to witness His Resurrection. When Jesus was alive, the testimony of a woman wasn’t considered trustworthy in Jewish society — in fact, women weren’t even allowed to serve as eyewitnesses in court. If you were trying to convince someone of something they didn’t witness, you wouldn’t use a female’s testimony to do it. Yet, that is exactly what is done in the New Testament. If the writers of the Gospels were trying to convince fellow Jews of a made-up story, they would have written that men had discovered Jesus’ empty tomb and witnessed the Resurrection because it would have been more convincing. The only reason why it would have been recorded that women were the first is if that is exactly how it happened — and there was no way around it.

I’m not confident that I would have had the fortitude to go searching for all this information if I hadn’t been heavily steeped in Catholic prayer as a child. My parents made sure I was at Mass every Sunday, and prayed in the mornings, before meals, and at night. Fortunately, God gave me enough grace to be receptive to their efforts to form me. I had started relying on prayer so much that I still did it even when I felt like it was pointless and, coincidentally, these same prayers that felt like wastes of time were probably the same prayers that helped reinvigorate my faith.

So, if you take anything from this testimony, I hope it is that you should never stop praying, and that it is normal and okay to doubt and question your faith. Saint Augustine once said: “Doubt is but another element of faith.” Don’t think there is something wrong with you, or that God will be angry that you are finding some beliefs difficult — it is a sign of spiritual maturity and part of being human in a fallen world — even Mother Teresa struggled with her faith. Take your struggles as an invitation to strengthen your relationship with God and learn more about Him. You’ll be glad you did.

—taken from the writings of Trenton Mattingly, a College Student.

## 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.

