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Honoring cultures of universal Church



During a prayer service during the Bishop Keane Institute event at Immaculate Conception Church, Hampton, Jan. 21, worshippers were so moved that many stood and waved their arms or clapped to music sung by the Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Norfolk, choir. (Photo/Jennifer Neville)



The Têt celebration on Jan. 22 began in the parish hall of Church of the Vietnamese Martyrs, Richmond, with the traditional lion and dragon dance performed by the Eucharistic Youth. (Photo/Daniel Villar)

Learning from the painful past of Black Catholics

JENNIFER NEVILLE
Special to The Catholic Virginian

“Black history is and always has been Catholic history. Catholic history is and always has been Black history.”

Thus Shannen Dee Williams began her presentation on Saturday, Jan. 21, at Immaculate Conception Church (ICC), Hampton, as part of the parish’s Bishop Keane Institute lecture series. Williams, an associate professor of history at the University of Dayton, Ohio, with a doctorate in history from Rutgers University, is a historian of the African American experience and author of the book “Subversive Habits: Black Catholic Nuns in the Long African American Freedom Struggle.”

During her talk, Williams debunked what she called four myths about the Catholic Church regarding racism. Afterward, the approximately 250 attendees discussed three questions in small groups: What surprised you? What gives you hope? What is the Holy Spirit calling our Church to do?

Following that, summaries of the group discussions were given and Williams answered questions. Next was music and a prayer service in the spirit of African liberation for which the choir of the Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Norfolk, sang. A lunch featuring traditional African fare concluded the morning.

“This event was important because it brings education and awareness to topics in areas of the Church that tend not to be heard or seen,” said Daniel Villar, director

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Vietnamese Catholics focus on faith in keeping culture alive

KRISTEN L. BYRD
Special to The Catholic Virginian

Têt, the Vietnamese holiday of the Lunar New Year, is the most important and sacred time of the year in the Vietnamese culture. It was celebrated with a special Mass on Sunday, Jan. 22, at the Church of the Vietnamese Martyrs, Richmond. Father John Baptist Nguyễn, pastor, presided over the celebration, with more than 200 people attending.

“New Year’s Day brings a new beginning,

getting rid of the bad things and the misfortunes of the past year, so everyone tries to be happy and generous toward each other,” said parishioner Julie Nguyễn, who is not related to Fr. Nguyễn. “It is believed that what we do on the first day of the year will affect the rest of the year. Therefore, we pay great attention to every word we say and everything we do on this day.”

Though the central celebration occurred on Jan. 22, Têt actually spans several days of

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One-year-old Santiago Fat wears a Santo Niño de Cebu costume, specially made for the Sinulog Fiesta at Church of the Redeemer, Mechanicsville, on Jan. 21. The costume on the original image shows the Child Jesus dressed as a Spanish monarch. (Photo/Sue Berinato)

Filipino faithful bring special devotion to the US

LILY NGUYEN DUNKLE
The Catholic Virginian

Santo Niño, the Holy Child Jesus, holds a special place in the faith and history of the Filipino Catholic community. The Filipino faithful across the region celebrated their deep devotion during the Sinulog Fiesta in honor of Santo Niño at Church of the Redeemer, Mechanicsville, on Jan. 21. The event included Mass, re-enactments, and special prayer dances.

Sinulog evokes a lot of nostalgia for Rey Bonjoc, one of the event organizers and parishioner at Church of the Re-

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Prayer is an integral part of our health, healing



CHRIST OUR HOPE
MOST REV. BARRY C. KNESTOUT

This past December, “60 Minutes” included a segment about the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes in France. As one would expect, the focus was on the 71 miraculous healings that have occurred there, and which are recognized by the Church, since our Blessed Mother appeared to St. Bernadette Soubirous in 1858.

Jamie Jensen, who suffers from cerebral palsy, has visited Lourdes 18 times hoping to be cured. When the reporter, Bill Whitaker, asked him about not receiving the miracle he sought, the man noted that he had received the miracle he *needed* — a change of heart. “There’s a peace within myself,” he said about his experiences at Lourdes.

During the years I assisted Cardinal James A. Hickey, I went to Lourdes with him several times. I learned that everybody experiences some form of healing there, but it might not be physical nor for the intention one had at that time. For many, like Jamie Jensen, it is confidence in the presence of God and calmness when it comes to dealing with the difficulties and tragedies of life.

This winter we have been cautioned about a resurgence of the flu bug, lingering COVID and the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) that infects lungs. Along with those, we have become more aware, especially since the pandemic, of the toll that depression and mental illness have taken on people’s well-being.

A healthy prayer life and an awareness that we depend upon God for our well-being

— physical, mental and spiritual — benefit us. Multiple researchers have determined that prayer has a positive impact upon one’s health. Attentiveness to this in hospital settings has proven important to the health and healing of patients.

Anecdotally, people will talk about feeling better when they have prayed. The “calm” they experience in prayer is often used to describe what helps them cope with their condition. Simply put, prayer is an integral part of healing.

This past week, many of us may have had the opportunity to have our throats blessed on or near the Feast of St. Blaise, patron of those who suffer from throat ailments. That blessing is not meant to be magical, to do away with all ailments and risks. It is a profession of faith, a request that we be physically well. It does not exempt us from taking the necessary precautions and following the necessary medical practices, e.g., visiting the doctor, remaining current on medications or treatments, keeping a healthy diet, etc., that assist in keeping us healthy.

During my years of priestly ministry it always seems that right around the Feast of St. Blaise, I come down with a sore throat and a cold. As much as, in my pastoral role, I was giving the blessing, I often needed it myself as well! I’ve always been grateful for it and for the grace that comes to us through the Church.

This coming Saturday, Feb. 11, is the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. It is also the World Day of the Sick, designated as such by St. Pope John Paul II in 1992. Not only is it a time to pray for health and healing, but it is, as Pope Francis wrote in his letter for this year’s



The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes

observance, an opportunity “to reflect on the fact that it is especially through the experience of vulnerability and illness that we can learn to walk together according to the style of God, which is closeness, compassion, and tenderness.”

Let us accept our Holy Father’s invitation to do that.

Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.

Praying when you’re sick of being sick

LAURA KELLY FANUCCI
OSV News

Here is a story that every family I know can tell: all of us have been sick. For a long, long time.

In the past few months our household has endured countless rounds of colds and coughs, flu and fevers. With four kids in school and one toddler at home it’s not surprising. Over the weeks I’ve spent pouring doses of cough syrup and searching frantically for fever medications in drugstores, I read everywhere about the “triple-demic”: the extra-potent convergence of COVID-19, RSV, and the flu that’s hitting families, schools, workplaces, and hospitals across the U.S. right now.

Caught in our own endless slog of hacking coughs, feverish kids and runny noses, I started stockpiling ways to pray through this winter’s sick season. Tuck one of these ideas in your pocket (along with extra tissues) to remember the God of the sick sees you, too.

■ Invoke the Trinity. What better way to counter the triple-demic — or any illness from mild to severe

“Rest without guilt. God could have designed our bodies to heal by exertion but instead, our bodies usually need more sleep to heal.”

— than by calling upon God’s own name for strength and comfort? The Prayer of St. Patrick’s Breastplate binds us to the holy name of the Trinity and reminds us that God is our protection in every moment: “Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me.”

■ Seek a saint’s intercession. Many of us grew up getting our throats blessed on the Feast of St. Blaise (Feb. 3). As a kid in Catholic school, I always seemed to have a seasonal sore throat by that mid-winter Mass, so the timing was perfect. But did you know there are plenty of saintly friends to call upon when sickness hits?

St. Roch survived the plague to become a patron of the ill, along with St. Angela Merici who was devoted to serving the sick. St. Gianna knew the personal and professional sides of caring for kids as a mother and doctor. By winter’s end we might all be praying to St. Jude, intercessor of the impossible.

■ Sit with a healing story. The Gospels are full of stories of Jesus healing the sick: small children, older adults and people with diseases or disabilities. Cures don’t come for everyone, but praying with the abundance of healing Scriptures reminds us that God sees, cares for and loves those who are suffering.

■ Pray for others. The “pain Olympics” of comparison are never

worth playing, but it can help to unite our suffering with others when we are feeling low. Remember those in the hospital while you’re sick at home. Give thanks for those in healing professions when you’re stuck on hold with the doctor’s office or waiting at urgent care for hours. Keep a list of friends and family who are sick and check in with a quick text and prayer.

■ Rest without guilt. God could have designed our bodies to heal by exertion but instead, our bodies usually need more sleep to heal. Listening to your body, tending to others as caregiver and heeding the Sabbath call to rest are ways to honor God’s care for bodies.

On the bleakest days when you can barely crawl out of bed, remember that “Help!” is a complete sentence and a full prayer. As the Psalmist cries out, God hears every petition and comes to our aid: “The Lord sustains him on his sickbed” (Ps 41:4). Even when our bodies suffer, our souls can draw closer to Christ who knew the depths of human suffering.

May the healing power of the Divine Physician lift your spirit, in sickness and in health.

A collective voice to defend life

Taking a stand together for pro-life advocacy

Overcast skies did not dampen the mood or the mission during Virginia Pro-Life Day in downtown Richmond Feb. 1. Groups from across the commonwealth converged at the State Capitol for a day of pro-life lobbying and advocacy.

The title of Virginia Pro-Life Day serves as an umbrella for Defending Life Day and the Virginia March for Life. Defending Life Day took place in the early part of the day; participants in high spirits showed support for pro-life members of the General Assembly and encouraged legislators who have voted against pro-life bills to reconsider their views. Bishop Barry C. Knestout and Arlington Bishop Michael F. Burbidge led a prayer and addressed the crowd at the start of the day's events. A rally and march took place in the early afternoon.

The event was a collaborative effort of the Virginia Catholic Conference, the Dioceses of Arlington and Richmond, and Virginia Society for Human Life.



Above: People of all ages, many holding signs, line up to visit members of the General Assembly as part of Defending Life Day at the State Capitol in Richmond Feb. 1. (Photo/Joe Staniunas)



Above: Bishop Barry C. Knestout and Arlington Bishop Michael F. Burbidge lead a prayer and address the crowd at the start of Virginia Pro-Life Day in downtown Richmond Feb. 1. Both bishops also took part in the Virginia March for Life. (Photo/Joe Staniunas)



Above: Bishop Barry C. Knestout holds his hand out as he blesses a group of students from St. Joseph Catholic School, Petersburg, during Virginia Pro-Life Day in downtown Richmond Feb. 1. (Photo/Michael Mickle)



Above: Students and staff from Peninsula Catholic High School, Newport News, carry signs and banners as they leave a rally at the State Capitol during the Virginia March for Life on Feb. 1. (Photo/Joe Staniunas)

Editor's note: Look for our full story in the next issue of The Catholic Virginian.

