

Extraordinary Celebrations, Extraordinary Growth!

Ideas for Independent & Old Catholic Communities
during the Year of Matthew 2020

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Preface

Independent Catholicism in the English-speaking world is a mixed salad, with no organizing center and with myriad personalities celebrating the Church's sacraments in myriad ways. Despite a lack of formal relationship with the Union of Utrecht of the Old Catholic Churches, some Independent Catholic clergy refer to themselves as "Old Catholic," and many celebrate the eucharist with few, if any, congregants. Many count on few resources and little support from the larger movements of which some clergy are part. None of this contributes to the upbuilding of the Body of Christ or to Saint Paul's vision that we all might be "one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

Together, these factors contributed to the birth of the present work, which is the effort of a small group of clergy to lift their eyes from their own local community in an attempt to support their sisters and brothers in ministry throughout the English-speaking world. It is their earnest hope that, through the sharing of their experiences at their parish community, they might help to "lift all boats" within Independent and "Old" Catholicism.

Holy Family Catholic Church in Austin, Texas brands itself as "Loving. Inclusive. Catholic. Doing It Jesus' Way!" Birthed in 2012, the bilingual English/Spanish community attempts to embody the best of the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, Holy Family regularly attracts 200 to 300 congregants to its three Sunday liturgies. Fortunately, Holy Family enjoyed a few advantages from the start.

The parish's pastor, **Father Jayme Mathias**, was schooled in the Roman Catholic seminary system, earned seven degrees from Roman Catholic institutions, and pastored what he grew to be Austin's largest Spanish-language congregation in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Austin. After "seeing the light" in 2011, he was convinced by a local attorney to bring Independent Catholicism to Central Texas.

The parish's rock-solid parochial vicar, **Father Roy Gomez**, was a pillar in the Roman church, where he ministered as a lay person for nearly 20 years before working with Father Jayme to co-found Holy Family in 2012. Having participated in the parish's theological institute for three years, he was ordained to the presbyterate in 2015.

The parish's first associate pastor, **Father Cleofas María Cruz**, was a deacon in the Roman church for over 20 years before ordination to the presbyterate in the Independent Catholic tradition. Father Cleofas María and his wife, Dulce María, then birthed various missionary endeavors.

And two years after the parish's founding, the community was blessed with the addition of **Father Libardo Rocha**, who brings to the community a solid theological formation from 20 years of pastoral

ministry in Rome and his service as a professor of dogmatic theology at a pontifical university.

As will be obvious in this work, the clergy at Holy Family Catholic Church are firmly rooted in the western liturgical traditions of the Church. Like all members of the Body of Christ, they possess varying gifts (Rom 12:6), and, because there are few Independent and “Old” Catholic communities in the English-speaking world that are the size of Holy Family, they have prepared this *ordo* for clergy and lay leaders who shepherd eucharistic communities at more primitive phases of their life cycles—with the hope that those communities might achieve the next phase of their growth in 2020!

Five Stages of Growth for Independent Catholic Communities

In 2017, Father Jayme created a theoretical framework to describe five stages of growth for eucharistic communities in the Independent Catholic tradition:

- **Stage 0 – I’m alone!** As the Pareto Principle suggests, a very large percentage of laity in the Independent Catholic world are served by a very small number of clergy—which means that many clergy in the Independent Catholic tradition are largely shepherds with few, if any, sheep. Stage 0 is unheard of in the Roman church: If you’re ordained in the Roman church, you’ve likely received a rather-solid formation, and you’re likely given a flock with which you can share your gifts. The Independent Catholic tradition, in contrast, has few barriers to the sacraments of the Church, such that individuals can be ordained to the Church’s ministries without possessing the requisite knowledge and skills for shepherding others. If you’re an Independent Catholic deacon, priest or bishop, and you don’t regularly celebrate the eucharist with others, it’s likely the case that you haven’t yet arrived at the first stage of Independent Catholic eucharistic communities. You have a title, but you don’t have a flock. You’re a shepherd without sheep!
- **Stage 1 – I want to...!** If you more-or-less regularly celebrate the eucharist with a very small group of people—most likely in your home or apartment—you’ve made it to Stage 1 of an Independent Catholic eucharistic community! If you’re not able to be present for whatever reason, though, there is no liturgy. You have a dream. You also have the seeds for a eucharistic community: a minister and some persons to whom s/he might minister. Unfortunately, though, likely no one supports you or your ministry in any way that even begins to outweigh the opportunity costs that you incur

as a result of the sharing of your time, talent and resources. You have the desire to grow a community, but you haven't yet gathered the necessary people or resources to realize the dream!

- **Stage 2 – We want to...!** You regularly celebrate the eucharist with a group of people who find your ministry so valuable that they provide you a regular stipend—even if only small—from the resources that rightly belong to the community. That's right: Your dream is now shared by others, they are taking ownership of it, and you're providing something of value to them, such that they return to celebrate with you and to be nourished by your words and actions and by the community you are assembling. You're not in this for the money, but, fortunately, those who join you find their time together to be so valuable that they're willing to share their time & talent—but also their resources—to make this opportunity possible. The seed of your dream is shared, and it's growing!
- **Stage 3 – We are...!** You and your eucharistic community have worked to form an entity that is recognized by others. Of course, you likely possessed a name for your community from the start, but now you have recognition of your organization by government officials—likely from your state's Secretary of State, and from the United States Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3). Congratulations: You are a recognized church! It's not just about you and your ministry anymore: Like any non-profit, your community is governed by a board of at least three people who are legally responsible for the organization, and, presuming you and a family member are *not* serving together on that board, your nascent organization is now largely out of your hands. You've made a leap of faith! The vision of the Second Vatican Council is now being realized, and the people of God are now sharing in the leadership and/or governance of your ministry!
- **Stage 4 – We will...!** You and your eucharistic community have in place the necessary structures and systems that you might be considered a parish community in the Roman tradition. You have systems for tracking all sacraments. You record all stewardship, and you share annual giving statements. By now, others have likely shared the dream to the extent that they are now involved in the ordained ministries of the community, and, with more “cooks in the kitchen,” you've likely passed through a few storms. The good news: Your community is becoming more and more like “fire-tried gold” (1Pet. 1:7)! You're not yet ready for conversations on legacy, but you have achieved significant progress toward one day becoming a viable, sustainable faith community!

- **Stage 5 - We have, and we still will...!** Your eucharistic community has pulled together enough resources over time that it now owns substantial assets, likely totaling more than \$100,000. You also have in place the necessary structures to ensure that the community will outlive you. The foundation on which you've built your community more closely resembles rock than sand (Mt. 7:24-27), and it's now more likely that your community will withstand the winds of time. You and your community are truly extraordinary: You've reached the level of Stephen Covey's "Eighth Habit": You're living, loving, and, yes, leaving a legacy!

Commit yourself now to making 2020 the year in which you take your eucharistic community to the next phase of its growth—or in which you take significant steps in that direction. Together, let's build and strengthen the Independent and "Old" Catholic movements in 2020!

The Benefits of Growth in Ministry

Imagine for a moment the benefits that might accrue from your efforts to assist in the great commission of building Independent and "Old" Catholicism in our world:

- You will be assisting a greater number of people to grow in their relationship with God and others!
- You will more greatly contribute to the knowledge base of what works—and what doesn't work—for eucharistic communities in the Independent and "Old" Catholic traditions!
- You will add to the credibility of the Independent and "Old" Catholic movements, which for too long have been accused of containing so many bishops and priests who enjoy "dressing up" and "playing church" but who are, in far too many places, sheepless shepherds!
- You will contribute in a meaningful way to the upbuilding of the power and influence of the tremendous ideals of Independent and "Old" Catholicism in our world! As the Roman church well knows, there are two principal sources of power and influence in this world: organizing people and organizing resources. Independent and "Old" Catholicism will forever be fringe movements with little, if any, people and resources, unless we commit ourselves to gathering together the necessary people and resources to support not only our local ministries, but also the larger movements of which we're part!

The “Miracle” of Multiplication

The growth of our local communities and of the Independent Catholic movement will not happen overnight, nor will it occur through some inexplicable miracle of multiplication (Mt. 14:13-21, Mk. 6:30-44, Lk. 9:10-17, Jn. 6:1-14). Jesus of Nazareth didn’t gather to himself a crowd of thousands on his first day of ministry. Instead, he nourished people in small interactions over time, causing them to return to him for continued nourishment – and sending them forth with the desire to spread word of him to their family members and friends. Perhaps the true miracle of multiplication in Jesus’ time wasn’t any purported duplication of loaves and fish; perhaps the true miracle was the multiplication in the wilderness of so many mouths to feed!

What will *you* do in 2020 to take a few steps toward nourishing more and more hearts, minds and souls (Mt. 22:37)? What will you do in 2020 to increase your knowledge and skills, so as to touch more hearts, open more eyes, and enlighten more minds? What will you do to bring together more and more people and to nourish them in such a way that they hunger for more and that they leave eager to tell others about you and the community you’re building?

The prayer of clergy at Holy Family is that 2020 might be a real turning point for the Independent and “Old” Catholic movements throughout the world—due to the efforts of persons like *you*! A popular adage suggests: “If you think you’re a leader, but no one is following you, you’re simply taking a walk!” You are a minister of God. You are called to lead, sanctify and teach the People of God. You are *not* called to wander alone. You are *not* called to remain stagnant. The Matthean Jesus suggests that “Where two or three gather in my name, I am there” (Mt 18:20). The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed this with its abolition of the seeming contradiction of “private Masses.” A loaf of bread and a cup of wine cannot be shared...alone! **So, what exactly will *you* do during the coming weeks and months—indeed, what will you do *today*—to draw together and nourish the People of God in a way that contributes to the great miracle of multiplication?**

The “Creation of Experience”

The clergy and lay leaders of Holy Family Catholic Church in Austin, Texas regularly reflect on their “creation of experience” – something they take very seriously. In 2016, after four years of ministry and growth, the community had largely plateaued, and the parish’s clergy tried an experiment: For four weekends, Father Roy and Father Cleofas María celebrated the parish’s Sunday Masses, while Father Jayme and Father

Libardo visited and learned from the largest megachurches in Texas. What Father Jayme and Father Libardo discovered is hardly surprising: Much of the success of the large communities they visited was due to their “creation of experience.” The pastors of megachurches know that nothing is more important than the “experience” they share with those who come to them! It’s the same reason that concerts and sports games easily attract thousands upon thousands of people, while relatively few people seem interested in attending the liturgies that we, as Independent and “Old” Catholic clergy, provide. Many factors contribute to a church’s “creation of experience”: warm hospitality, welcoming personalities, fine music, great preaching, and, perhaps most importantly, a sense of connection and community by those in attendance.