Church preserves history, remains 'beacon of hope' in community

Basilica one of two Catholic churches nationwide awarded special grant

WENDY KLESCH

Special to The Catholic Virginian

In the Gospel, Christ calls upon everyone to be good stewards of the gifts that God has given them, so that they might use them in building up his kingdom.

Through dedication and perseverance, the parishioners of the Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Norfolk, have done just that.

In January, the Basilica of St. Mary was honored for its efforts — both in preserving the past and in working for a better future — with a grant of \$150,000 from the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

"It was a nice surprise," said Father James Curran, pastor of St. Mary. "We were the only church in Virginia and one of only two Catholic churches in the country to be recognized."

The award, which was announced on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, will help the parish to care for and maintain the recently renovated basilica, ensuring that its bright red doors remain open for years to come.

Chosen from more than 1,200 applicants nationwide, the basilica is one of 35 organizations to receive an award. The Action Fund will disburse a total of \$4 million over the next two years through its Preserving Black Churches project, a project made possible by a \$20 million initiative from Lilly Endowment, Inc.

A beacon of hope

"Save the past. Enrich the future."

These words serve as the slogan of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Candra Parker, a parishioner from Holy Rosary, Richmond, who has a professional background in grant writing and who shepherded St. Mary through the application process, explained that the trust looks at both elements in reviewing grant applications.

"Even though the grant is a preservation grant — looking primarily at the building and the structure — the program also considers the justification for keeping it alive," she said. "It asks, 'Why is this church significant in the community?'"

Two key points made St. Mary a strong candidate, she said.

"In addition to the historical significance to the church, St. Mary is doing what they have been doing forever," Parker said. "They have a food bank, they feed people and, even though the community has been torn down around them" —

razed as part of the St. Paul Redevelopment project — "the people are still coming in."

"It's one of the things that's such a blessing about the basilica — the impact that they have on the community," Father Curran said. "They've always been very focused on being good neighbors and on helping one another."

Even when the basilica was in the midst of its \$6.7 million restoration project, he said, the church continued a robust outreach program to the hungry and those in need.

The fact that the church had recently completed a successful capital campaign, Parker said, also served as a testament to the church, proof positive that the parish has earned strong community support.

"They are building the kingdom of Christ out in the community in so many ways," she said. "The church gave, and the community gave back. They aren't a city on a hill with big walls around it. It is beacon of hope, literally — when you ride through there, you can see the church from the highway. It's a shining beacon of hope."

A time to preserve

Through protecting aging roofs and walls, the Preserving Black Churches project aims to preserve the stories that those walls tell, as well as keeping history alive.

"The preservation of our stories is very important," Parker said. "It's particularly significant for this diocese. Like many dioceses, a lot of Black parishes here were closed in the '60s. I saw that as a very young child; my parents were married in a church that is now closed."

Present-day St. Mary, for example, was formed in part when neighboring St. Joseph was closed, merging the two parishes, she said.

Congregations seeking a preservation grant may apply for one of five categories: Programming and Interpretation, Capital Project, Project Planning, Endowment and Financial Sustainability, and — the category under which St. Mary won its award — Organizational Capacity Building and Operations.

Father Curran said that St. Mary plans to use the funds to hire staff members to maintain the recent renovation of the basilica, which began in 2016 when a simple roof repair job uncovered a host of problems, including extensive water and termite damage.

"One of the reasons we got into the hole that we found ourselves in was that there was no one on staff who knew what we should look for,"



Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Norfolk, receives grant from African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund. The goal is to help Black churches preserve their history while they continue to serve their communities.
(Photo/Wendy Klesch)

Father Curran said. "Once the water comes in, that's it. The damage begins."

The church spent the bulk of four years covered in scaffolding, undergoing work that included roof and structural repair, a new heating and air conditioning system, a new floor, and the restoration of its stained-glass windows. The sanctuary reopened in December 2020.

"This is almost like the final phase of our renovation project," Father Curran said. "It is to help us preserve what we have done. We have restored, and now we're going to preserve."

History worth saving

"The significance of St. Mary to the diocese is that it is the diocese's oldest parish, founded in 1791," Msgr. Walter Barrett said.

Msgr. Barrett, recently retired director of the Office for Black Catholics, served as associate pastor of St. Mary from 1975 to 1977 and as pastor from 1985 to 2000.

"From its earliest days, it's always had a racially-mixed congregation," he said. "People from Saint-Domingue, which would be Haiti today, were there when it was still St. Patrick."

St. Patrick, the first church to serve the parish, was founded by French Catholics fleeing the French Revolution. Soon, they were joined by the first wave of Irish immigrants as well as immigrants from Saint-Domingue.

During the 1850s, St. Patrick pastor, Father Matthew O'Keefe,

came under fire from members of the Know-Nothing party — a clandestine political party known for its anti-Roman Catholic and anti-immigrant views — who objected to the priest celebrating integrated Masses.

When St. Patrick was burned on December 8, 1856, many believed it to be the work of the Know-Nothing Party.

A new church was built up from the ashes and completed in 1858, Msgr. Barrett said. It was named St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception.

In 1991, Pope John Paul II proclaimed the church a minor basilica.

"It was a long process," Msgr. Barrett said. "There were certain requirements that had to be met. The French Gothic architecture was one of the things that Rome was interested in, for example."

The church, however, is beautiful not only for its liturgical furnishings and art, he said, but also as a living bastion of men and women who endeavor to follow the call of the Gospel.

He remembered when the parish's food ministry began in the mid-1970s.

"It started out simply enough, with peanut butter and jelly or bologna sandwiches served out of the back door of the parish rectory," he said, "and now it feeds hundreds of people each week."

"The church merits preservation," Msgr. Barrett said. "Not only because it's a beautiful church — and it is beautiful — but because of its long and rich history."

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How you can make your parish better

LORENE HANLEY DUQUIN
OSV News

Parishioners are expected to feel a true sense of ownership in their parish. That means looking at your parish as more than just a place where you go to Mass. A parish can be a sacred place where the human and the divine meet, where people of all ages grow in the knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

It can be a place where people receive spiritual nourishment, guidance, inspiration and strength — not just from the priests but from other members of the parish as well. It can be a spiritual home where people share in each other's joys, support each other in times of sorrow, offer encouragement to those who are struggling, and help to heal anyone who feels battered or broken by life's trials and tragedies.

Or it can be a social place where people make new friends, reach out to those less fortunate, and invite others to become part of a community of believers who try their best to live the Gospel message.

Maybe your parish is already all of this and more, but even the best parishes can become even better when parishioners take an active interest in making the parish grow and prosper. Here are six ways to do just that.

Think of yourself as part of a parish family. Family members share a common heritage and history. They are grounded in the same beliefs, values, and traditions. They embrace new members of the family with a spirit of love and acceptance. Family members don't always agree, but they do feel a strong commitment to one another and to the family as a whole.

Be welcoming. When you come together on the weekend for Mass, think of it as a large family reunion — with people you know well, know slightly, and don't know at all. Introduce yourself to people you don't know, especially if they are sitting alone in church or standing by themselves at the coffee-and-donut hour. If they're new to the parish, offer to give them a tour, introduce them to other parishioners, or simply tell them why you love the parish. Enthusiasm is catching! Watch your nonverbal communication, too. If you're sitting on the end of a pew, for example, don't make others crawl over you to



get to middle seats. Remember to smile; take the time to compliment the people sitting around you on everything from their singing ability to the cuteness of their kids.

Use your gifts and talents for the good of the parish. God has given each person unique gifts and talents that are intended to be shared. Like public speaking? You might get involved as a lector. If you're friendly and outgoing, you could be an usher or a greeter. You can share your deep devotion to the Eucharist by becoming an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion or an adult altar server.

If you play an instrument or sing, the music ministry might be the place for you. Maybe you're a teacher and could help in religious education; if you love children, you could assist in the babysitting room. Any expertise — business, finance, public relations, photography, grant writing, engineering, carpentry, building maintenance, or even such skills as cooking, baking, cleaning, or gardening — can find a place in the parish.

Maybe your greatest gift is time; if you're already an extraordinary minister or instituted acolyte, you can take Communion to the sick and homebound. Or you can help with your parish outreach ministry to the poor. You might even have an idea for a new ministry, support group, organization, or event, and your enthu-

siasm and energy can help other people get excited and involved.

Attend parish events. Although Mass is our central focus, other parish ministries, activities, and events help to increase spirituality and build community as well. Whether it's a mission, a lecture, a lawn fête or a spaghetti dinner, take advantage of opportunities to meet new people, feel more connected, and affirm your fellow parishioners who work hard to plan and execute these events.

Invite family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers to join you — especially those who are not Catholic or may have stopped practicing their faith. These folks may not be ready to attend Mass, but they might enjoy coming to a parish event, meeting other parishioners, and seeing some of the good things that the Catholic Church has to offer.

Support your parish financially. You know how expensive it is to run your own home. Parishes face even higher costs — and depend on parishioners to help meet them. Take a serious look at the money you give to your parish each week. Do you increase your contributions each year as the cost-of-living rises?

Giving to the Church is more than just a financial obligation. Once you recognize that everything you have is a gift from God, you see that giving generously to continue God's work in the parish is an essential part of your spirituality.

Pray for your parish. Keep your pastor, parish staff and fellow parishioners in your daily prayers. Praying a rosary, spending time in Eucharistic adoration, fasting or offering up any suffering, annoyance or inconvenience you experience for the well-being of your parish will bring rewards not just for the parish but for you personally. You will begin to see yourself as spiritual support for all the good work being done in and through your parish.

Pray also for the return of Catholics who have strayed from the practice of the faith, people raised with no faith, and people searching for meaning and purpose in life.

No parish is perfect, and even the best parishes can improve. Imagine what would happen if every person in your parish did one little thing to make the parish better!

Four things that hurt parishes

Negativity. Negativity usually starts with a few disgruntled people who complain about virtually everything, then can spread like wildfire. The best way to deal with negativity is to address it head-on by asking some key questions. Is what this person is saying true? If yes, what needs to be done to address the problem? If no, the person must be confronted and the negativity exposed.

Gossip. Gossip is negativity directed at a person or a group of people in the parish. Every parish has gossipmongers whose own insecurity drives them to put others down as a way of

feeling better about themselves. The best way to deal with them is directly: ask why others really need to know the things they share, or how others can help the person whose reputation is at stake.

Cliques. Sadly, people involved in a clique usually don't think of themselves as "cliquish." They've just been running things for so long that they automatically rely on the same people over and over to help. Sometimes they just need a friendly reminder to invite others. Newcomers also often benefit — and help the parish — by starting their own new ministries, organizations and events.

Refusal to change. Tradition is good, but when parishioners become rigid about the way things have "always been done," a parish can quickly begin to decline. Change is never easy but talking about it will help. Try to find a balance that will maintain some time-honored traditions, while incorporating new ways of doing things and involving new people in doing them.