Three years later, the clergy and lay leaders of Holy Family continue to reflect on their “creation of experience” through the analysis of a variety of quantitative and qualitative data, including social media data (e.g., views, likes, comments and shares) and their regular reflection on “what worked” and “what didn’t work” in their liturgies and events. The relationships built at Holy Family are of prime importance, and clergy and lay leaders are always presenting opportunities for people to get to know and interact with one another. Preaching is also important. Because 65% of people are visual learners, Holy Family clergy focus on making homilies:

- visual (as often as possible with an “object lesson” or visual),
- brief (i.e., a maximum of seven minutes),
- participatory (to keep listeners engaged), and
- engaging (so as to continually “spike” the energy of listeners).

They also assist liturgical ministers to improve their ministries through periodic reviews of details on which ministers might focus.

In 2018, parish clergy began gathering with a small group of lay leaders on a regular basis to reflect on the parish’s creation of experience. The result was a regularly-updated list titled “Things to Look Forward to at Holy Family.” The predecessor of this work, that list was essentially an annual planning calendar, allowing clergy and lay leaders to see “down the road” and to view the entire liturgical year, rather than merely peer “over the hood” at the next Sunday liturgy.

Creating Your Own “Box of Rocks”

When Holy Family clergy and lay leaders create their annual planning calendar—their list of “Things to Look Forward to at Holy Family”—they begin by listing the “big rocks,” the annual celebrations and events that they host as a parish community. These are largely determined by the Church’s liturgical calendar and by parish traditions. Those “big rocks” are then supplemented with the “medium rocks” of the regular monthly events of the parish community. Finally, clergy and lay leaders think about the “little rocks” of those special touches that make each Sunday extraordinary.

As you seek to create your own “box of rocks,” please feel free to steal any ideas from Holy Family—and from others who are enjoying success in gathering together the People of God. By all means, see what works for your own community, and what doesn’t. Re-use and continually improve what works, and dump what doesn’t.

The “Big Rocks”: Planning each Extraordinary Year!

If you’ve ministered for at least a year, you likely understand the flow of the Church year. For a larger vision of ministry within your community, attempt to plan for the entire year at a time. Note the Church’s seasons and the themes of the principal gospel of the year. Think about the annual events that will be important for your community. Be sure to celebrate your community’s anniversary, as well as the birthdays and anniversaries of clergy—including your bishop(s)—and lay leaders. If your jurisdiction has a necrology, consider adding to your calendar the dates of the passing of those in your necrology, so that you can remember them and pray for them on those days. Plan annual fundraisers and appeals and community-building opportunities that will become traditions. Think through any sacraments that you’ll celebrate only on an annual or semi-annual basis. Consider how you’ll train and recognize liturgical ministers over the course of a year. These are the “big rocks” that don’t change much from year to year.

The “Medium Rocks”: Planning each Extraordinary Month!

Every community has rhythms. At Holy Family, Mass attendance is typically largest on the first Sunday of each month, with attendance tapering on subsequent Sundays—and the difference in attendance between the first and the last Sundays of the month is sometimes staggering! As a result, clergy and lay leaders created a monthly rhythm to address this: On the first Sunday of the month, typically around the time that people on fixed incomes receive their monthly checks—and when attendance is highest—they host their monthly Building Fund

collection. On the fourth Sunday of the month, when attendance is otherwise the lowest, they host communal celebrations of the sacraments of Baptism & Eucharist for those wishing to be baptized or receive their “first communion” during regular Sunday Masses; this attracts to Mass the family members and friends of those receiving sacraments. To lift attendance on the third Sunday of each month, they regularly celebrate the Church’s sacrament of Anointing, for the sake of those who are searching for healing and health in various dimensions of their lives. Then, to boost attendance on the second Sunday, they have a monthly “Kindles for Kids” raffle at each Mass: When Amazon Prime Day rolls around each summer, the parish purchases a year’s supply of tablets for some \$20 each and then raffles them off throughout the year with free tickets for all children under the age of 18! The parish has a penchant for supporting various charities, so it programs a bimonthly social ministry collection into its annual calendar. The English Mass also provides a monthly “View from the Pew”—a regular opportunity to hear the perspectives of laity. Holy Family possesses a regular schedule of post-Mass events, including a monthly potluck after the Spanish Mass, and a weekly parish breakfast or an offering of coffee and sweet bread between its English Masses. All of these monthly opportunities are placed in the parish’s calendar, as are any weekly opportunities, like bible studies, rosaries, and the parish’s theological institute and *escuela de espiritualidad* [school of spirituality].

The “Small Rocks”: Planning each Extraordinary Week!

Like the ancient Church, which gathered for its weekly Sunday sunrise service, the liturgical calendar at Holy Family revolves around its weekly celebration of the Lord’s resurrection on Sunday morning. Holy Family doesn’t celebrate daily Masses, nor has it seen enough interest in the past for a vigil Mass on Saturday evening. Most folks at Holy Family don’t attend parish programs during the week, so the parish has a single hour on Sunday for the experience it wishes to create and share. Thus, to make each Sunday extraordinary, Holy Family often incorporates elements from the Church’s calendar, either from the week before or the week after the Sunday, saying, for instance, “This week, the Church celebrated...” or “This week, the Church celebrates....”

Create your own schedule of extraordinary Sundays! Consider introducing ways to help people to better know one another, like a time to welcome newcomers, a time for people to share the reasons for their gratitude to God (typically birthdays, anniversaries, and family moments), and a moment for people to be able to get to know one another before your sacrament of unity.

And, if Maslow's Hierarchy is correct, the people to whom you minister have physical needs, too! If you gather people to pray, why not include a time of community-building with food and/or drink? Youth ministers will tell you that the secret of any successful youth ministry includes "friends, food and fun." Similarly, Spanish-speaking cultures suggest that successful churches provide *misa, mesa y musa* (Mass, food and entertainment). Inject the same three ingredients into your weekly experience!

In 2017, Reverend Patrice Cheasty-Miller shared with our Holy Family clergy an idea that has proven golden: All our Masses contain a post-communion opportunity where we invite the children to come forward and choose a gift from our "Children's Treasure Chest"! We invite congregants to bring small, inexpensive toys to fill the chest, and children wait with excitement to hear the word "kids!" after communion.

Finally, recognizing that Independent Catholics are indeed "extraordinary Catholics," find some way—even if small—to make each gathering of your community...extra-ordinary! This is the essential question: Why should people wake up on any given Sunday morning, or why should they take time from any given evening, to travel all the way to you and your community, when they could just as easily go to any church *en route*? Sprinkle your calendar with generous doses of "reasons" for them to celebrate with you and your community—and announce these opportunities a few weeks in advance, so that people will know the things that will be happening in your community—things that they likely wouldn't find at any other Catholic community in town! And *voilà*, now you and your community are unique, and you're nourishing God's people in incredible, new ways!

And It Goes Without Saying...

- Holy Family Catholic Church is firmly rooted in Western traditions of the Church, with clergy who were largely formed by the seminary system of the Roman church. Admittedly, this resource will be of less utility to those of Eastern traditions.
- Anything you do as part of your own "creation of experience" is futile if no one shows up to worship with you—so, spread word of what your community is doing! Try a variety of means: social media, text messages, eblasts, etc. Remember that general announcements at Mass are far less effective than personal invitations. Better yet, get others spreading word of your efforts out of the excitement that they share for what's happening in your ministry!

- As the French say, “gift implies return gift.” If a person shares his/her time to join you for Mass, let him/her know how grateful you are. If people show support of your efforts, call them or send handwritten notes or text messages; let them know of your gratitude and of your prayers for them, their families, and their intentions.
- Constantly “sharpen the saw”! Read all you can, in order to improve your ministry and liturgies. Record and watch your Masses and homilies, so that you can see and hear what others see and hear when they listen to you. Be critical of yourself, and imagine what it’s really like to watch and listen to yourself! Do you hear your own speech disfluencies? Do you see the awkward moments that they see? Do you convey low energy? With a bit of awareness, all these can be remedied!
- Finally, what are you doing to equip and empower others to do what you do—particularly in those moments when you’re not able to personally attend to the needs of God’s people? Think about your legacy, and build a community and a ministry that will outlive you!

Things to Look Forward to in 2020!

Here are some ideas for generating interest in and enthusiasm for your ministry. Feel free to steal any of these ideas—and to improve on them. And, by all means, feel free to shift ideas that occur during the week to the Sunday before or after that day: On Sunday, simply say “This week, the Church celebrated...” or “This week, the Church celebrates...” Don’t even think of attempting everything contained in this work, and don’t burden your liturgies with too much “stuff.” Instead, look for a thing or two that will make each liturgy you celebrate truly extraordinary!

Upon implementing some of these ideas, please reach out to us through social media (www.facebook.com/HolyFamilyACC), email (pastor@HolyFamilyACC.org), and/or voice or text (512.826.0280), to let us know of your experiences and/or if we can be of assistance to you as you seek to nourish God’s people and bring an ever-increasing number of hearts, minds and souls closer to God and closer to one another!

Sunday, December 1, 2019
FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
(blue or violet)

It's the **Year of Matthew** (Year A): Be sure to provide some catechesis and/or an overview of this preeminent gospel that attempts to paint the Matthean Jesus as the new Moses. Be sure to situate this gospel as being written to a Jewish-Christian community in 80-85 A.D., after the Jerusalem Temple had been destroyed, when Christians were under attack from all sides: by Jews, Romans, and even other Christians!

Advent has arrived! Be sure to share a brief lesson on this **season of joyful hope** – and to speak of **Christ's three comings**: in flesh 2,000 years ago, at the end of time, and in the liturgy your community celebrates!

Now that Thanksgiving is over, some radio stations are already playing Christmas music 24/7. Challenge congregants to **respect the integrity of the Advent season** and to **"fast" from Christmas music and decorations until December 24**. For more ideas on how congregants might honor the Advent season, visit <https://adventconspiracy.org/>!

Think about your worship environment!

- The beginning of a new liturgical year might be an ideal time to try out a **new placement for your liturgical furniture**.
- In place of the penitential color of violet (*violaceus*), **consider using blue this year** – a beautiful winter color that calls to mind Mary during these weeks leading up to the birth of her son! If you stick with violet, consider a shade that's toward the blue end of the spectrum, reminiscent of the night sky before the dawn, and use complementary violets that vary, like the shades of the sky.
- Be sure to steam or iron your **Advent vestments** – and to coordinate the color of your vestments with any other touches of blue or violet in your worship space!
- Plan how you might tie the **Advent décor** of your worship environment to the décor of the Christmas season, so as to lessen the load of Christmas decorating on December 24 and to provide a smoother transition from one season to the other – or, even better, to show a more seamless joining of the Advent and Christmas seasons! Consider pulling out the **garland and Christmas trees** and decorating them with touches of your Advent color, which can be replaced with touches of Christmas color on December 24.