Lorene Hanley Duquin is the author of Catholic books, pamphlets, and articles on a variety of evangelization and ministry topics. She has conducted workshops in parishes and at diocesan conferences in the United States and Canada.

Be a source of healing, peace to our generation

GUEST COMMENTARY

FATHER TOCHI IWUJI

The star of Bethlehem is correlated with the birth of Christ. The Magi from the East took notice of the star and journeyed with the star in obedience and paid homage to the newborn king.

As we celebrate this year's Black History Month, I invite you to reflect on our collective journey to the heart of Christ, where we find our healing and peace. Like the Magi, who saw the star, risked their lives, faced many challenges, and even entered a conspiracy with Herod, the king at the time – they remained focused, attentive, and in touch with the star, their source of

direction; as a matter of fact, they were wise not to rely on another source except Divine support.

As a people needing healing and peace, our healing comes from Christ, our light. We must resist the temptation to give up or the alluring test of trusting another source to lead us to the source of our healing. Following the star involves risks, challenges, conspiracy, fear, uncertainty, pain and struggles to let go, in all these, “we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us” Rom 8:37.

Like the Magi, when they eventually reached the place where the newborn king was, their joy knew no bounds, and they went home a better way. Christ encounters us to restore us, and he sends us home through a better way to become what we have received.

I invite you, friends, to become a source of healing and peace to our generation. Our

Beloved Servant of God, Sister Thea Bowman, provides some words on which to reflect:

“What does it mean to be Black and Catholic? It means that I come to my Church fully functioning... I bring myself, my Black self, all I am, all I have, all that I'm worth, all I hope to become. I bring my whole history, my tradition, my experience, my culture, my African-American song and dance, gesture and movement, teaching and preaching and healing, and responsibility as a gift to the Church.”

Have the courage to follow the star and stay focused on where our healing lies; Christ is our healer; come to him with your stories and history.

Father Tochi Iwuji is the director of the Office of Black Catholics and pastor of the Central Virginia Catholic Cluster.

Saint Spotlight: St. Josephine Bakhita and her 114 scars

Former slave-turned-nun shines light on modern-day slavery

GREG BURKE
OSV News

Human cruelty, at times, seems to know no boundaries. We see examples of depravity and wanton violence every day, whether it's the cavalier disregard for human life of the drug lords or the intentional killing of innocents by Islamic terrorists, or the sinister work of the Sicilian Mafia bosses, like dissolving a 12-year-old boy in a vat of acid.

We're all aware of Narcos, Islamic terrorists and Mafiosi, thanks to Netflix and the headlines in the paper, but rarely do we think about human traffickers and that's unfortunate. Why? Because those who traffic in human beings – for sexual purposes, for free labor or for their organs – make drug dealers look like gentlemen.

You might be tempted to think slavery is a problem in poor, far-away countries, and it is. But it's also happening in the wealthiest and most developed countries of the world, including the United States. Right here, right now.

Slavery didn't end in the United States with the Civil War and the 13th Amendment in 1865. Legal slavery ended. What continues to this day is people – most of them young women – being enslaved in massage parlors, nail salons and prostitution rings – working to pay off massive debts they owe to the people who have tricked and trafficked them.

Runaway kids are particularly easy prey, getting picked up at bus stations and malls within days of having left home. Owning slaves is incredibly profitable (even more so than dealing drugs), and quite difficult to prosecute, so traffickers are brazen in going about their business.

How to put an end to the problem? First of all, shine a light on it. When ordinary people realize



An image of St. Josephine Bakhita, a former Sudanese slave who became a nun, hangs from the facade of St. Peter's Basilica Oct. 1, 2000. The Church celebrates International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking Feb. 8, the feast day of St. Bakhita, who was kidnapped as a child and sold into slavery in Sudan and Italy.

(OSV News photo/Paolo Cocco, Reuters)

what's going on, even in their own neighborhoods, they'll take steps to stop it. See something, say something.

One way the church shines a light is through the life of St. Josephine Bakhita, the patroness of victims of slavery and trafficking. St. Josephine was a Sudanese woman, abducted as a young girl in the late 1800s and forced into slavery. She was eventually brought to Italy and freed. She became a Christian and entered religious life with the Canossian Sisters.

St. Josephine bore the marks of slavery in her flesh, having been cut by one owner some 114 times. She was declared “blessed” in 1992 and made a saint in the year 2000. Her story has helped Catholics be more

aware of what Pope Francis calls the “scourge” of trafficking and slavery. Feb. 8, the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita, is the annual day of prayer and awareness against human trafficking.

Few things can destroy a person's dignity more than being owned by someone else, and being treated like an animal – or less than an animal. Frequently victims of trafficking are raped, drugged and beaten into submission. That doesn't happen to many animals.

Victims range from children not yet school age being used for online pornography, to Filipino maids enslaved in the wealthy Gulf states, to Mexican kids being trafficked for their organs and American run-aways forced into prostitution.

Young men from poor countries in Southeast Asia also get tricked into working 20 hours a day for months on end on big fishing boats with no pay. Unfortunately, the ways to ensnare desperately poor people are almost limitless. Fortunately, there are thousands of religious sisters working to defend human dignity.

Although not many people are aware of it, religious sisters are the largest and most effective group combating human trafficking

worldwide. I got to see their incredible contribution through the Arise Foundation, a small NGO, but one punching well above its weight. Arise was founded in 2015, and helps frontline groups, especially networks of sisters, in fighting the root causes of slavery today. Those root causes are extreme poverty and unemployment.

While many religious sisters set up safe houses for trafficked women after they have been rescued, the focus of Arise is on prevention – tackling the problem at its roots. Awareness is only the start: education, skills training and job creation are also key.

Like much of the educational and health service the Church provides around the world, the amazing work of sisters to combat trafficking gets little media attention. They aren't looking for attention, but we should at least offer them our help. This quiet, generous and selfless effort probably deserves a Nobel Peace Prize, and certainly deserves our support and our prayers.

Greg Burke, a former Vatican spokesman, develops strategic partnerships for the anti-slavery charity Arise.

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Circulation: Ashly Krebs (804) 622-5226 akrebs@catholicvirginian.org

Eastern Correspondents: Wendy Klesch and Jennifer Neville

Western Correspondents: Karen Adams and Joe Staniunas

Central Correspondents: Kristen L. Byrd and Rose Morrisette

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Shootings are 'an issue about life'

Parishes pray for those impacted by gun violence

JENNIFER NEVILLE

Special to The Catholic Virginian

Awareness.
Transformation.
Action.

Thus was the challenge of prayer vigils that four parishes in the Eastern Vicariate held for victims of gun violence in recognition of the annual World Day of Peace observance on Sunday, Jan. 1. Over the New Year's weekend, Immaculate Conception, Hampton; St. Therese, Chesapeake; and Church of the Holy Family and Church of the Holy Apostles, both in Virginia Beach, prayed during the vigils for those who died from gun violence in 2022, whether by suicide, accident or murder, including mass shootings. The parishes emphasized Hampton Roads' tragedies.

"Doing it in solidarity with churches across the region makes it feel like we have that much more power for making change," said Teresa Stanley, a Holy Apostles parishioner who helped organize the event.

'Not just a number'

Immaculate Conception displayed 217 pairs of shoes for each victim killed by gun violence in Hampton Roads last year. Each pair had a tag with that person's name, and as the parishioners processed out at the end, they placed candles by the shoes and gathered for a brief prayer.

There were children's and adults' shoes, sneakers and high heels, sandals and boots, depending on the individuals who died, who ranged in age from two to 83. The vast majority were young men in their 20s and 30s who were killed in individual



Above: Over New Year's weekend, Church of the Holy Apostles, Virginia Beach, held a vigil for the victims of gun violence. The parish was one of four in the Eastern Vicariate having similar services. (Photo provided by Church of the Holy Apostles, Virginia Beach)



Left: At a New Year's Eve vigil for the victims of gun violence at Immaculate Conception Church, Hampton, the prayer service had 217 pairs of shoes representing the people who died as a result of gun violence in 2022 in Hampton Roads. (Photo provided by Immaculate Conception Church, Hampton)

Right: Approximately 100 people pray at a vigil for the victims of gun violence at Immaculate Conception Church, Hampton, on New Year's Eve. The parish set out shoes representing the 217 people who died of gun violence in Hampton Roads in 2022 and parishioners placed a candle by each pair. (Photo provided by Immaculate Conception Church, Hampton)



shootings, according to research done by parishioner Joan Kennedy.

"That (the shoes) really made an impact in terms of making it not just a number, (but) really connecting what's happening to humans, children of God. These were people who wore shoes, who had names," Kennedy said. "Some of them were

juniors or the third. Somebody had taken a great deal of care to pick a name with all the hopes and dreams that they had for their child, and then they were taken by gun violence."

Holy Family set out 22 pairs of shoes, and two people alternated reading the names — 10 names per

pair — of the people who died of gun violence in Hampton Roads. A chime was rung after each one and a parishioner placed a candle behind the shoes.

"The whole idea was that these people were sons, daughters of somebody, and they're not just a

See *Gun violence*, Page 13

Mother's act of forgiveness changing countless lives

GRETCHEN CROWE

Editor-in-chief, OSV News

Four years ago, I watched a video on YouTube of a woman who was doing impressive work caring for underserved children in downtown Columbus, Ohio. She'd started a center for after-school activities, where young people could come and have a snack, do their homework, learn about Jesus Christ and spend time with one another in a safe environment.

What a great initiative, I thought. And then I kept watching. There was a reason she was doing this work. Isn't there always a reason? But Rachel Muha's was nothing short of astounding.

In 1999, Rachel had lost her younger son, Brian, when he was violently murdered after he and his roommate were abducted from their off-campus apartment at the Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. Brian, a bright, caring 18-year-old from Westerville, Ohio, had his life ahead of him. He had wanted to be a doctor — to work with, you guessed it, underserved children.

But there is an even more incredible part of this story, and it's that Rachel publicly forgave her son's killers before his body had even been found. And it's that act of forgiveness that has gone on to

change life after life in the 20 years since.

How do I know this? Because I got to tell her story. After watching the YouTube video (on a tip from Kevin Lowry, a member of OSV's Board of Directors), I spoke with book editors at OSV and volunteered to work with Rachel to make her story — and the work of The Brian Muha Foundation — better known.

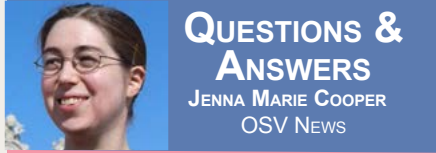
For the next three years, I spoke and visited with Rachel, talking to her about Brian's kidnapping and what it was like to search for him (even looking in dumpsters); about dealing with grief and her decision to forgive; about the two young men who had murdered her son; about her older son, Chris, and his own heartbreak; about the terrible criminal trials that occurred and then occurred a second time; on grief, racial tensions and the death penalty; and finally, on how she has been an inspiring one-woman agent of change in her community and beyond. The result was a new book, published in November, called "Legacy of Mercy: A True Story of Murder and a Mother's Forgiveness."

Through those pages, I do my best to introduce the reader to the woman who had first captivated me in that YouTube video — the wom-

an who had spent her life in the service of others and, in doing so, in service to God. And who has experienced this best but the young people who she has served over the years? One of my favorite examples of the success of Rachel's work is how people who first came to the center as children are now returning to help the next generation. Daniel Houston, 22, is one of those "Racers" who is now working full-time with the day school. He told me, when I recorded him for an interview, "If Miss Rachel is hearing this: I love you, man. I appreciate everything you've done for me." His comments bring me to tears to this day.

Thanks to Rachel's tireless effort and hard work, "Legacy of Mercy" is already outdated. There are more students at the day school (complete with new uniforms!), and a gym expansion is underway. And watching over it all is a big photo of Brian, hanging on the wall outside the center's office. Thanks to his mom — to her tremendous faith, her love for others and her decision to forgive against all odds — he will not be remembered just as a boy who died. He will be remembered as a boy whose untimely and tragic death helped change the world.

Understanding sacramentals, holy water and silent prayers



Q. What are sacramentals and why must they be burned or buried? (St. Cloud, Minnesota)

A. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines sacramentals as “sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments,” which make us more “disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments” (grace), and through which “various occasions in life are rendered holy” (CCC 1667).

There are different kinds of sacramentals, including sacramentals that are not material objects at all. The catechism goes on to note that our most important sacramentals are prayers of blessing, from simply daily meal blessings up to more solemn, lasting blessings, such as the dedication of a church building, religious professions or the consecration of virgins (CCC 1671 and 1672). Interestingly, prayers of exorcism are also considered sacramentals (see CCC 1673).

However, your question is addressing our tangible sacramentals — rosaries, holy medals, religious statues and images or other blessed objects. Canon law doesn't mention specific disposal methods for mate-

rial sacramentals that are no longer useful or have fallen into disrepair, but the general idea is that blessed objects need to be disposed of in a respectful manner.

This is the same principle behind our etiquette for the proper disposal of an American flag. A worn-out flag is to be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning, because of what the flag represents. A sacramental — blessed and recognized by the Church as an aid to receiving grace — should be disposed of with honor and respect. Burning a blessed object so that it no longer exists intact, or returning it to the earth via burial, are both intrinsically more reverent acts than simply adding a sacramental to the trash.

Practically speaking, if you have sacramental objects which you no longer need but which are still in relatively good shape, the best and easiest thing to do is pass them along to someone else who could use them. Many parishes have something like a “free table” where parishioners can leave their no-longer-needed Catholic books and small religious articles for anyone who might like them.

If you have sacramentals at home that are broken beyond repair, and you are truly unable to burn or bury them yourself, you can call your local parish for advice.

Incidentally, there is one time every year when a parish will go out of its way to burn a sacramental for

you: prior to the start of Lent each year, when last year's Palm Sunday palms are collected and burned to create the ashes used on the upcoming Ash Wednesday.

Q. Why do Catholics bless themselves with holy water? (Conway, South Carolina)

A. A distinctive feature of any Catholic church is the holy water fonts usually found at the entrances to the worship space. Catholics customarily dip their fingertips in the blessed water and make the sign of the cross upon entering and leaving the church.

We do this because holy water is a reminder of the waters of our baptism. Holy water — a sacramental — is also frequently used as a means of blessing persons, places and objects. Catholics bless themselves with holy water as a means of invoking God's grace and protection.

Although we most often see holy water in churches, it is also possible to use holy water in other places and situations. For instance, many Catholics observe the beautiful custom of keeping personal holy water fonts inside the doors of their own homes.

Q. I live alone, and every morning and night, I say my

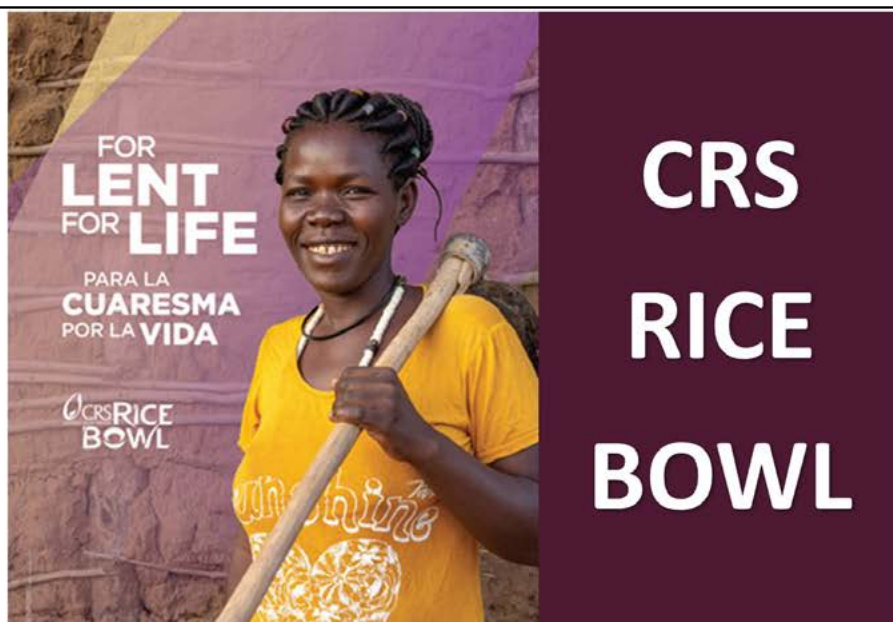
prayers out loud, but sometimes I pray silently, just in my head. Are those silent prayers heard? (Atlanta, Georgia)

A. God is everywhere and knows everything, so it is safe to say that even our purely silent prayers are heard by God.

Additionally, we are told throughout Scripture that God knows the secrets and thoughts of our hearts. For example, in the Book of Psalms, we pray: “LORD, you have probed me, you know me: you know when I sit and stand; you understand my thoughts from afar ... Even before a word is on my tongue, LORD, you know it all” (Ps 139:1-2, 4).

Many of our greatest saints, such as Sts. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, place special value on “mental prayer,” or a silent, often wordless sharing of our hearts with God. And in the Gospel, Jesus himself tells us: “...when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will repay you” (Mt 6:6).

Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News. Send your questions to CatholicQA@osv.com.



crsricebowl.org/order

It is **not too late** for your parish or school to order rice bowls for Lent! Visit the link above to find materials for families, parishes, or elementary, middle, and high school students, and universities.

The **Diocese of Richmond** received \$35,068 in grants (Lent 2022) for use in our local communities.

Recipients: St. Andrew, Williamsburg House of Mercy, Sacred Heart (Big Stone Gap), Church of the Holy Family, Saint Anthony (Norton), St. Paul, Holy Spirit and Saint Elizabeth Catholic Churches.

CRS Rice Bowl contributions support projects that assist those in need **BOTH** overseas **AND** in the U.S. **75%** of **CRS Rice Bowl** contributions are sent to CRS and help fund *development projects* that help *increase & maintain communities access to food*. **25%** of the contributions fund **local poverty & hunger alleviation programs in dioceses in the U.S.**

“God invites us to slow down in the silence and look for him around us—in nature and in people who need us most.” - CRS

This year, the **CRS Rice Bowl Stories of HOPE** will take you to Honduras, Kenya and the Philippines, where you will learn how people are overcoming the causes of hunger and adapting to climate change.

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Visita crsplatodearroz.org para más recursos.

Authentic loves requires sacrifice



IN LIGHT OF FAITH
BARBARA HUGHES

It's the time of year when hearts and cupids are in stores. Hoping to capitalize on the idea that affection translates into mega spending sprees, retailers direct their attention toward enticing shoppers of every age. From a simple Valentine to a box of chocolates to diamonds, gift giving as a show of affection has become a cultural phenomenon. Every Feb. 14, love is in the air – or is it?

The practice of gift giving as a token of one's love rings true for those whose love language is expressed by the dollar value of a gift, but unless the gift involves a level of personal sacrifice, it remains only a token.

Authentic love will always have a sacrificial dimension. This explains why cupids are pictured with an arrow that wounds even as it endears and why homemade Valentines are keepsakes, prized more highly than those purchased from a store. The time and talent required to make a gift adds to its value.

Love is invisible, but how could it be otherwise, “for God is love” (1 Jn 4:8b) and “no one can see the face of God and live” (Ex 3:20). Although we cannot see love, we can certainly see the effects of love. Love is made visible by parents who keep vigil at the bedside of a sick child and by adults who care for aging parents.

It can be seen in a teacher who

purchases classroom supplies with her own money, and in the priest who leaves the comfort of his bed to administer the last rites to a dying patient. Love may even look like a mom wearing an outdated dress who happily presents her child with a new dress for the prom.

When a Pharisee asked Jesus “‘which commandment in law is the greatest?’ He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Mt 22:36-39).

We know that Jesus' greatest act of love began with donning our human nature and ended with gifting his life to the Father on our behalf while he hung dying on the cross. It's no surprise then that one of the most quoted Scripture passages is: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16-17).

When couples marry, they pledge their love to each other, but it's in the daily dying to their own needs for the good of their spouse that they live out the commitment that they promised at the altar. I've

always been fascinated by the poem that Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote to her husband. True to its poetic nature, the love Ms. Barrett describes is ethereal.

No doubt it was written when her heart was overflowing with emotion. Like most love sonnets, she was describing the indescribable, but there was more to it than flowery language. The enamored poet sacrificed a great deal and overcame many obstacles in finally being able to marry Robert Browning, and so her poem was more than empty words.

Her love was a lived experience that has been immortalized through her poetry. Though written to her husband, it is an invitation for reflection and a prayer that invites us to ponder this most important question:

*How do I love thee?
Let me count the ways.*

*I love thee to the depth and
breadth and height*

*My soul can reach,
when feeling out of sight*

*For the ends of being
and ideal grace.*

*I love thee to the level of
every day's
Most quiet need,
by sun and candle-light.*

*I love thee freely,
as men strive for right.*

*I love thee purely,
as they turn from praise.*

*I love thee with the
passion put to use*

*In my old griefs,
and with my childhood's faith.*

*I love thee with a
love I seemed to lose*

*With my lost saints.
I love thee with the breath,*

*Smiles, tears, of all my life;
and, if God choose,*

*I shall but love thee better after
death. (Sonnet 43)*

As a prayer, the words surely rise like incense before the throne of God. However, it's what happens after we rise and go forth that is proof of the love we pledge. For when words are united with the will of God, the invisible is made real.

Barbara Hughes is an author, retreat facilitator and spiritual guide. She lives in Virginia Beach and can be reached at brhughes16@gmail.com.