- Bring a touch of **Advent color and/or accents** to other places outside your worship space: to outdoor areas, the entrance into your worship space, your Blessed Sacrament chapel, your parish hall and/or classrooms, etc. Try an outdoor banner and/or place an evergreen wreath on the front door!
- Dust off your **Advent wreath**, or create a new arrangement this year—perhaps even a “deconstructed wreath” consisting of four candles in four places. If you have a smaller space and are trying for a more contemporary look, try adding a floating candle to a large glass bowl of water on each Sunday of Advent. Looking for a vintage look? Try suspending a wagon wheel from the ceiling: Early American pioneers hung their wagon wheels indoors during the winter (to keep them from warping), and they decorated them with evergreens and lights to ward off the winter darkness. Instead of colored candles, consider colored glass globes that can be placed over candles; the globes can be taken off at Christmas to expose white candles. Be sure the Advent wreath is a focal point during prayer—but that it doesn’t overshadow or overpower the primary liturgical objects of the altar and ambo. Consider placing it in the spot where you’ll have your creche on Christmas (to make the connection of Christ coming as the Light of the world), or consider keeping the wreath throughout the Christmas season, but with white candles and white/gold ribbon. Always consider placing the Advent wreath and/or creche in a place where people can be drawn into prayer—a “shrine” within your worship space—perhaps in a place where parents and grandparents can conveniently share a lesson with their children or grandchildren.
- Do you have any large icons of **St. John the Baptist** and/or of the **Visitation of Mary**? Think of incorporating them into the worship environment when the scriptures speak of them.
- Consider whether you’ll keep the nativity scene out of the worship space until Christmas (which many liturgists recommend), or whether you’ll **heighten the anticipation with have a gradual addition of figures to the creche** over the four weeks of Advent. Remember: when you place the nativity scene in your worship space, **the manger is left empty until Christmas!**

Need help decorating your worship space? Don’t be bashful: **Ask for volunteers!** Take leadership. Assign tasks and responsibilities. Play appropriate Advent music while you decorate. Then show your

gratitude with hot chocolate and cookies, or some other appropriate winter food and drink!

The Advent wreath is an important liturgical symbol. **Bless your Advent wreath** on this first Sunday of Advent. **Involve a parish family by inviting them to carry the first lighted, violet candle in procession, or to light it at the appropriate moment.** Be sure to speak of the symbolism of the increasing light that we'll see during these four Sundays! Send congregants home with a prayer of blessing for their own Advent wreaths and ideas of how they might pray as a family during this season—perhaps before a daily family meal!

In some places, the **Jesse Tree** is a popular tradition that features symbols from the story of our salvation. Consider a Jesse Tree this year, or encourage families to create their own Jesse trees and/or Advent calendars at home!

Thinking of helping those in need at a time when much of the world is focused on consumerism? Create a **“giving tree”** with tags listing gift items that might be used by the homeless or desired by families and/or senior adults in need, and/or have a coat drive and invite families to donate gently-used coats, hats, gloves, boots and blankets. A local homeless shelter will surely welcome your generosity!

Consider **restrained music** during Advent, building to a crescendo with splendid music during the Christmas season!

To honor the penitential nature of Advent, consider singing the **Penitential Rite** and or using **Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation**. Think, too, of how you might better incorporate **moments of silence** into the liturgies of these dark, winter days—perhaps with longer pauses after the proclamations of scripture and/or after reception of the eucharist.

Remember: **The Gloria is not sung during the Advent season!**

Be mindful of the **exclusive language** in today's psalm: Is there any reason a person should proclaim God's Word by saying anything less inclusive than, “Because of my *family* and friends”?

The thread in today's scriptures: Proto-Isaiah and the psalmist envisioned salvation as a joyous, light-filled day (Ps. 122:1, Is. 2:5) of peace and prosperity (Is. 2:4, Ps. 122:6-8), when all nations would be gathered into the Lord's house (Is. 2:2, Ps. 122:1). The *Quelle* Jesus (common to Matthew & Luke) warns us to be prepared for the parousia (Mt. 24:42-44, Lk. 12:35-40), since that event will determine who is “taken” to the Lord's house or to the mountain of the Lord, and who is

“left” (Mt. 24:40-41). Noting the nearness of salvation (Rom. 13:11), Paul encourages us to “throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:13), so that we, too, might share in that joyous day!

Holy humor: Today we light our Advent wreath! Some churches say that each candle is symbolic. I recall the story of one pastor, who was asking the children in [his/her] community what each candle of the Advent wreath stands for. [S/he] said, “Who can tell me what the four candles of the Advent wreath represent?” Since there was a small banner hanging from each candle, one little boy raised his hand and eagerly read three of the four banners: “Love, joy, peace, and...” Seeing the boy stumble, the pastor asked, “Love, joy, peace and...what?” Love, joy, peace and...what? And you could hear the little boy’s mother utter under her breath: “Love, joy, peace and quiet!” [Then segue to the progressively-increasing light of the Advent wreath and/or to the Advent theme of peace in today’s scriptures.]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Point to the light of the first candle of the Advent wreath! The candles and lights in our churches are symbols of the light of Christ. Are we putting on the “armor of light” (Rom. 13:13), walking in the light of the Lord (Is. 2:5), and sharing the light of Christ, so as to bring increased light to this world?

For the intellectually-curious, consider sharing a lesson on the symbolism of the Advent wreath, its historical roots in sixteenth-century Germany, and the popular tradition of lighting the wreath before family meals in the “domestic church!”

It’s Advent: Encourage congregants to find a way to **make this Advent special!** Here are a few ideas:

- Challenge congregants to commit themselves to a **special act of charity** during this Advent season.
- Invite them to consider the Advent tradition of choosing a **secret Christkindl** (“Christ Child”), a person for whom they might pray and/or secretly perform small acts of kindness during this Advent season!
- Host an activity in which families can create **Advent wreaths** and/or invite families to begin this season with **an empty manger in the home into which each member of the family can place a piece of straw for every good work performed in honor of the Baby Jesus** during these four weeks, so as to welcome the Christ Child at Christmas with a padded crib. Depending on the size of

your congregation, consider doing this activity as a community in or outside of your worship space.

- Looking for other activities for children? Many children write letters to Santa during these weeks; encourage them to observe the Austrian tradition exercised by the von Trapp children of writing their own “*Christkindl Brief*,” a letter to the Baby Jesus that’s placed on the window sill for their Guardian Angel to read to the Christ Child!

The First Sunday of Advent was traditionally known as “**Stir-up Sunday**,” due to the fact that the collect (or opening prayer) spoke of the stirring up of God’s might. Many traditional Advent prayers contain the words: “Stir up your might, we beg you, and come....” Consider incorporating these words into your prayer today, and, after Mass, share a dessert – like a plum pudding – that congregants can help to “stir up”!

Looking for a **community building event** this holiday season? Announce a parish trip to a local holiday light display and/or live nativity during the coming weeks, or host a party in which parish families can create Advent wreaths and/or holiday wreaths for their homes!

Social media is a great way to evangelize: Be sure to take advantage of social media for spreading word of the themes of this season! Think of creative ways to engage your congregants, perhaps through hashtags (#AdventLight #AdventHope #AdventJoy) and/or by inviting congregants to post photos and/or videos from their day to a “**digital Advent calendar**” of daily Advent themes!

On **December 2**, we remember the passing in 1719 of **Pasquier Quesnel**, the French theologian who never shied away from scholarly controversy. Banished from Paris for his Jansenist sympathies, he penned a devotional commentary on the New Testament. At least 101 sentences of this commentary were condemned by the papal bull *Unigenitus*, the Roman church’s attempt to limit theological views to those espoused by the Jesuits of the time. In Quesnel’s memory, pray for all who continue to write and publish in an attempt to foster the devotion of others – and for all who are persecuted by the people they love!

On **December 2**, we remember the passing in 2007 of **Thomas Forsyth “T.F.” Torrance**, the Scottish Protestant theologian who was a pioneer in the study of science and theology and who edited the translations of hundreds of theological writings into English, including Karl Barth’s six-million-word *Church Dogmatics*. Torrance was instrumental in drafting a joint statement on the doctrine of the Trinity for an historical agreement between the Reformed and Eastern Orthodox churches. In his memory,

meditate on how generously you are sharing the gifts God has given you, for the upbuilding of God's kingdom in this world!

On **December 3**, the Church celebrates **St. Francis Xavier**, the Jesuit ordained with St. Ignatius of Loyola and later sent to evangelize India. Often portrayed as a young, bearded Jesuit with a torch or flaming heart, he's the patron saint of navigators, missionaries, foreign missions and parish missions. If your community has any connection to the Jesuits and/or a desire to support the Church's missions, pray the Litany of St. Francis Xavier, provide a brief lesson and/or a call to action based on this "spiritual soldier," and/or meditate on the words of scripture shared with him by St. Ignatius: "What does it profit you to gain the whole world if you lose your soul?" (Mk. 8:36, Mt. 16:26)

On **December 4**, the Church celebrates **St. John of Damascus**, the first Christian Aristotelian, the last Greek Father, and the "Doctor of Christian Art." John was known for transmitting the teachings of the Greek Fathers and defending the veneration of images. In his memory, read of the iconoclasm that sprang up as a result of Christianity's interaction with Islam, host a religious art appreciation party, and/or reflect on the visual sacramentals of our Catholic tradition, which include statues, paintings and other images!

On **December 5**, the Church celebrates **St. Sabbas**, the fifth-century abbot, "Star of the Desert" and "Patriarch of Monks" who defended the faith at the Council of Chalcedon. Venerated by the Eastern Church, he's depicted as an abbot with an apple, since he overcame the temptation to eat an apple outside of prescribed meal times, and he vowed never to eat apples again. In Texas, he has a river, city, county and Spanish mission named for him. Take a moment to reflect on the greatest temptations you face in life – and ways in which you might better overcome them!

On **December 5**, we remember the passing in 2013 of **John Alan Lee**, the Canadian writer and LGBTQ activist known for his research on the sociological and psychological aspects of love and sexuality. The author of over 300 books and articles, he turned his attention later in life to the issues of assisted suicide and the right to die. In his memory, pray for "the flying boy" or girl you know, who might be addicted to such things as sex, work, pain or failure!

On **December 6**, the Church celebrates **St. Nicholas**, the fourth-century Turkish bishop whose generosity made him the protagonist in numerous folktales. Often depicted as a bishop holding three bags of gold (or three golden balls), with three children in a tub at his feet, he's invoked as the patron saint of numerous groups, including brides and brewers,

fishermen and pharmacists, maidens, mariners, merchants and murderers, pilgrims and prisoners, scholars and schoolchildren. In his memory, research how his day is celebrated in different countries, bake some *speculaas* (Dutch spice “Kris Kringle cookies”), share one of the many charming stories of St. Nick or *Sinterklaas*, or perform a secret act of charity. Do you have kids in your community? And do have a miter, crozier and Santa Claus beard? Share a brief lesson on the saint’s generosity, then, while all sing “Jolly Old St. Nicholas,” invite a congregant to enter dressed as the saint, with small gifts for the kids!

On **December 7**, the Church celebrates **St. Ambrose**, the fourth-century “honey-tongued” bishop who played a role in the conversion of St. Augustine. Often depicted with a beehive, or holding a church in his hand, he’s a patron saint of bees, beekeepers, wax melters and candlemakers. In light of the Roman church’s penchant for erecting barriers to the sacraments of the Church—condemned as the heresy of semi-Pelagianism—share a brief lesson on this unbaptized-catechumen-turned-bishop and/or try creating a Christ Candle for Christmas!

On **December 7**, we also celebrate the birth in 1941 of **Sr. Elizabeth A. Johnson**, the Roman Catholic feminist theologian whose books are widely read in various theology classes. Her work, *Quest for the Living God*—which expounds new ways of thinking about God within the context of traditional Catholic beliefs—garnered criticism by the Roman church’s hierarchy, fraying the already-strained relationship between bishops and theologians of the church. In her honor, find a way to support our sisters in their quest for greater participation and authority in the Body of Christ!

Sunday, December 8, 2019

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

(blue or violet)

Light two violet candles of the Advent wreath!

Remember: **The Gloria is not sung during the Advent season!**

The thread in today’s scriptures: Proto-Isaiah continues his vision of the harmony and peace that will characterize God’s reign, where those once viewed as enemies will live in harmony (Is. 11:6-8). Himself a Jew, Paul shared a similar vision through his ministry to non-Jews (Rom. 15:8), encouraging all to “think in harmony with one another, in keeping with

Christ Jesus, [and]...with one accord" (Rom. 15:5-6). Rather than focus on harmony, the Matthean Baptist called out the vipers (Mt. 3:7) who co-existed among those who produce good fruits (Mt. 3:8). In the end, our ability (or lack thereof) to live in harmony and peace with one another might be one factor that aligns us more closely with the "wheat" (or with the "chaff"; Mt. 3:12)!

Holy humor: American author and publisher Elbert Hubbard was once quoted by Bugs Bunny, when Bugs Bunny said, "Don't take life too seriously. You'll never get out of it alive!" Elbert Hubbard was also famous for his definition of editors. We're all familiar with editors, right? Editors are the people who decide what is printed in certain publications, like newspapers and magazines, and how those things are said. Elbert Hubbard once defined editors as the people who work for newspapers and whose job it is to separate the wheat from the chaff—and to make sure the chaff is printed! [Segue into the gospel theme of separating wheat from chaff—and Proto-Isaiah's and Paul's (and Jesus') vision of building bridges with those traditionally regarded as "chaff"!

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider an ax or a hatchet and/or a lawn rake! Proto-Isaiah speaks of the stump of Jesse, which resulted when Israel was cut down (Is. 11:1), and the Quelle Jesus (common to Matthew & Luke) speaks of the ax being at the root of the tree (Mt. 3:10, Lk. 3:9). Fortunately, if we heed Paul's exhortations in today's letter to the Romans, we need not fear "the ax"! The Quelle Jesus speaks of the winnowing fan or fork (Mt. 3:12, Lk. 3:17), which resembled a modern-day lawn rake. Just as a lawn rake separates the leaves from your yard, the winnowing fan separates the wheat from the chaff!

When it doesn't fall on a Sunday, **December 8** is the date on which the Roman church celebrates its "holyday of obligation" of the **Immaculate Conception**, a papal pronouncement that irreparably split the Roman church in 1854 and led to other proclamations: of the novel ideas of the Roman's bishop's purported "infallibility" and universal jurisdiction in 1870. It was exactly these new ideas that led many to refer to themselves as Old Catholics, indicating their desire to return to the beliefs and practices of the ancient Church, rather than fall prey to the novelties proposed by the Roman papacy. Whether you celebrate the Immaculate Conception or not, this could be a tremendous teaching moment for those who celebrate with you and wish to understand the differences between Independent/Old Catholicism and the teachings of the Roman church. If you celebrate the "Patroness of the United States of America," choose Marian hymns, place white lilies near her image, and consider praying a decade (or more) of the rosary. This is also the

traditional day for baking gingerbread Moravian spritz cookies: Plan a family activity of assembling a gingerbread house or of baking holiday cookies!

December 9 is the Feast of **St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin**, the indigenous man to whom Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared in 1531, according to the legend written about them in 1648. A patron of Mexico, he's often pictured with roses and with an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on his *tilma* (outer cloak). Though seemingly frightened and confused by the mandate he was given, Juan Diego obeyed and courageously sought an audience with Fray Juan de Zumárraga, the bishop of New Spain. In his honor, pray for and/or find a way to support those whose faces and courage are mirrored in this saint—including the many migrant workers who help to sustain our economy!

On **December 9**, we remember the passing in 1979 of **Fulton John Sheen**, the American bishop known for his preaching on television and radio. For 20 years, he hosted a night-time radio program, "The Catholic Hour," before moving to television and sharing "Life is Worth Living" and "The Fulton Sheen Program." Often referred to as one of the first televangelists, Sheen was the winner of two Emmys for Most Outstanding Television Personality. In his memory, consider how you are using modern technologies to expand the reach of your preaching and teaching!

On **December 10**, the Church celebrates **St. Melchiades**, the African pope who led the Church during the last persecution before Constantine's granting of freedom to Christians. Because Melchiades helped usher in a new era of peace, St. Augustine called him "the true child of the peace of Jesus Christ." Pause today to pray for all who are persecuted, for their persecutors, and for all who are instruments of peace in our world!

On **December 10**, we remember the passing in 1968 of **Thomas Merton**, the Trappist monk, theologian, mystic and social activist who dedicated the latter years of his life to the study of comparative religions. His bestselling autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, inspired countless students and veterans to enter religious life. In his memory, pull one of his works from the shelf and reacquaint yourself with his timeless wisdom!

On **December 10**, we also remember the passing in 1968 of **Karl Barth**, the Swiss Reformed theologian referred to by Pope Pius XII as the greatest theologian since Thomas Aquinas. How much do you know

about him? Take a moment today to increase your knowledge of him and his works!

On **December 11**, the Church celebrates **St. Damasus I**, the fourth-century pope who commissioned Jerome's Vulgate translation of the scriptures. He's the patron saint of archaeologists. Share a brief lesson on the biblical canon approved at his Council of Rome (382 A.D.), and/or make a commitment to better familiarize yourself with the rich fare that we find in scripture!

On **December 12**, the Church celebrates **Our Lady of Guadalupe**, the Empress of the Americas, the Patroness of Latin American, and the Mother of all Mexicans!

- If you want to celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12, remember that **the most popular celebrations of her by Mexicans occur at midnight and/or at a very early hour of the morning** (e.g., 6:00 a.m.), beginning with the singing of "*Las mañanitas*."
- If you have a Mexican community that might not gather to celebrate on December 12, consider a nod to **Our Lady of Guadalupe** during the Sunday liturgy and/or a celebration of her after your Sunday Mass.
- Invite congregants to **decorate an image of her**, perhaps with large paper flowers of the colors of the Mexican flag, and/or to bring **roses and/or candles** in her honor.
- Before you begin your celebration of the eucharist, sing "*Las mañanitas*" in her honor!
- Incorporate traditional dances by *matlachines* and/or *concheros* into your liturgy and/or your gathering after Mass!
- **Share a gift**—perhaps a prayer card or pin or bookmark containing her image for each person present.
- In this Advent season of increasing light, be sure to reference her being clothed with the sun and standing on the moon. Also, note the black band around her waist—a symbol of her pregnancy: In the same way that she carried the Christ Child inside her, we are called to carry Christ within us and to share him with others!
- If you have the talent, organize a **dramatic reenactment of the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe to St. Juan Diego!**
- **For the intellectually-curious**, consider sharing a lesson on the *Nican mopohua*, the tale that was penned 118 years after the purported apparition, and/or on the incredible **syncretism** that

we find in the image of the Aztec goddess *Tonantzín*—who is now venerated by Catholics as the mother of Christ!

- If devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe runs especially deep in your community, invite lay leaders to host a **novena** in her honor, with the nightly praying of the rosary and singing of songs in her honor, beginning on December 3.

On **December 12**, we remember the passing in 2008 of **Avery Robert Dulles**, the Jesuit priest, theologian and non-bishop cardinal who penned over 20 books and 700 articles, largely on ecclesiology. Raised Presbyterian, he became agnostic then Roman Catholic, later serving as president of the Catholic Theological Society of America and of the American Theological Society. He served on the International Theological Commission and worked in Lutheran/Catholic dialogue. In his memory, consider the ways in which you might more significantly contribute to theology and/or to ecumenical dialogue!

On **December 13**, the Church celebrates **St. Lucy**, the third-century Greek noblewoman whose vow of virginity infuriated the young man to whom she was unwillingly wedded. The patroness of eye problems, blindness and the blind, authors, laborers, salespeople and hemorrhages, Lucy is often depicted hitched to a yoke of oxen or holding two eyes on a dish. In Croatia, Christmas wheat is planted today; plant some wheat seeds in a small pot of soil, and you'll have fresh, green wheat about eight inches tall for your manger scene by Christmas! In honor of St. Lucy's intervention in a 1582 famine, Italians abstain from grain, bread and pasta today, eating *cuccia* instead. In Lombardy, goose is eaten today, and St. Lucy brings gifts today to the children who leave hay, carrots and bowls of milk for her donkey. In Sweden, the oldest daughter of the household dons a white dress, a crimson sash and stockings, and a crown/wreath with lighted candles—don't try this at home!—to wake family members on *Luciadagen* (Lucy's Day) with hot coffee and *Lussekatter* (saffron buns). Pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions her, and share a brief lesson on her life and its application to respect for women and support for all who stand with the #MeToo movement and against sexual abuse. Remember to tie her name (from the Latin root *lux*, *lucis*, meaning "light") to the increasing light that we see during Advent—and to pray for those who are physically and/or spiritually blind!

On **December 13**, we remember the passing in 1984 of **Pierre Martin Ngô Đình Thục**, the Vietnamese Roman Catholic archbishop who lived in exile after the murder of his younger brother, Ngô Đình Diệm, the president of South Vietnam. Thục was excommunicated by the Roman

church for consecrating a number of bishops without the Vatican's approval during the last ten years of his life. In his memory, pray for all who continue to share his valid lines of apostolic succession with others!

On **December 14**, the Church celebrates **St. John of the Cross** (a.k.a., Juan de Yepes), the 16th-century Spanish Carmelite priest who helped St. Teresa of Avila to reform the Carmelite Order. He is the patron saint of mystics, mystical theology, contemplatives and contemplative life. Amid the joy of this day, share an acknowledgement that not all people are rejoicing during this holiday season. Say a prayer of blessing for those passing through the "dark valleys" of life and/or through "the dark night of the soul" during what might otherwise be a season of joy!