Don't let your life happen to you by accident



**BELIEVE AS
YOU PRAY**
MSGR. TIMOTHY KEENEY

“What do you want to do?”
“I don't know. What do you want to do?”

“I don't know. What do you want to do?”

Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Sound familiar? Sometimes we are afraid to choose, to make a commitment, because what will I do if a better opportunity comes along and I am already committed? The problem is, if

we never make a commitment we are no longer in charge of the direction of our lives. We are simply letting random chance determine the meaning or the lack of meaning of our existence.

C.S. Lewis, in “Mere Christianity,” used the image of a house when he was asked about making a commitment to a particular faith. He said that believing in mere Christianity is like

entering the foyer of a house. But we don't live in the foyer. We live in the various rooms that we have access to by entering the foyer. We must make choices, and by their very nature certain choices mean leaving behind other choices.

Lewis was using the image to explain that we can only live our faith in Christ by a commitment to a particular community of faith gathered in Jesus' name. The image also works for our first reading. “If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you will live; ... Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him” (Sir 15:15, 17).

We can be afraid that making a definite commitment for God's commandments may make my life too narrow, too oppressive or that somehow I will lose part of myself. Our fear of making a commitment for God is also tied to our culture's loss of a sense of trust in God — that he has given us his commandments does not limit us but sets us free.

The German philosopher Max Scheler, who heavily influenced St. Pope John Paul II

and Pope Benedict, was concerned with this estrangement of modern man from God and how it undermines our sense of self. He argued that it was completely the opposite: “You gain yourself as a person by losing yourself in God” (Scheler, “Of the Eternal and Humanity”).

Don't be afraid to take up the challenge of the prophet Sirach; don't be afraid of making defining choices in your life. Choosing to keep God's commandments will not limit you but set you free to be truly yourselves.

Not to choose, is to choose. We cannot keep the commandments without the help of the Holy Spirit, unless we make a choice that help cannot be given because we are not ready to receive it.

Only when we make the firm commitment to keep God's commandments, even if we fall from time to time, are we ready to accept the grace of the Spirit that will allow us to keep the commandments. To know and keep those commandments at the deeper level Jesus is calling us to fulfill in the Gospel will lead to an even deeper sense of self and of joy.

Msgr. Timothy Keeney is pastor of Incarnation, Charlottesville.

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

Sir 15:15-20

Ps 119: 1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34

1 Cor 2:6-10

Mt 5:17-37

It is good to let the jeering skulls laugh

ELIZABETH SCALIA
OSV News

Like St. Teresa of Avila, I have a skull on my desk. Two, actually – one plain and one riotously decorated in green and purple. I think they’re funny; they remind me not to take myself, or the world, too seriously. When I have tied myself into knots due to some perceived weakness, or spent more than a minute brooding because I feel ignored, the skulls jeer at me with all of their teeth and whisper from the prophet Isaiah, “All flesh is grass... The grass withers, the flower fades” (Is 40:6-7).

In our high-stimulus society, keeping to an “all flesh is grass” philosophy can bring balance and perspective. It’s of a piece with something I’ve read about St. Bernadette Soubirous: When an exalted sister within her community would disparage the visionary of Lourdes due to her lack of stature or her poor education, Bernadette would say, “Move along, creature,” to herself, as well as to her tormentor. “Only Christ matters.”

“Move along, creature” is, like the smiling skulls – a fine way of reminding ourselves not to invest too much into our hurt feelings or our offense-taking. It reminds us that passing human stupidities and insults (I am redundant) ought not to command too much real estate in well-grounded souls. Social media has conditioned us to believe that everything we do, everything we think, every bit of umbrage we

feel and every thoughtless slight offered by some stranger at a distant keyboard must be marked and then responded to by others – voted up or down in the virtual circus of chaotic consensus through which we waste so much time.

We moderns do take ourselves very seriously. We bore others with details of our diets, we fret over our retirement planning or our workout schedules. How much is too little, how much is too much? Will any of this ever be enough?

There is nothing wrong with wanting to be fit, or to plan for some future day when (with any luck) all the workouts and investments have paid off and you’re ready to slow into retirement. But while we’re doing all that, it’s worth recalling a wry old Jewish maxim: “You make plans; God laughs.”

All our efforts to last another day, or decade, and to live in relative comfort, are contingent upon controls that, ultimately, we do not possess. How often have we heard that someone who “did everything right” in terms of diet and exercise suddenly succumbed to a heart attack that came out of nowhere? How many stories can we recite about someone’s life savings being lost to an unforeseen market turn?

Which is why it is good to keep a smiling skull around – to help us laugh at ourselves as we remember that all flesh goes the way of the grass that fades and the flower that withers.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for February 12, 2023

Matthew 5:17-37

Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A: The importance of words. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

THE LAW	PROPHETS	LETTER
BREAKS	LEAST	NOT ENTER
LIABLE	BROTHER	ALTAR
RECONCILED	GUARD	LAST PENNY
ADULTERY	RIGHT EYE	SWEAR
THRONE	FOOTSTOOL	CITY
GREAT KING	HEAD	BLACK

ABOUT THE LAW

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L K D E L I C N O C E R
B L C A L I A B L E A E
R R A A E A D N A E G T
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I R I G H T E Y E J G J
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Lunar New Year

Continued from Page 1

preparation, gatherings, family and festivities. Nguyễn, who arrived in the United States as a child refugee in 1975, explained that it's common to get new haircuts and clothes in an effort to begin the year anew.

People also clean their homes thoroughly before Tết, literally and figuratively sweeping away the leftover dust from the previous year to make room for good luck. Traditional food is prepared and homes are decorated with colorful arrangements of apricot blossoms, peach blossoms, chrysanthemums, orchids, and kumquat trees.



Fr. John Baptist Nguyễn, pastor of Church of the Vietnamese Martyrs, Richmond, delivered the homily with Deacons Thoại Trần and Liêm Đỗ seated behind the altar on Tết, the Vietnamese holiday of Lunar New Year. (Photo/Daniel Villar)

In Vietnam, people visit the graves of ancestors to pray for their souls. Families gather for feasts and dancers perform as lions and dragons in the streets. Parades march to the beat of gongs and drums while firecrackers light up the night sky.

Stateside, many try to keep these traditions alive in a myriad of ways. Before the start of Mass at the Church of the Vietnamese Martyrs, the parish elders offered incense in honor of the community's ancestors, as they would in Vietnam. There was a traditional lion and dragon dance, and elders gave money to the younger churchgoers, as is common during Tết.

Center oneself on God

The altar was adorned with chrysanthemums and framed with two large banners, one stating "Họp Nhau Âm Tinh Dân Tộc (Getting Together with the Love of the Same Countrymen) and the other "Quây Qu àn Nhớ Tổ Việt Nam" (Gather to Commemorate Vietnamese Ancestors). Men and women wore tradi-

tional Vietnamese formal clothing, called áo dài, and "fortunes" were blessed and given to all who were present. These fortunes were rolls of paper containing Bible verses and prayers.

According to Nguyễn, Fr. Nguyễn spoke of the importance of being present in the moment during his homily, not worrying about tomorrow, but fully experiencing today. He called on his parishioners to center themselves in God. He also spoke of the significance of this particular new year, which marked the beginning of the Year of the Cat.

"The cat is gentle, steadfast, peaceful, and elegant," said Nguyễn, who paraphrased Fr. Nguyễn's homily. "It is one of God's tools, and the mission for us is to be God's tool, the tool of peace. We must develop our faith, which is our true treasure, and become a witness to our faith."

After Mass, attendees gathered to sing karaoke, dance, eat and laugh. Parishioners also decorated and prayed at the church's shrine to Our Lady of La Vang. La Vang is a rainforest in Vietnam where Catholics fled due to persecution around the turn of the 19th century. Many fell sick while hiding in the jungle, but they continued to pray the rosary nightly at the foot of a tree. The Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus is said to have appeared and comforted those who were suffering from fear of death from execution or illness. The statue serves as another significant connection to their homeland.

Diverse ways to encounter Gospel

Nguyễn explained why the Church of the Vietnamese Martyrs is so important to those of Vietnamese descent in the area.

"The culture shock is very hard on them so they turn toward their faith to help them mentally and spiritually. It is better for them to practice their faith when they can understand the Word of God and the sermons thoroughly," she said. "The cultural activities that are being practiced at the church help them transition better and live a better Christian life."

Daniel Villar, director of the Diocese of Richmond's Office of Ethnic Ministries, attended the Tết service. As a man with Hispanic roots, he said he was moved by the unique cultural elements he witnessed that were combined with the traditional universal Catholic Mass, which reminded him of the great diversity that can be found in the Catholic faith.

"We are all made in the image and likeness of God," said Villar. "It is our vocation and call to encounter the Gospel through the diverse ways faith has informed culture. How beautiful it is to see the face of God through the lens of different cultures and languages!"



The choir from the Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Norfolk, sings during a prayer service as part of the Bishop Keane Institute's event at Immaculate Conception Parish, Saturday, Jan. 21. (Photo/Thanh Nguyen)

Painful past

Continued from Page 1

of the Diocese of Richmond's Office of Ethnic Ministries.

Dispelling myths

Williams said one myth is, "Black Catholic history in the United States is inconsequential and primarily a 20th-century story of the conversion of African American southern migrants in the urban North, West and Midwest."

She said in actuality when the Spanish founded St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565, some of the earliest generations included free and enslaved Black Catholics. She also spoke of historical events like the Stono Rebellion of 1739 started by "Congolese Catholics" trying to get to St. Augustine because they were promised to be freed there if they took up arms against the British. She mentioned people like a Black sister who in 1820 founded the nation's first Catholic school for Black girls in Washington, D.C., when she was 15.

"At every turn, African-descended people are represented in the earliest records of our Church," Williams said. A second myth, Williams said, is that "the Church was a reluctant and benevolent participant in modern slavery."

To the contrary, she claimed the Catholic Church was among the "largest corporate slaveholders in America." For example, Catholic laity and religious were among the largest enslavers in the nation, with the Jesuits having the most slaves in the Western Hemisphere in 1767.

When Pope Nicholas V's papal bull "Dum Diversas" in 1452 authorized Portugal to conquer Saracens, it allowed the country "to invade and enslave and put into perpetual servitude any non-Christian in Africa," and Pope Alexander VI in 1493 "extended much of these doctrines into the Americas," she said.

Even though Pope Gregory XVI condemned slavery in 1839, that came 337 years after slavery formally began, she noted.

Segregation and exclusion

According to Williams, a third myth is "the Catholic Church was at the forefront of desegregation in the

20th century." Although her research has uncovered "extraordinary" examples of Church officials taking "an unpopular stance for racial justice," Williams said "over and over" she has found that the Catholic Church was the "largest practitioner of segregation."

Another myth is "Catholic sisters were the moral compass of the Church in the fight for racial justice." In actuality, eight historically Black sisterhoods (three of which exist today) in the United States were established because of the prohibition of Black women in white women's religious communities, she said.

Although many orders denied Black women entrance, some in the 19th century allowed them to enter, but most of those Black women were "ambiguous," she said. Likewise, in most cases before World War II, Black women who entered white religious orders had to "pass as white" and often had to cut ties with their families who were "noticeably Black." Most decided not to join, Williams claimed.

Contemplative communities were the first to desegregate, and a nursing school in St. Louis was the first community in public ministry to admit visibly Black people, but they did so on a segregated basis. Williams maintains that "informal policies" against the admission of Black women into white religious communities in the United States still exist.

"For today, I want to leave you with these stories of faithfulness and these testimonies of courageous and tenacious faithfulness in hopes that we understand certainly that we can gather from Black Catholic history the courage, the strength, but also a blueprint for confronting the enduring sense of white supremacy and exclusion in our Church and our wider society," she said.

'Step out of the comfort zone'

During their breakout sessions, attendees concluded that hard conversations like this must continue even if it makes people uncomfortable.

"If we don't know our history, if we don't know the story of different peoples within our Church, we tend to minimize them and in doing so we tend to minimize what it means to truly be a universal community in Christ," Father John Grace, ICC pastor, told The Catholic Virginian.

Pope: Long homilies are 'a disaster'

Advises keeping homilies under 10 minutes



Pope Francis speaks to diocesan liturgy directors during an audience at the Vatican Jan. 20, 2023. The liturgists were attending a course at the Pontifical Institute of Liturgy in Rome. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

JUSTIN McLELLAN
OSV News

VATICAN CITY – Lengthy, abstract homilies are “a disaster,” so preaching should be limited to 10 minutes, Pope Francis said.

Speaking off the cuff to diocesan liturgical directors Jan. 20, the pope said homilies are not academic conferences. “I sometimes hear people say, ‘I went to this parish, and yes it was a good philosophy lesson, 40, 45 minutes,’” he said.

Pope Francis encouraged priests to keep their homilies to “no more than eight to 10 minutes” and always include in them “a thought, a feeling and an image,” so that “the people may bring

something home with them.”

Homilies are “sacramentals” to be “prepared in prayer” and “with an apostolic spirit,” he said.

But, in the Catholic Church, he said, “in general, the homilies are a disaster.”

The liturgical directors were in Rome to participate in a formation course on liturgy, “Living Liturgical Action Fully,” at the Pontifical Institute of Liturgy.

Pope Francis also warned against the liturgical master of ceremonies assuming too central a role during Mass. “The more hidden a master of ceremonies is, the better,” he said. “It is Christ that makes the heart vibrate, it is the meeting

with him that draws in the spirit.”

Beyond a “deep knowledge” of religious celebrations, the pope said that experts on liturgy must have a strong pastoral sense to improve a community’s liturgical life, and that religious celebrations must foster the “fruitful participation of the people of God” and not just of the clergy.

A pastoral approach to the liturgy allows religious celebrations to “lead the people to Christ, and Christ to the people,” which the pope said is the “principal objective” of liturgy and an essential principle of the Second Vatican Council.

“If we neglect this, we will have beautiful rituals, but without vigor, without flavor, without sense, because they do not touch the heart and the existence of the people of God,” said Pope Francis.

The pope encouraged them to spend time in parishes, observe liturgical celebrations and help pastors reflect on how they prepare liturgy with their communities.

If teachers of liturgy are “in the midst of the people, they will immediately understand and know how to accompany their brothers and sisters, how to suggest what is suitable and feasible to communities, and what the necessary steps are to rediscover the beauty of the liturgy and celebrating together,” he said.

The job of a diocesan liturgical director, said Pope Francis, is to offer parishes a liturgy “that is imitable, with adaptations that the community can take to grow in liturgical life.”

A liturgical director should not care about a parish’s liturgy only when the bishop comes to visit and then let the liturgy go back to how it was after he leaves, the pope said.

“To go to parishes and not say anything when faced with somewhat sloppy, neglected, poorly prepared liturgies means not helping the community, not accompanying them,” he added.

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Gun violence

Continued from Page 7

statistic which was why the names were read," said Abby Causey, the parish's director of evangelization and community technology. "Imagine if your loved one was suddenly taken. That's what we wanted to highlight."

At Holy Apostles, the vigil began in the commons and moved to the parish garden where lights were placed in memoriam of the lives lost. Parishioners also told personal stories as to how gun violence has affected them. A student spoke of the mental health toll lockdown drills at school are having on her and her friends.

Prayers for transformation

In his homily at the New Year's Eve liturgy, Father Kevin O' Brien, St. Therese pastor, led into the vigil that would follow the Mass by focusing on Pope Francis' message of peace this year. Father O'Brien emphasized at the liturgy and the vigil that "in the midst of dark out there, we need to not lose our faith, not get discouraged, but trust in this God who walks with us" and that we need to be "sentinels bringing light."

The vigil not only honored those killed by gun violence. A script read at all four vigils also prayed for the wounded, for affected family members and friends and for the shooter. It asked God "to strengthen the hands of the rescue workers, medical professionals and caregivers."

The scripted prayer expressed frustration that gun violence is escalating. One reader spoke of being "tired of the unwillingness to see this as

an important issue," "tired of those in power who work to prevent real change," and "tired of those who say that gun violence can't be reduced."

Another reader conveyed fury as he read, "I'm angry at the seeming powerlessness of our community to prevent this. I'm angry at the selfish financial interests who block change. I'm angry that these shootings happen at all."

The prayer asked for transformation, as a reader proclaimed, "Help me to see in these emotions our own desire for change. Help me see in these feelings your moving me to act. Help me see in these reactions your pushing me to do something."

And it further called for those attending to respond: "How can I help? How can I fight against gun violence? How can I urge my political leaders to enact change? How can I help people understand that this is an issue about life?"

Centered in prayer

At Holy Apostles, parishioners were given specific suggestions as to how they can help in the effort, such as working for the passage of "common sense gun legislation," learning more about what is going on in the community and donating blood "to help those impacted by the disaster," Stanley said.

The vigils were the result of an initiative by Virginia Catholics for Racial Justice which has been encouraging and supporting Catholic parishes to host vigils regarding gun violence, said Mark Hoggard, Immaculate Conception pastoral associate.

Organizers said vigils like these keep the is-

sue of gun violence in the forefront, and Immaculate Conception and Holy Apostles plan to have one every year. The other parishes are considering doing so.

"Our goal was really to increase awareness about gun violence in our community, to help people to understand the magnitude of the issue and of course to pray for the victims of gun violence, and our ultimate goal is to have zero shoes," Hoggard said.

Likewise, Father O'Brien said, "We need to pray to God for an end to this violence, and we need to take action because it's getting out of hand."

Jimmy Culpepper, a St. Therese parishioner who helped organize the vigil, agreed.

"Obviously what we're after is change. You shouldn't have to worry about getting shot going to the grocery store, going to school or going to the hospital or all the other places where these mass shootings occur," he said. "We need to do better individually. We need to do better in our communities. Part of that doing better is pushing for change, whether that's legislative change, whether that's change in budget."

Causey said the response to gun violence, which is "weighing so much on our society," must start with prayer because "prayer centers us," but prayer "should move us to action."

"We as a people of faith know what we are called to do. And we had our example by Jesus on the cross, that we know that the ultimate price to do anything right, to do anything what God wants, will ultimately require some sacrifice," she said.

Sinulog

Continued from Page 1

deemer. "This brings me back to my childhood and young adult life as my parents would often take the family to the Basilica Minore de Santo Niño to visit and celebrate Mass together," he recalled.

The celebration is meant to mimic the annual Sinulog Fiesta in honor of Santo Niño in Cebu, an island in the Philippines. The cultural and religious festival is held each year on the third Sunday of January in Cebu City, Philippines. It is considered the largest festival in the Philippines, marking the time in 1521 when explorer Ferdinand Magellan arrived and planted a cross in Cebu, bringing Catholicism to the Philippines.

Cradle of Christianity in the Philippines

Magellan, a Portuguese explorer, voyaged to the Philippine islands more than 500 years ago. Magellan's historian and clerk on the voyage, Antonio Pigafetta, chronicled the kindness of the Filipino people and the conversion of the king and queen of Cebu.

The queen, her husband, and 800 of their subjects were baptized. That's when the queen was presented the wooden image of Santo Niño, the Child Jesus, as a gift from the Spanish king. Santo Niño is dressed as a Spanish monarch, wearing a crown and rich vestments.

The image of Santo Niño has survived over the centuries, even being found largely unscathed in a burning hut in 1565. A church was erected at

the site where the image was found following that fire and named San Agustin Church. The church was renamed the Basilica Minore del Santo Niño following a Vatican decree 400 years later in 1965, during the fourth centennial celebration of the Christianization of the Philippines. The basilica remains home to the image, now venerated as the Divine Protector of the Philippines.

Bringing Filipino faith to America

The Filipino Catholic community in the Richmond area has been commemorating its own version of the Sinulog festival since 2010. For five years, the fiesta was held at an elementary school. In 2015, the celebration moved to Church of the Redeemer.

Bonjoc was one of the first organizers for the Richmond-area Sinulog fiesta. He is from the Cebu area of the Philippines called the Visayan Islands and came to the U.S. in 1997. "I grew up celebrating Sinulog. Santo Niño is very important to Catholics in the Visayan Islands and I wanted us to have our own celebration here in Richmond," he said.

Bonjoc helped start the Visayan American Association of Central Virginia. The group's main focus is keeping the key part of their faith and culture alive, which means organizing a Sinulog fiesta each year.

The event includes the traditional Sinulog dance, a prayer dance of petition, contrition, thanksgiving, and adoration. Bonjoc says the dance is meant to be an expression of their experience of God's constant love and care for them. The movements

are meant to mimic the current of Cebu's Pahina River. Part of Sinulog comes from the word "sulog," which means "current."

The fiesta also includes reenactments of Magellan arriving in Cebu in 1521, the presentation of the image of Santo Niño to Cebu's queen, and the native Sinulog dance.

Bonjoc says the event in Richmond each year brings him back to the very first Sinulog Festival that he attended in Cebu as a child. "Participating in the festivities and having a hand in planning it for the devotees of Santo Niño here in Richmond truly evoke a shared spiritual gladness," he said.

OPPORTUNITIES

The Catholic Diocese of Richmond Office of Finance in Richmond is seeking a full-time parish and school auditor. For full listing and how to apply, please visit <http://bit.ly/3VZIPyE>. For any questions please contact Kelly Shumate, HR Generalist/Recruiter at jobs@richmonddioocese.org.