Speaking of those for whom the holidays aren't necessarily a jolly time, **share the joy of your community with the homebound and/or with those who might enjoy your visit at a local hospital, nursing home, or senior center!** Such activities can involve congregants of all ages: the children can create handmade holiday cards, the teens can bake cookies and sing carols, the adults can prepare to spend a little extra time listening to those whom you visit. Take with you prayer resources and news from your community!

On **December 14**, we remember the passing in 1895 of **Paul Melchers**, the German cardinal and archbishop of Cologne who wrote to Pius IX with 13 other bishops to express their concern that the definition of purported papal infallibility was untimely. Melchers played a prominent role at the First Vatican Council and counseled against a definition of papal infallibility. Faithful to the Roman papacy, he later excommunicated professors who refused to accept the novel dogma, as well as two priests who joined the Old Catholic movement. In his memory, pray for all who, against their best judgment, heap burdens on others rather than risk the loss of the privileges they enjoy!

On **December 14**, we celebrate the birth in 1938 of **Genézio Darci "Leonardo" Boff**, the Brazilian theologian known for his support of the early Latin American liberation theology movement. A sharp critic of the "fundamentalist" Roman papacy and of American foreign policy, he was silenced by "religious terrorist" Joseph Ratzinger. After being silenced again and barred from attending the Eco-92 Earth Summit, he departed his Franciscan order and abandoned his priesthood ministry. In his honor, reacquaint yourself with any one of his liberating works!

Sunday, December 15, 2019
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
(rose or blue or violet)

It's **Gaudete Sunday**: Share a brief lesson on the joy of this day and its tie to Paul's words: "*Gaudete in Domino semper*" [Rejoice in the Lord always] (Phil 4:4)!

Do you have **rose vestments**? Today's the day to pull them out! Aim for a shade of rose that resembles the sky at dawn – and not a shocking pink. Be sure to iron or steam them – and to coordinate the color of your vestments with any other touches of rose in your worship space!

Light two violet candles and the rose candle of the Advent wreath!

Remember: **The *Gloria* is not sung during the Advent season!**

The thread in today's scriptures: The prayer of the ancient Church was *maranatha*, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Clearly, the *Quelle* Jesus was seen as proleptically fulfilling Proto-Isaiah's vision, coming to save us (Is. 35:4, repeated as the response for our responsorial psalm today), giving sight to the blind (Is. 35:5, Ps. 146:8, Mt. 11:5, Lk. 7:21-22), causing the deaf to hear (Is. 35:5, Mt. 11:5, Lk. 7:22) making the lame to walk (Is. 35:5, Mt. 11:5, Lk. 7:22), and ransoming the captives (Is. 35:10, Ps. 146:7). James uses the words "patient" and "patience" four times (James 5:7-10): Until the risen Christ comes again in glory, we need to patient!

Holy humor: Have you heard my pink-candle-Advent-wreath story before? One year, I gathered all the children of the parish around the Advent wreath, and I was telling them about the symbolism of the candles and the evergreens and the colors of the candles. Since I was speaking with kids, I didn't refer to the candles as "violet" or "rose" – the names of our liturgical colors; instead I used colors the kids would understand: purple and pink. I asked the children what they thought the three purple candles stood for, and I explained that purple was an ancient color of penitence – of being sorry for the things that we've said and done that have hurt other people. Then I asked the children what they thought the pink candle was for. I'll never forget: One girl shot her hand into the air. I asked her: "What do you think the pink candles stands for?" With wide eyes and without hesitation, she shouted: "The pink candle means...we're going to have a baby girl!"

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider the mathematical signs for “greater than” and “less than”! Early on, kids learn that certain things (and certain people) are “greater” or “less” than others – often associating those mathematical signs with the “alligator” that eats the highest number of the two. We all know it: Our kids are programmed to think that some people are “less” than others (e.g., children, women, minorities, the elderly, those with less ability and/or resources). Proto-Isaiah had the vision that the coming messiah would make people “greater” than they might otherwise be. They’ll enjoy greater health and freedom, the “valleys” in their lives will be filled, and they will be made whole! Interestingly, the Quelle Jesus points out that John the Baptist was “greater” than a prophet (Mt. 11:9); he says, “there has been none *greater* than John the Baptist; yet the *least* in the kingdom of heaven is *greater* than he” (Mt. 11:11, Lk. 7:28)! Like mother, like son: the Quelle Jesus shared his mother’s vision (Lk. 1:51-53) that the “lesser” will be deemed the “greater”!

Christmas is drawing near! Consider hosting a **holiday party** for clergy and lay leaders and/or volunteers! Invite them to bring potluck dishes. Have a few holiday party games and a White Elephant gift exchange. Buy Advent-colored Santa hats for clergy and lay leaders. You will have created a memory and begun a tradition that they’ll want to continue!

If your congregation is of Italian descent, invite them to bring their Christ Child figures to church for a special **Bambinelli Sunday** blessing, which always occurs on the Third Sunday of Advent!

On **December 15**, when it doesn’t fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Virginia Bracelli**, the 17th-century Italian noblewoman who, after bearing two daughters, was widowed at age 20, professed a vow of chastity, and spent the remainder of her life helping the sick, the poor, and abandoned children during times of plague and famine. Pray today for all who are bringing light and life to others during this Advent season!

In the Latino culture, **December 16** is the first day of *las posadas*, the nine-day reenactment of Mary and Joseph’s search for lodging in Bethlehem.

- Organize a parish *posada* at your worship space, complete with candles, food and drink, a *piñata*, gifts for the kids, and maybe even a visit from Santa!
- Better yet, find nine families who are willing to open their homes for parish *posadas* – one on each night from December 16 to 24 – so that you can get out and visit them at their homes. Publish the

date, time and address of each *posada*, so that parishioners can join the fun!

- Remember to incorporate a lesson on how we're all called to open the "doors" of our hearts to those around us during this holiday season – and throughout the coming year.
- If there's a *piñata*, be sure to speak to the symbolism of beating the capital sins in our lives (represented by the seven "horns" of a traditional *piñata*), so that the grace of God might spill into our lives (as symbolized by the candy)! Note: The *piñata* can be an extremely dangerous tradition. Have adults hold back eager children with a large rope circle until a whistle is blown – which is the signal for the child with the stick to stop swinging!

December 17 is the first day for the seven daily **O Antiphons**, which are based on fourth-century titles for the Messiah. Found in the hymn "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," they are: *O Sapientia* (Wisdom), *O Adonai* (Lord and Ruler), *O Radix Jesse* (Root of Jesse), *O Clavis David* (Key of David), *O Oriens* (Dayspring), *O Rex Gentium* (King of the Gentiles), and *O Emmanuel* (God With Us). When ordered in reverse (*Emmanuel, Rex, Oriens, Clavis, Radix, Adonai, and Sapientia*), they form the Latin acrostic *ero cras*, which means, "I will come tomorrow." Pray today's O Antiphon and invite the Lord to come!

On **December 17**, the Church celebrates **St. Joseph Manyanet y Vives**, the 19th-century "Apostle of the Holy Family" who founded the Congregation of the Sons of the Holy Family and of the Missionary Daughters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, two congregations dedicated to parish ministry, teaching children, and serving families. Joseph encouraged devotion to the Holy Family, and he published the magazine, *La Sagrada Familia*. Pause today to consider how you might better serve your family and the families you encounter each week!

On **December 17**, the old *Roman Martyrology* celebrated **St. Lazarus of Bethany**, the brother of Ss. Martha & Mary of Bethany, whom the Johannine Jesus raised from the dead (Jn. 11:1-44). According to one tradition, he went on to become a missionary to Gaul (modern-day France), the first bishop of Marseilles, and a martyr during the persecutions of Domitian. Incorporate into your prayer today a meditation on John's story of Lazarus' rising from the dead!

On **December 17**, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the birth in 1936 of **Jorge Mario Bergoglio**, who would become Pope Francis. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 1.3 billion Roman Catholics he serves!

On **December 18**, we remember the passing in 1644 of **Michael Wadding (a.k.a., Miguel Godínez)**, the Irish Jesuit who spent over 20 years of his life as a missionary in present-day Mexico. In his memory, pray for the missionaries of the Church—especially for those who continue to minister to the needs of Spanish-speaking persons in the U.S. and abroad!

On **December 19**, we remember the passing in 1914 of **Johann Friedrich von Schulte**, the German canonist and historian who opposed the First Vatican Council and was the architect for the canon law of the German Old Catholic Church. He served as President of the Old Catholic Congress from 1871 to 1890. In his memory, pray for all who follow in his footsteps of leading and guiding the Independent and Old Catholic movements at the international level!

On **December 19**, we remember the passing in 1919 of **Arnold Harris Mathew (a.k.a., Arnaldo Girolamo Povoleri)**, the founder of Old Catholicism in England. A Roman Catholic priest who lost faith in scripture and the divinity of Christ, he was later consecrated by the Archbishop of Utrecht. The Vatican responded to his subsequent consecrations of bishops by labeling him a “pseudo-bishop.” In his memory, pray for all victims of bullying—and for all who feel the need to put others down!

On **December 20**, the Church celebrates **St. Dominic of Silos**, the 11th-century Spanish Benedictine abbot who was exiled for not surrendering his monastery’s land to the king. A beloved saint in Spain, he rescued Christian slaves from the Moors, and his shrine was the site where St. Dominic de Guzmán’s mother prayed for a child. He’s a patron saint of prisoners and pregnant women and is invoked against insects, rabies, and rabid dogs. Find a way today to show your solidarity and support for those praying for a child during this Advent season!

On **December 20**, we remember the passing in 1552 of **Katharina von Bora, “die Lutherin,”** the wife of Martin Luther, who was an important part of the Reformation due to her role in helping to define Protestant family life and in setting the tone for married clergy. A former nun dissatisfied with monastic life and interested in the growing reform movement, Katharina married Martin, who concluded that “his marriage would please his father, rile the pope, cause the angels to laugh and the devils to weep.” She managed their brewery and cattle business to support their family, the students and visitors who boarded with them, and the hospital she operated on site in times of widespread illness. In her memory, pray for the spouses who so generously support the ministries of our clergy!

On **December 21**, the Church celebrates **St. Peter Canisius**, the sixteenth-century Dutch Jesuit priest who defended the Church by preaching, writing, founding colleges and seminaries, and contributing to the Council of Trent. He authored several catechisms that were translated into twelve languages during his lifetime, and he penned 1,400 letters in support of Church reform. As we celebrate this patron saint of catechism writers, consider how you're helping others to grow in their knowledge of our faith!