The Catholic Hoos, a ministry of St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish in Charlottesville, is seeking an Associate Director of Campus Ministry. This full-time position requires residency in close proximity to Charlottesville. The responsibilities include working with the priest-chaplain, parish staff and student leaders to provide direction and guidance to the campus ministry. This includes development of themes for the semester/year, specific support for regular events, i.e., retreats, community events, catechesis, service opportunities, etc., and special events—periodic outreach efforts, large lectures, etc.) Collaborate with the priest-chaplain on the administrative duties of the campus ministry. This includes proposing/managing the budget, working as the liaison between students and staff members, organizations, and ministries associated with St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish, the University of Virginia and the Diocese of Richmond. Interested applicants should send a cover letter and résumé to Dominican Father Joseph-Anthony Kress, chaplain@catholichoos.org.

St. Mark Catholic Church, Virginia Beach, is seeking a Parish Secretary (26 hours per week) with Sunday work availability a must. The successful candidate should enjoy working with people and possess the ability to work collaboratively with parish staff, parishioners and positively greet and assist guests to the parish. Provides clerical and administrative support to the pastor and other staff members. Additionally, this position will maintain the parishioner database and prepare and submit the weekly bulletin for publishing, update Sacramental Records, and manage the parish calendar and scheduling of meeting spaces for the church building. Strong phone and computer skills, including Microsoft Office and MS Publisher, are required for this position. Familiarity with Parish Soft Database is a plus. A bachelor's degree is desired, however, significant work experience in a secretarial role will be considered in lieu of education. Interested candidates should send a résumé to Deacon Mike Johnson, Pastoral Associate, Catholic Church of St. Mark, 1505 Kempsville Road, Virginia Beach, VA 23464 or deacon_mike@stmark-parish.org.

Religious Education Coordinator for Children. The Cluster Parishes of Portsmouth and Chesapeake are seeking an engaging, enthusiastic

and disciplined person for the job of Religious Education Coordinator for Children. This position works directly with families and children, Pre-K through fifth grade and is responsible for sacramental preparations for first sacraments — first reconciliation and first Communion — and the RCIA for children as well as Vacation Bible School. The cluster contains four parishes, so organization, time management and the ability to multi-task, as well as inter-personal skills. Ability to speak Spanish is an asset, but not required. Applicant should be well versed in Microsoft Suite and willing to learn new programs. Please submit résumés to pastor@clusterparishes.com

St. Paul Catholic Church, Richmond, is seeking a part-time Faith Formation and Liturgy Coordinator. Applicant must be a practicing Catholic and possess a love for and knowledge for the faith, as well as a strong commitment to faith development of children and adults. Professional work ethic and excellent communication skills, written and oral, are essential. Bachelor's degree preferred of related field, or equivalent ministry experience required. Adult, children and/or youth ministry programming experience desired. To apply send résumé and diocesan application (<https://bit.ly/36ndEsX>) to Father James Begley, 909 Rennie Ave., Richmond, VA 23227 or email to churchoffice@saintpaulscc.com

The Catholic Diocese of Richmond Office of Finance is seeking a full-time finance project manager and auditor. This position is anticipated to last 18 months to support special projects. This position supports the Finance Office by providing monthly analysis of diocesan Catholic school financial statements, serving as financial analyst on parish and school specific projects and by performing parish and school internal audits on a cyclical basis as needed. This position will be an accounting resource and will serve as ParishSoft subject matter expert.

The finance project manager & auditor is a full-time position (35 hours per week) scheduled for 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday. Occasionally, extra hours may be required. In-state travel is required. Must maintain a good driving record. Hybrid remote telework is available after orientation period.

Interested candidates should provide a cover letter, resume and completed application (bit.ly/3GQ-sokh). For additional questions, please contact Kelly Shumate, HR generalist/recruiter at jobs@richmonddioocese.org.

The Catholic Diocese of Richmond is seeking a Bilingual Associate Director for the Office of Christian Formation. For full ad and how to apply, please visit <http://bit.ly/3HceCln>. For any questions please contact Kelly Shumate, HR Generalist/Recruiter at jobs@richmonddioocese.org.

SHORTTAKES

Archbishop Timothy Broglio, Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, and President of the USCCB, will preach on “Being Catholic in the Military” on Friday, Feb. 24, 7:45 p.m., at Memorial Hall, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington. A reception follows in the military museum. The event is part of a speaker's series in celebration of the 150th Anniversary of St. Patrick, Lexington. No reservations are required. For further information, call Kathleen Nowacki-Correia, DRE, 540-463-3533.

Annual Spaghetti Dinner, Friday, Feb. 17, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, 332 S. Main St., Amherst. The meal includes spaghetti and homemade sauce, salad, garlic bread, beverage and homemade dessert. Adults, \$10. Children under 12 years old, \$3. Dine-in or take-out. Call 434-946-2053 that day to order take-out meals or order at the door when buying tickets. Profits support local organizations and charities. Come join us for a wonderful meal — lunch, dinner or both!

Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, Norfolk, is having a Mardi Gras party on Saturday, Feb. 18, 6:15-8:30 p.m. We will have Cajun-style food, 50/50 and gift basket raffles, games and live entertainment by Steve Ambrose, from the Original Rhondels. Cost is \$15/person in advance (12 years old and under, free) and \$20 at the door. Wine/beer/mimosas cash bar. For information, visit: Blessed-sacrament.com or call 757-423-8305.

The Knights of Columbus Assembly #1505 will hold a Lenten fish dinner every Friday during Lent, from Feb. 24 until March 31. Doors open at 5 p.m. and dinner will be served until 7 p.m. at the Columbian Club, 1236 Prosperity Road, Virginia Beach. Dinner will include fried or baked flounder, French fries or rice pilaf, homemade coleslaw and hush puppies. Chicken nuggets and fries are available for the children, if desired. Cost is a donation of \$12 for those 13 and over, \$6 for youth 6-12, and free for those 5 and under. Coffee, iced tea, and hot tea provided. Beer and soda, as well as some delicious desserts, are available for a minimal extra donation. Carryout is also available for those that cannot eat-in. Please contact Joe Burns at snrubeoj@gmail.com for additional questions. This is our annual fundraiser.

St. Edward Knights of Columbus #6546 annual Lenten fish fry! Fri-

days — Feb. 24, March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31, 5-7 p.m., St. Edward Community Center, 2700 Dolfield Drive, North Chesterfield. Choice of catfish or salmon with hush puppies; baked potato or fries; salad or coleslaw and a drink! \$15/adult, \$8/children 5-12, free for children 4 and under. Questions? Please email stedknights@gmail.com.

“Mr. Blue,” an inspiring new Catholic play by Mary Kay Williams, will be produced by the St. Anselm Institute for Catholic Thought at UVA. It is based on Myles Connolly's novel in which a young man who has everything decides to live his faith dramatically in 1920s New York — providing a joyful antidote to a modern age of indifference. Staged reading with live jazz piano, directed by Kate Burke (UVA Theater). Join us Saturday, Feb. 25, 7 p.m., at St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish, Charlottesville. Free but limited tickets available at www.stanselmminstitute.org.

St. Gregory the Great, Virginia Beach, is hosting a Lenten Mission, Monday, Feb. 27 —Wednesday, March 1, in the main church. The mission will be at 7 p.m. with the rosary being prayed at 6:30 p.m. The presenter is Dominican Father Bill Garrott preaching on the theme: “Christ-Lock: Identity Theft No More!” The mission is appropriate for ages second grade and above. Admission is free, with a free-will offering being taken up each night. Questions? Please email Sister Emily Ann Faubion at SrEmily@stgregorysva.org.

The Catholic Woman's Club (CWC) invites you to join us for a “Books in Bloom” in commemoration of Women's History Month. Enjoy a meet-and-greet and book signing to celebrate local authors and enjoy a luncheon. Our guest speaker is Sharon Pajka, author of “Women Authors Buried in Virginia.” This event is a major fundraiser for the CWC that contributes to a number of local charities, i.e., Meals on Wheels, The Virginia Home, as well as providing annual scholarships to St. Gertrude High School. Thursday, March 23 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Dominion Country Club, 6000 Dominion Club Drive, Glen Allen, VA 23059. Cost of the luncheon is \$38 per person. To reserve your seat, write your check to the Catholic Woman's Club and mail to Carol Valentine, 4817 Coleman Road, Richmond, VA 23230. Your check is due by Saturday, March 18. Note: If you have food allergies or special needs, please note in memo field of your check. More information can be found at www.cwcrva.org.

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El Pontífice: La Palabra de Dios penetra como una espada para cambiarnos

El Santo Padre preside la Santa Misa del Domingo de la Palabra de Dios y recuerda que su Palabra es para todos, nos invita a la conversión y nos llama a la misión de ser pescadores de hombres y decir: “Hermano, hermana, Dios se ha acercado a ti, escúchale y en su Palabra encontrarás un don maravilloso”.

MIREIA BONILLA – CIUDAD DEL VATICANO

“Jesús abandona la vida tranquila y oculta de Nazaret y se traslada a Cafarnaúm, ciudad situada a orillas del mar de Galilea, lugar de paso, encrucijada de pueblos y culturas diferentes. La urgencia que le impulsa es el anuncio de la Palabra de Dios, que hay que llevar a todos” ha dicho el Papa Francisco durante su homilía pronunciada durante la Santa Misa del Domingo de la Palabra de Dios.

La Palabra de Dios es para todos

El Papa explica en primer lugar que, “la Palabra de Dios es para todos”, tal y como lo narra el Evangelio que nos presenta a Jesús siempre en movimiento, en camino hacia los demás y en ninguna ocasión de su vida pública nos da la idea de que sea un profesor estático, un doctor sentado en una cátedra; al contrario – dice – “lo vemos como un itinerante y peregrino, recorriendo pueblos y aldeas, encontrándose con rostros e historias” porque la Palabra de Dios “no está destinada sólo a los justos de Israel, sino a todos”.

De hecho, dice el Papa, “si la salvación está destinada a todos, incluso a los más alejados y perdidos, entonces el anuncio de la Palabra debe convertirse en la principal urgencia de la comunidad eclesial, como lo fue para Jesús”. En este sentido, Francisco advierte: “Que no nos suceda que profesemos a un Dios de corazón ancho y seamos una Iglesia de corazón estrecho; que prediquemos la salvación para todos y hagamos impracticable el camino para recibirla; que nos sepamos llamados a llevar el anuncio del Reino y descuidemos la Palabra, dispersándonos en tantas actividades secundarias”. En cambio, el Pontífice pide que “aprendamos de Jesús a poner la Palabra en el centro, a ensanchar nuestras fronteras, a abrirnos a las personas y a generar experiencias de encuentro con el Señor”.