On **December 21**, we remember the passing in 1807 of **John Newton**, the English Anglican abolitionist known for composing "Amazing Grace." A sailor in the Royal Navy and a captain of slave ships, he worked in the slave trade for several years until a storm at sea caused the conversion experience that propelled him to become an Anglican priest. He renounced the slave trade, became a prominent supporter of abolitionism, and saw Britain's abolition of the African slave trade only days before his death. In his memory, pray for those who are enslaved — and for the "lost" and "blind" whose words and actions hinder the freedom of others!

On **December 21**, we remember the passing in 1940 of **F. Scott Fitzgerald**, the Catholic author regarded as one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century. He was raised Catholic and attended Catholic schools, but, for 25 years, the Roman church denied his family's request that he be buried in the family's plot at St. Mary's Cemetery in Rockville, Maryland. In his memory, pray for all who have been marginalized in life and/or in death by misguided "representatives" of God and/or the Church!

On **December 21**, we celebrate the birth in 1940 of **Matthew Fox**, the American Episcopal priest and theologian who was an early exponent of creation spirituality. The author of 35 books that have been read by millions, Fox has sought to align contemporary ecological and environmental movements with numerous spiritual traditions. In his honor, consider how you employ scripture and tradition to honor God's creation!

On **December 21**, we celebrate the birth in 1951 of **Jan Michael Joncas**, the priest, liturgical theologian and composer of contemporary Catholic music, known for such songs as "On Eagle's Wings," "I Have Loved You," and "Take and Eat." In his honor, incorporate a tune or two of his into your prayer today!

Sunday, December 22, 2019
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
(blue or violet)

Light all four candles of the Advent wreath!

Remember: **The *Gloria* is *not* sung during the Advent season!**

The thread in today’s scriptures: As we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ at Christmas, we sing with the psalmist: “Let the Lord enter” (Ps. 24:7)! Proto-Isaiah had a vision that “God-with-us” would enter the world through a young girl (Is. 7:14, too often mistranslated as “virgin”). Matthew suggests that the young girl was Miryam, the wife of Yossef, who was a descendant of King David (Rom. 1:3), that Miryam “was found with child through the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 1:18), and that Yossef, in line with Proto-Isaiah’s prophecy (Is. 7:14, Mt. 1:23), was to name the boy Yeshua (Mt. 1:21).

Holy humor: One day, when Jesus was a child, he heard his name shouted from the family’s carpentry shop, by his stepfather, Joseph. Jesus ran to Joseph in the carpentry shop and asked, “Did you call me?” And you know where this joke is going: Joseph looked at Jesus and said, “Did I call you? No. I just hit my thumb with the hammer!” (“Jesus Christ!”) [Segue into Matthew’s story of Joseph giving Jesus his name, trusting that the child’s conception was really due to supernatural reasons, and welcoming Jesus into his heart and into his home, in the same way that we’re called to welcome Christ into our hearts.]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider an image of St. Joseph with the child Jesus! We’ve all seen the tender, serene images of Joseph holding his wife’s child, but imagine for a moment the leap of faith required for Joseph to take Mary into his home and to raise her son, believing it was “through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her” (Mt. 1:20). It is for this reason that Joseph, a simple *tekton* (handyman), is a model of faith for all generations! As we approach Christmas, ask yourself how you’re opening your heart and your life to welcome the Christ Child!

This is the last Sunday before Christmas—and the second Sunday in which we hear the call to repentance of St. John the Baptist: Have you helped congregants “prepare the way of the Lord” with a celebration of the **sacrament of Reconciliation**? If not, consider hosting a communal service at the conclusion of Mass today! Invite congregants to write their chief sins on small pieces of paper you’ve shared, assure them that God

knows what's written in their hearts and forgives them of all their sins, share with them a scripture (perhaps the *metanoia* of the "prodigal son" in Luke 15, through the party thrown by his father), suggest a penance, then, with penitential music in the background, invite congregants forward, silently read and burn the paper written by each, and share with him/her the Church's words of forgiveness!

Christmas is near: Do you have kids in your community? And do have someone in your community who owns a Santa suit? Invite **Santa Claus** to come and share a simple gift with the kids! School children are on winter break, and their families may be traveling for the holiday, but, for those who remain, this will be a special treat! Consider announcing a few weeks in advance that you'll be hosting "a special holiday visitor" on this day! Even better, invite Santa to remain after Mass for family photos!

Want to create a memory? Invite congregants to bring Christmas cookies and candies and to wear holiday sweaters for a post-Mass community-building event! Try an "**ugly sweater contest**" and/or award prizes and bragging rights in categories like "Most Festive," "Most Sparkle," "Most Adorable," "Most Retro/Vintage" & "Ugliest". You'll have great photos!

On **December 22**, we remember the passing in 1316 of **Giles of Rome**, the French archbishop and prior general of the Augustinian order, who wrote a guide for princes as well as the major text on 14th-century papism. The "Best-grounded Doctor" took an active part in ending the controversy concerning the validity of Boniface VIII's election to the papacy. In his memory, pray for all who dedicate their lives to the defense of the Church!

On **December 22**, the Autocephalous Turkish Orthodox Church celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2002 of Paşa Ümit Erenerol as **Turkish Orthodox Patriarch Papa Efrim IV**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the people he serves!

On **December 23**, we celebrate the birth in 1926 of **Robert Bly**, the American poet, essayist and activist whose bestselling work, *Iron John*, made him the leader of the mythopoetic men's movement. He pointed to the predicament of children, particularly boys, who lack models and rites of passage to guide them through life's stages. In his memory, pray for and/or reach out to those trapped between childhood and maturity, and who continue to struggle from having grown up without the love and leadership of a father and/or mother!

On **December 23**, we remember the passing in 1947 of **Maurice de Wulf**, the Belgian Thomist philosopher at Louvain who distinguished medieval philosophy from Scholasticism, highlighting the "anti-Scholastic"

thought of Scotus Erigena, the Cathars, the Albigenses, and the Pantheistic schools. In his memory, explore some of the counter movements that have enriched our world, our faith and our theology!

On **December 23**, we remember the passing in 1972 of **Abraham Joshua Heschel**, the Polish-born American rabbi who was one of the leading Jewish philosophers and theologians of the 20th century. He was active in the civil rights movement and authored a number of widely-read books on Jewish philosophy and mysticism. In his memory, find a spiritual friend with whom you might share an insight or two from his works!

On **December 23**, we also remember the passing in 2009 of **Edward Cornelis Florentius Alfonsus Schillebeeckx**, the Belgian Dominican theologian whose contributions to the Second Vatican Council made him known throughout the world. Schillebeeckx's innovative thought (including his attempt to overcome the Aristotelian categories of transubstantiation with a fresher thought of "transignification") were sometimes viewed with suspect, though never condemned by the Vatican. In his memory, consider the space that you allow the Spirit in your own theology and thought!

On **December 24**, we remember the passing in 2016 of **Joseph Augustine Fitzmyer**, the Jesuit priest and professor *emeritus* at The Catholic University of America who specialized in the study of the New Testament, but who also made contributions to the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Jewish literature. In his memory, thumb through one of his commentaries and see what new insights you gain!

Wednesday, December 25, 2019

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

(white)

Christmas is here: Let's decorate!

- Break out the **Christmas décor**—or, even better, smoothly transition from your Advent décor to Christmas décor by replacing the touches of Advent color with Christmas color!
- Remember: Red, white and green may be the traditional colors of Christmas in the secular world, but **white is the liturgical color for the Church's Christmas season**, often with touches of gold that bring to mind the newborn King!

- Be sure to steam or iron your **Christmas vestments**—and to coordinate the color of your vestments with other decorative details in your worship space!
- This is a high solemnity: Be sure to cover the altar with your loveliest white and/or gold altar cloth!
- Consider appropriate places for **evergreen** decorations—perhaps with wreaths on the end of pews and/or with garland that accents the architecture of your worship space. Try making your garland extraordinary with touches of boxwood, seeded eucalyptus, wax flowers, white hypericum, pine cones, and/or other ideas you find online or at your local florist.
- Try making your **creche** extraordinary: Instead of simply placing it on a table or on the floor, nestle it in a fitting devotional space where congregants can pray and where parents and grandparents can explain the figures to their children and grandchildren. Be sure that adequate light shines on the figures—but not in the eyes of those gazing on it. Unless the placement of the Christ Child in the manger is part of your liturgy, **be sure to place the Christ Child in the manger before the Mass begins!** Remember: The magi will not arrive at the nativity scene until January 6; **find a place for the magi that suggest that they are *en route*** but still a distance away.
- Be cautious *not* to impede liturgical movement with a forest of trees in the sanctuary.
- Be prepared to leave the Christmas décor up through the end of the Christmas season (which concludes with the Baptism of the Lord)—or, if you lead a Latino community, consider leaving touches of Christmas in the worship space for the entire 40 days of Christmas in the Latino culture, which concludes February 2.
- **Continue the decoration** into the entrance to your worship space, outdoors, and into other spaces on the grounds, including your Blessed Sacrament chapel, parish hall and classrooms! Be especially sure to **communicate “the reason for the season” outside your worship space** to passersby, perhaps with outdoor banners, wreaths, an outdoor nativity set, *luminarias* (candles in paper bags), and/or tasteful inflatables.

Christmas Eve Masses are famous for their **reenactments by children of the birth of Jesus**; this is an especially dear memory for parents and grandparents! If you have a liturgy with a child-friendly focus, be sure children leave knowing the key figures in the Christmas story!

For the intellectually-curious, find time outside the Mass to share a brief lesson on the **differences between the two nativity stories** in the gospels of Matthew and Luke—and the **lack of nativity stories in Mark and John!** Take two cans of spray paint to an old nativity set, so that adult learners can easily distinguish the elements highlighted in Matthew (Joseph, magi, camels, star) from the elements highlighted in Luke (Mary, stable, manger, ox, donkey, sheep, shepherds, the angel of the Lord). Also consider sharing the story of **the origin of the Christmas creche** and its attribution to St. Francis of Assisi! Other possible lessons might include the reason for the date for Christmas, the theology of the incarnation, the two natures of Christ, etc.

The most common question for Catholic parishes on Christmas Eve Day is, “What time is your midnight Mass?” Consider hosting a Mass *at midnight*, complete with a **candlelight service!**

- Ring a bell at midnight, begin your service in the dark with soft music in the background, and share a brief lesson on Christ’s coming as the Light of the world!
- Be sure to test the environment you’ve created before the Mass: Some church electrical outlets might be tied to light switches!
- Before the liturgy, be sure all liturgical ministers understand the importance of the dark, quiet environment you’re attempting to create; they need to know not to talk loudly and/or open doors that will allow light to flood the space.

Be sure that **hospitality ministers** are aware that holiday visitors may be joining you for this Mass; visitors should be welcomed with joy. Christmas is no time for impatience, judgment, or criticism. It’s Christmas; don’t be a scrooge or a grinch!

After four Sundays of “fasting” from it, **bring the Gloria back with gusto!** Consider asking someone to ring the church bell and/or other bells in the church to highlight the solemnity of this song!

Also, consider the use of hypoallergenic **incense**—presuming you and your thurifer have practiced how you’ll handle the thurible and boat. Be sure to remind your altar server(s) when incense will be used and that the *lavabo* (handwashing) will occur *after* the incensation of the altar and gifts! If you’re swinging the thurible, remember that the closer you place your fingers to the thurible, the more control you’ll have. Finally, if you have a skilled thurifer, work with him/her in advance to perfect a 360-degree vertical swing of the thurible with a simple flick of his/her wrist (circle, forward, back, circle, forward back, etc.) as s/he leads the procession down the aisle!

Homily Help: Remember that there are four sets of scriptures for today, based on when you celebrate Mass. Your worship environment is likely very special today; for the sake of the 65% of your listeners who are visual, tie your message to the visuals in your space!

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Look around your now-decorated worship environment for symbols to incorporate into your message: The **lights** on the trees and the **candles** remind us of Christ's coming as the Light of the world. The **evergreens** remind us of God's enduring love for us. The shape of the **poinsettias** remind us of the star leading people to Christ, and the story of the poinsettia's purported origin links to a drummer-boy-like story of a poor girl with nothing to offer the newborn King. The **creche** reminds us of the ordinary circumstances of the Lucan Jesus' birth and God's choice to come to the poor and marginalized, rather than to the rich and powerful of that time. We display these symbols at Christmas; how will we continue to proclaim the message of these symbols in our daily lives throughout the year ahead?

If you have a Latino community, consider incorporating **the last *posada***, the traditional ***arrullo***, the traditional **veneration of an image of the Child Jesus**, and/or a ***pastorela***!

- Before Mass, the antiphonal singing of the traditional song for *las posadas* might be sung by congregants inside and outside your worship space, with those outside being welcomed in for Mass.
- In the Mexican culture, the image of the Child Jesus is taken from its upright position on the home altar, "rocked to sleep" with a lullaby (the *arrullo*), and placed in the manger; consider incorporating this rite into the liturgy.
- When Mexican families celebrate *las posadas*, they often place an image of the Christ Child in a basket or on a tray or platter filled with candies; individuals then come forward to venerate the image of the Christ Child with a kiss and to take a piece of candy from the basket or tray. Even better, invite two teens to hold the basket or platter as people come to them, to venerate the image and take a piece of candy!
- *Pastorelas* are traditional Christmas plays portraying the journey of the shepherds to the place where the Christ Child lay; *pastorelas* involve more planning and work, but can be an extremely memorable experience for all involved!

Send congregants home with a copy of a **prayer of blessing for their creche and/or Christmas tree!**

If you begin Mass with a candlelight service (reminiscent of the Easter vigil and common in non-Catholic congregations), have hospitality ministers prepared to distribute the taper candles before Mass—and prepared to collect the taper candles after Mass.

On **December 25**, the Georgian Orthodox Church (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 1977 of Irakli Ghudushauri-Shiolashvili as **Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II of Georgia**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 3.5 million Georgian Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **December 26**, the Church celebrates **St. Stephen**: Be sure to recognize and bless your deacon(s) as we celebrate the patron saint of deacons! Consider sharing with your deacon(s) a seasonal gift, perhaps a Christmas ornament with a personalized message of gratitude for their ministry to the Church. Also, don't forget to recognize those who are preparing for diaconal ministry!

On **December 26**, we remember the passing in 2007 of **Bernhard Word Anderson**, the American United Methodist pastor and Old Testament scholar. His *Understanding the Old Testament* is a classic textbook. In his memory, thumb through one of his works and expand your knowledge of the Old Testament world!

On **December 27**, the Church celebrates **St. John the Evangelist**: Be ready to share a brief lesson on his high Christology (his emphasis on the divine nature of Christ), why his gospel is symbolized by an eagle, his poetry and symbolic language, and/or some of the many differences between this gospel and the synoptic gospels!

On **December 27**, we celebrate the birth in 1938 of **Jon Sobrino**, the Spanish Jesuit theologian and co-founder of the University of Central America, known for his contributions to liberation theology. He narrowly escaped the targeted assassinations that occurred at his rectory during the El Salvador civil war, and he continues to be an outspoken advocate for peace and against the U.S. training of Latin American military officers in torture techniques at the School of the Americas. The Vatican has criticized his works for their emphasis on Jesus' human nature and purported downplaying of Jesus' divinity. In his honor, consider how you are esteeming and serving "the Church of the poor"!

On **December 27**, we remember the passing in 2011 of **Sir Michael Anthony Eardley Dummett**, the English philosopher who has been described as "among the most significant British philosophers of the last century and a leading campaigner for racial tolerance and equality." He wrote that opposition to immigration is largely based on racism, and his

work, *On Immigration and Refugees*, detailed the demands of justice for nations with respect to the movement of people between them. A convert to the Roman church, he sparked controversy in 1987 by writing that “from the earliest times, the Catholic Church, claiming to have a mission from God to safeguard divinely revealed truth, has taught and insisted on the acceptance of falsehoods.” In his memory, reflect on how you are bringing greater credibility to the Independent Catholic movement, so that it might not become, in the words of Dummett, “a laughing-stock in the eyes of the world”!

On **December 28**, the Church celebrates the Memorial of the **Holy Innocents**: Pray for those who, like Herod, try to stamp out the Word of God. If you have a Mexican community, and if you have a parish gathering on December 28, prepare a prank in honor of *el día de los santos inocentes* – the equivalent of April Fool’s Day in Mexico! Looking for an idea? Ask your local baker to frost a cardboard box, to look like a holiday cake. When congregants cut into it, shout the traditional April Fool’s line: “¡Inocente palomita!”

On **December 28**, we celebrate the anniversary of the ordination in 1970 of **Ludmila Javorová**, the Czech Roman Catholic woman who helped organize the underground church of Czechoslovakia during communist rule. She and some five other women were ordained by their Roman Catholic bishop, to serve women who were imprisoned and tortured but who had no access to male priests. In her honor, lift up all the women who have bravely shared of their lives and ordained ministries with our Catholic Church!

On **December 28**, we remember the passing in 2004 of **Jacques Dupuis**, the Belgian Jesuit theologian who spent several decades in India before teaching non-Christian religions at the Gregorian University in Rome. The Roman Curia censured his book, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, due to its suggestion that non-Christian religions might possess “the seeds of truth and goodness.” Regardless, his work was praised as a pioneering effort to esteem “God’s plan of salvation” in other religions. In his memory, pause to consider how God’s plan of salvation might be unfolding in religions quite unlike your own!

Sunday, December 29, 2019

HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY & JOSEPH

(white)

Like most people, Jesus of Nazareth was born into a family! Point to the **model of holiness** of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph; draw the connection between your community's families and the Holy Family; but also acknowledge that **families come in different shapes and forms!**

We're still in the Christmas Octave: **Sing the *Gloria* with gusto!**

You'll have to **choose which second reading you'll use**: The longer form of Colossians contains outdated language of wives needing to submit to their husbands. Really, now, does there exist even a single reason to perpetuate any idea that marriage is less than a partnership of co-equals and/or to perpetuate the oppressive views of an ancient, androcentric, patriarchal society?

Be mindful of the **heavily-exclusive language** in today's scriptures: Sirach's message to *fathers* might be rephrased for *parents*, the longer form of Colossians should not be used, and is there any reason a person should proclaim God's Word by saying anything less inclusive than, "thus is the *one* blessed who fears the Lord"?

Note: **The introductory line of today's second reading is misleading.** The Letter to the Colossians is a pseudonymous letter, written in Paul's name and spirit, but not written by Paul. Avoid confusing your listeners by beginning the proclamation with, "A reading from the Letter to the Colossians"!

The thread in today's scriptures: When we honor and revere our family members (Sir. 3:3-6), we are like young olive trees sinking our roots deep into solid earth (Ps. 128:3), where our lives are "firmly planted against the debt of [our] sins" (3:14; see also Sir. 3:9). In today's gospel (Mt. 2:13-15 & 19-23), Joseph models the virtues of heartfelt compassion, kindness and love (Col. 3:12-14), which are ideally the foundation of family life.

Holy humor: Today's gospel shares the story of the flight to Egypt—how it is that Joseph and Mary fled their homeland, to avoid the persecution of King Herod, and found themselves exiled in Egypt until Herod's death. The story is told of the religious education teacher who gave her young students the assignment of drawing their favorite bible stories. Six-year-old Kimberly brought her drawing to class, and, yes, she drew a picture of today's gospel, the flight to Egypt. Can you guess what she drew for the flight to Egypt? An airplane, of course! But the story gets

better. The teacher asked Kimberly what she drew, and Kimberly, of course, responded, “the flight to Egypt!” So the teacher asked Kimberly who the four people were in the plane. Kimberly pointed to each person: “That’s Joseph, and that’s Mary, and that’s the baby Jesus, and driving the plane is...Pontius the Pilot!” [Segue into the story of the flight to Egypt and the virtues displayed in that story.]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Point to your vestments and/or to the winter clothing of those in attendance! It’s winter, and you’re likely wearing various layers of clothing. People don’t see your T-shirt. They don’t see much of your clergy shirt or alb. They principally see what’s on top: your chasuble or dalmatic! And you see the coats your congregants are wearing, more so than anything they’re wearing underneath! In the same way, the pseudonymous author of the Letter to the Colossians exhorts us to clothe ourselves with a number of virtues. And what should we put on over all those virtues? Love! When others look at us, what they should principally see is nothing other than our love!

Consider concluding the Mass with a special **blessing of families!** Acknowledge that division and longstanding grudges exist within many families, and pray that congregants might be blessed with the necessary gifts to help bring their family together despite these challenges. **Encourage and/or challenge congregants to reach out to estranged family members in a special way today.**

Many families may be on holiday vacation and away for the weekend. For those who remain in town, share a **gift for families** in honor of the Holy Family. Consider an appropriate end-of-year gift, like a personalized church calendar – popular with older generations – and/or a missal with all the Sunday scriptures for the new year!

If you have an open-minded Latino community, have a *bendición familiar*. As part of the final blessing, invite them to sign the foreheads of others, just as Latino parents and grandparents bless their children and grandchildren when they go off to school or work. The novelty of the action will cement it in the memory of congregants!

On **December 29**, when it doesn’t fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Thomas Becket**: In a special way, we pray for those who, like Henry VIII, wish to rid the world—or at least our communities—of the “meddlesome priest[s]” of the Independent and Old Catholic movements!