La Palabra de Dios llama a la conversión

“Su Palabra nos sacude, nos inquieta, nos apremia al cambio, a la conversión; nos pone en crisis porque «es viva y eficaz, y más cortante que cualquier espada de doble filo”. Son estas las palabras con las que el Pontífice ha descrito la Palabra de Dios, insistiendo en que “como una espada la Palabra penetra en la vida, haciéndonos discernir los sentimientos y pensamientos del corazón, es decir, haciéndonos ver cuál es la luz del bien a la que hay que dar cabida y dónde en cambio se adensan las tinieblas de los vicios y



El Papa Francisco reza por una niña al final de una audiencia con miembros de la Rota Romana, un tribunal del Vaticano, Empleados de Rota y miembros de sus familias el 27 de enero de 2023. (Foto de CNS/Vatican Media)

pecados que hay que combatir”. De hecho, Francisco hace hincapié en que su Palabra, cuando entra en nosotros, “transforma nuestro corazón y nuestra mente y nos cambia”.

Si queremos cambiar la perspectiva de nuestra vida, pero no sabemos por dónde empezar, el Papa nos dice el secreto: “tomar conciencia de la presencia de Jesús y hacer lugar a su Palabra” o, en otras palabras: “poner tu vida bajo la Palabra de Dios”. “Este es el camino que nos mostró el Concilio – recuerda el Papa – en el que todos, incluso los pastores de la Iglesia, estamos bajo la autoridad de la Palabra de Dios. No bajo nuestros propios gustos, tendencias y preferencias – señala el Papa – sino bajo la única Palabra de Dios que nos moldea, nos convierte y nos pide estar unidos en la única Iglesia de Cristo”.

La Palabra de Dios hace anunciadores

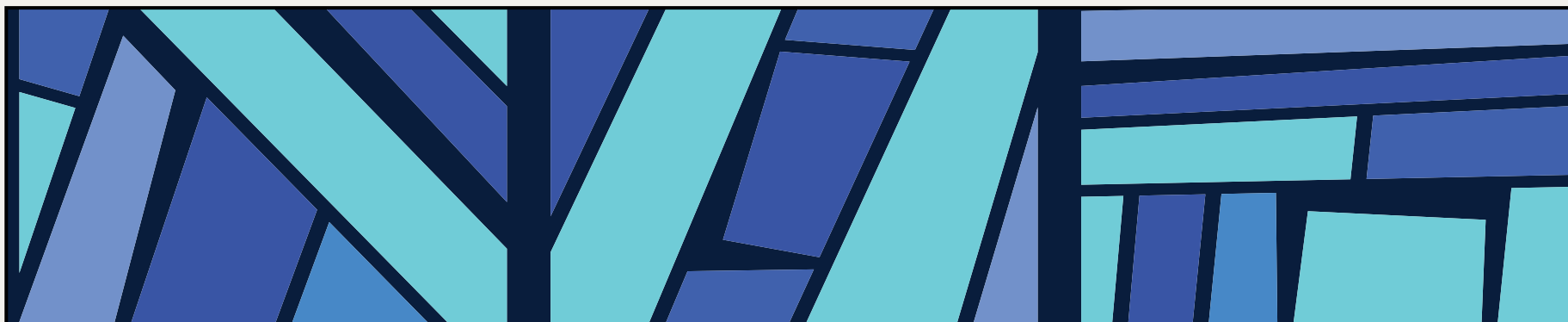
Por último, la Palabra de Dios, que se dirige a todos y llama a la conversión, “hace anunciadores”. Tal y como Jesús invitó con su Palabra a los hermanos pescadores Simón y Andrés a ser «pescadores de hombres» y salir al encuentro de sus hermanos y de proclamar la alegría del Evangelio, la Palabra de Dios a nosotros hoy “nos atrae hacia la “red” del amor del Padre” y “nos llama a anunciar su Palabra, a testimoniarla en las situaciones de cada día, a vivirla en la justicia y la caridad, a “darle carne” acariciando la carne de los que sufren”. “Y esto - apunta - no es proseli-

tismo, porque la que llama es la Palabra de Dios, no nuestra palabra”. Por tanto, nuestra misión – aclara el Papa – es: “convertirnos en buscadores del que está perdido, de quien se siente oprimido y desanimado, no para llevarlos a nosotros mismos, sino el consuelo de la Palabra, el anuncio impetuoso de Dios que transforma la vida, la alegría de saber que Él es Padre y se dirige a cada uno, la belleza de decir: “¡Hermano, hermana, Dios se ha hecho cercano a ti, escúchalo y en su Palabra encontrarás un don maravilloso!””.

Francisco agradece a cuantos trabajan para que la Palabra de Dios vuelva a estar en el centro

Francisco concluye diciendo simplemente “gracias” a quienes dedican sus esfuerzos para que la Palabra de Dios vuelva a estar en el centro, sea compartida y proclamada:

“Gracias a quienes la estudian y profundizan en su riqueza; gracias a los agentes pastorales y a todos los cristianos comprometidos en la escucha y difusión de la Palabra, especialmente a los lectores y catequistas, gracias a quienes han aceptado las numerosas invitaciones que he hecho para que lleven el Evangelio consigo a todas partes, para leerlo cada día. Y, por último, un agradecimiento especial a los diáconos y a los presbíteros: gracias, queridos hermanos, por no dejar que al Pueblo santo de Dios le falte el alimento de la Palabra”.



Haitian health clinic rises amid country's chaos

Twinning projects continue because 'the work in Haiti is never done'

TOM FAME

Special to The Catholic Virginian

The Second Sunday of Ordinary Time was anything but ordinary at the small, rural Haitian parish of Sacre Coeur, in the Petit Fond Valley of Haiti's Central Plateau. The church was full – shoulder to shoulder – with another large crowd seated on benches outside. Six priests presided at this Mass to help dedicate a new gift that gave great joy and hope to the people there: a new health center.

Since 1996, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Salem, has been twinned with this community, helping to build three schools, providing student lunches, and sending qualified young people to training schools. The businesses these young people now run in this valley include: a corn grinding mill, two agricultural projects and a welding/fabrication shop.

Health care is an obvious need, so together we decided to start with public health programs. We sent a young woman to a regional master's level public health school in Haiti. She now supervises 120 community health volunteers, with a second public health student finishing in three years. We started a prenatal clinic with a local nurse midwife, and an LPN-level nurse to supervise 50 or so rural traditional birth attendants.

These health workers needed a better place to operate, so eight years ago I engaged a Blacksburg architect, who had worked in Africa, to visit the community and design a clinic. Land was obtained, and work began slowly due to continually rising costs of material, political unrest, road blockages, and even the sudden death of the

work foreman.

Finally, this beautiful clinic building was complete, and it was time for everyone to thank God who had answered their prayers and had not abandoned them. After the two-hour Mass, a procession left the church and headed for the clinic. The cross-bearer led as a cloud of incense wafted over the six priests, followed by the choir singing praises to Mary, and a parade of the congregation.

The crowd gathered as Scripture was proclaimed telling of Jesus' healing miracles. Then the priests and choir went through the building, sprinkling holy water and incensing each room. Many dignitaries spoke, including the chief doctor of public health for the Central Plateau who promised to send us a young doctor once the clinic was stocked and ready.

Then, like the feeding of the 5,000, meals and drinks were supplied for everyone in attendance – a grand celebration with music lasting till early evening.

Twinning in Haiti is difficult – especially given the recent political unrest, but it's times like this when you feel God's love and joy. How through prayer and faith He provides. Although the work in Haiti is never done, remember – we are asked not to be successful, but just to love.

Relationships built on face-to-face encounters have been the heart and soul of our solidarity with the Haitian people. Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Salem, is one of 51 parishes in the Diocese of Richmond that walks in relationship and stands in solidarity – or



Father Petina Eulorge, pastor of Sacre Coeur Church, central Haiti, walks on a gravel road from the parish to the new health clinic for benediction on Jan. 15. The parish is located in a rugged area called Petit Fond Valley. (Photo/Tom Fame)



Our Lady of Perpetual Help Clinic, Haiti, was dedicated Jan. 15 with Mass and a celebration. The new health clinic is located in a rugged area with the mountain of Mon Michel shown here in the background. For years, the only way to travel was by mule or walking; there is now a primitive gravel road. Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Salem, has also helped build a school and chapel at the top of Mon Michel. (Photo/Tom Fame)

"twin" with the people of Haiti. The twinning relationship between the Diocese of Richmond and the Diocese of Hinche is in its 40th year! Over the years, so many lives, both in the Diocese of Richmond and the Diocese of Hinche, have been changed and

we are all drawn closer to Christ as a result of these encounters.

-Contact Diane Atkins, chair of the Diocese of Richmond Haiti Commission, at datkins@ChurchRedeemer.org if you are interested in learning more about the Haiti Twinning Ministry.

Pope Benedict XVI resigned due to insomnia

JUNNO AROCHO ESTEVES
OSV News

ROME – Pope Benedict XVI's biographer revealed that the late pontiff suffered for years from insomnia and exhaustion, which ultimately led him to resign from the papacy.

"Benedict XVI did not want to make a fuss during his lifetime about the intimate circumstances of his resignation," papal biographer Peter Seewald told German Catholic news agency, KNA.

According to Seewald, the late pontiff wrote a final letter to him Oct. 28, nine weeks before his death Dec. 31. In it, Pope Benedict told Seewald the "central motive" of his resignation was "the insomnia that has accompanied me uninterruptedly since World Youth Day in Cologne" in 2005.

In his letter to Seewald, Pope Benedict said he was prescribed "strong remedies" by his personal physician at the time due to his insomnia. Nevertheless, the medication had "reached their limits."

L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican news-

paper, said the pope made the decision to resign after his 2012 apostolic visit to Mexico and Cuba.

Several days after his resignation, a report from the Italian newspaper La Stampa said the pope hit his head during his visit to Mexico.

The late pope said that on his first night in Mexico in 2012, he had hit his head and found his handkerchief "totally soaked with blood."

"I must have bumped into something in the bathroom and fallen," the pope wrote in his letter.

Seewald told KNA that speculation arose regarding the circumstances surrounding the pope's resignation, including "rumors of blackmail and pressure of some kind exerted on him."

The papal biographer said he felt he had a duty to publish the decisive detail entrusted to him.

"I hope that this will finally put the conspiracy theories and erroneous speculations to rest," he said.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD



Fr. Štefan Migač

Chaplain-in-training: Fr. Štefan Migač, pastor of St. Patrick, Lexington, has received orders to begin training at the U.S. Army Chaplain School this month. Father Migač was commissioned as a chaplain to the U.S. Army Reserve on Thursday, Dec. 8, 2022, in Memorial Hall at Virginia Military Institute. Father Migač also serves as associate chaplain of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta Hospitaller Region, Richmond.



David Williams

Scientifically speaking: Peninsula Catholic High School, Newport News, is among the 800 schools nationally that has been awarded the College Board's AP Computer Science Female Diversity Award for expanding women's access to AP Computer Science Principles (CSP). David Williams is chairperson of the school's science department.