On **December 29**, we remember the passing in 1926 of **Rainer Maria Rilke**, the German poet and novelist whose mystical works focus on the difficulty of communion with the ineffable in an age of disbelief, solitude and profound anxiety. As we wind down this year, dust off his *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* and ponder his reflections on the quest for individuality, the significance of death, and the experience of time as death approaches!

On **December 29**, we celebrate the birth in 1960 of **James J. Martin**, the American Jesuit priest, writer and editor of the Jesuit magazine, *America*. He has written or edited over 10 books, many of which are largely about his own experiences as a Catholic, and he is a frequent commentator on national news outlets. When Glenn Beck suggested that Catholics run away from priests who preach social justice, Martin noted that “Christ asked us to work with the poor...He says that the way that we’re going to be judged at the end of our lives is not what church we prayed in, or how we prayed, but really...how we treated the poor.” His recent work on welcoming LGBTQ Catholics has drawn the ire of conservatives in the Roman church. In his honor, pause to pen him a few words of encouragement!

On **December 30**, we remember the passing in 1947 of **Alfred North Whitehead**, the English mathematician and philosopher who was a defining figure of process philosophy and an inspiration for process theology. Critiquing traditional monotheistic notions of God as a divine king who imposes his will and power on the world, Whitehead envisioned a God created by our world and not necessarily tied to religion, “the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality.” In his memory, acquaint yourself with his views of God and religion!

On **December 30**, we remember the passing in 2016 of **Huston Cummings Smith**, the American scholar regarded as one of the world’s most influential figures in religious studies. His work, *The World’s Religions*, remains a popular text on comparative religion. In his memory, spend a few minutes today broadening your perspective on other world religions!

Wednesday, January 1, 2020
MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD
 (white)

How's your devotion to Mary? This is a day for you to share your love for your Mother with others! Think how you might be able to **make this celebration special** for the people with whom you celebrate. Remember: Mass attendance on New Year's Day can be extremely challenging, particularly for those who rang in the New Year at midnight!

For the intellectually-curious, provide a brief lesson on the history of Mary's designation as the *theotokos* (the God-bearer), and the very recent renaming of this eighth-day feast from the **Feast of the Circumcision** to the **Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God!**

The Christmas Octave concludes today: **Sing the *Gloria* with gusto!**

Be mindful of the **exclusive language** in the second reading: If you begin "Brothers and sisters," as you should, you'll need to rephrase the two instances of "son" to "son or daughter" and the two instances of "sons" to "sons and daughters."

The thread in today's scriptures: In this new year, we pray for God's blessing (Num. 6:22-27 & Ps 67:2), calling upon God as father/mother (Gal 4:6) and upon Mary as mother. Her son was born "under the law" (Gal 4:4), and she showed her devotion to God and to God's law by submitting her son to circumcision (Lk 2:21). How are we manifesting our devotion? Are we striking an active/contemplative balance in our lives this holiday season, as captured by the active response of the shepherds (Lk 2:16-17) and the contemplative response of Mary (Lk 2:19) – both of which are good!

Holy humor: We made it through Christmas! Did you hear the story of what happened at one church's Christmas pageant? All the little kids were dressed up for their roles as shepherds, magi and angels in the Nativity story, and the older kids, the eight-year-olds, simply had to memorize one line each, so that they could tell the Nativity story together. One boy had his line memorized: All he had to say was, "And the Virgin Mary was with Child." What did he have to say? "And the Virgin Mary was with Child!" How could that go wrong, right? At every rehearsal, he perfectly delivered his one line: "And the Virgin Mary was with Child!" But on Christmas Eve, stage fright got the best of him, and, while all the other children flawlessly recited their lines, when it came time for him to share his line, "And the Virgin Mary was with Child,"

what came out of his mouth was—are you ready for this?—“And the Viking Mary was with Child”! Imagine that for a moment: “the Viking Mary,” as if Mary were some Norse personality, with a horned helmet and Thor at her side! [Segue into an even more incredible image: of a young woman chosen to be the mother of...God!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Point to Mary and the shepherds in your Christmas creche, and/or draw an invisible triangle connecting you and your listeners through the common divine father/mother figures (i.e., God & Mary) that we share! We are not strangers, but sisters and brothers (Gal 4:7), daughters and sons of Mary our Mother!

As we honor the mother of God, consider having a **blessing for mothers of all types** (birth mothers, step mothers, mothers-in-law, mother figures, etc.)!

No plans for ringing in the New Year? Invite others to join you at midnight, to ring in the New Year with prayer and a **midnight Mass!**

- Ring a bell at midnight, then begin the service. Or, time your Mass to conclude just before midnight.
- In addition to anything that you say about Mary, speak of the important liminal moment of this celebration—even referencing **New Year’s resolutions** and the two-faced, forward/backward-facing Roman god, **Janus**, after whom January is named.
- If you find yourself ministering within the context of the Latino culture, invite someone to bring along enough **grapes** so that each person in attendance can enjoy the tradition of eating 12 grapes, one for each of 12 wishes s/he makes for the new year.
- End with a sampling of traditional New Year foods and/or a **toast** to the New Year with sparkling juice in plastic flute glasses!
- Conclude the night with firecrackers, traditionally used in Asia to scare away demons. You will have created a memory!

It’s the New Year, and many people are making resolutions. Suggest a few **spiritual resolutions** for the new year!

January 1 is also the **World Day of Prayer for Peace**: Consider incorporating themes of peace into the intercessions, and pray for peace in the world and in all families!

On **January 1**, the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the birth in 1955 of **John Yazigi**, who would become Patriarch John X of Antioch. In a spirit

of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 1.8 million Greek Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **January 2**, the Church celebrates **Ss. Basil the Great & Gregory Nazianzen**, two Cappadocian Fathers who defended the divinity of Christ (against the Arian heresy). If your community has a bent toward social justice, share Basil's famous words: "When someone steals another's clothes, we call him/her a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and does not? The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry; the coat unused in your closet belongs to the one who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the one who has no shoes; the money which you hoard up belongs to the poor." Challenging words, indeed!

January 3 is the Optional Memorial of the **Holy Name of Jesus**: Do your congregants know that our Savior's name was *not* "Jesus" and that he *didn't* speak English? [Try telling that to those who say, "If English was good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me"!]. Catechize others on the history and meaning of the name *Yehoshua* and what the scriptures say about that name (e.g., Mt. 1:21, Jn. 14:13, Phil. 2:9-11)!

On **January 3**, we remember the passing in 2010 of **Mary Daly**, the feminist philosopher and theologian who taught at Boston College for 33 years until refusing to allow male students into her advanced Women's Studies classes. Her book, *Beyond God the Father*, is considered a foundational work in feminist theology for its attempt to overcome androcentrism in Western religion. She has focused her scholarship on ways in which men have attempted to suppress women through the "religion" of patriarchy. In her memory, consider the ways in which your own words and actions might reinforce patriarchy and/or androcentrism!

On **January 4**, the Church celebrates **St. Elizabeth Ann Seton**, the first native-born American saint: If the Sisters of Charity have a ministry in your area, be sure to include a brief lesson on Seton's contribution to the schools and hospital systems that bear her name!

On **January 4**, we remember the passing in 1896 of **Joseph Hubert Reinkens**, the first German Old Catholic bishop. A professor of theology, Reinkens was known for his writings on the early Church Fathers, including his renowned *Cyprian and the Unity of the Church*. As a Roman Catholic priest, he wrote various pamphlets against purported papal infallibility and on the proceedings of the First Vatican Council. When Old Catholics separated from the Roman Church in 1873, they chose Reinkens as their bishop. It was due to his efforts that the Old Catholic

movement crystallized into an organized church, with status in various German states. He consecrated Eduard Herzog as Old Catholic bishop of Switzerland, and he advocated for the validity of Anglican orders to the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands. In his memory, pray for the pioneers and founders of the various Independent Catholic churches throughout the world – and for all who continue their great work!

On **January 4**, the Georgian Orthodox Church (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the birth in 1933 of **Irakli Ghudushauri-Shiolashvili**, who would become Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II of Georgia. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 3.5 million Georgian Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **January 4**, we remember the passing in 1965 of **Thomas Stearns “T.S.” Eliot**, the epic essayist and poet whose post-conversion Christian poems discomfited the secular *literati* of his day. In his memory, savor a few hope-filled lines from his conversion poem “Ash-Wednesday”!

Sunday, January 5, 2020

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

(white)

It’s not often that January 6 – the traditional day of Epiphany – falls on a Sunday. Remember: This is the **traditional gift-giving day** (more so than Christmas) in some parts of the world, including parts of Latin America, where the magi visit children in the night and bring them gifts!

Do you have a creche in your worship space? Be sure to **set out the figures of the *magi* (and any accompanying animals)** before Mass!

For the intellectually-curious, there are various possible lessons today.

- Share a brief lesson on the three manifestations of Christ.
- Explain the spiritual significance of the three gifts listed in scripture.
- Help congregants to separate fact from fiction (e.g., scripture says neither that they were “three” nor that they were “kings”; traditional names were later appended to the *magi*; in some cultures, we even assign a different animal (e.g., a horse, elephant and camel) to each *magus* to show the universality of the magi who respectively came from Europe, Africa and Asia!

- Speak of various traditions of this day, including extractions, house blessings, and the *rosca de reyes*!

The thread in today's scriptures: Today's scriptures feature rich fare for inclusive Catholic communities! The mystery of God is made known to *all* people (Eph. 3:3), and people from distant lands (Is 60:6 & Ps 72:10-11) recognize the light (Is 60:1). Now, "every nation on earth will adore [God]" (Ps 72:17)—and even the Gentiles will inherit God's kingdom (Col 3:6)! The *magi*—Gentiles from distant lands—recognize the presence of Emmanuel (Mt 2:10-11); do we?

Holy humor: [The following joke works in Austin, where the local college football team, the University of Texas Longhorns, has a deep, longstanding rivalry with the "Aggies" of Texas A&M University in College Station. Consider adapting this joke to your own situation, perhaps inserting instead the name of a rival town or college sports team—and you'll have people believing that maybe this story was real...until they hear the punchline!] Did you see the news? There are all sorts of cities throughout the U.S. that are no longer displaying nativity scenes in public places. We all know what a nativity scene is, right? It's that scene of Mary and Joseph, with the baby Jesus in a manger, surrounded by animals and shepherds and angels and the magi from today's gospel. How many of us have seen a nativity scene before? That's right: We have one right here in the church! But throughout the United States, many nativity scenes are being removed from many public places. So, did you see the news of what happened in College Station this year? This year, Texas A&M didn't put out a nativity scene! Actually, according to the story, our Aggie friends were planning on having a nativity scene this year, but when they went to set it up, they found the images of Mary and Joseph, they found the image of the baby Jesus in the manger, they found the sheep and the ox and the donkey, they found the angels and the shepherds. So, why was there no nativity scene at Texas A&M University this year? Because in all of College Station, and with all the Aggies there, they couldn't even find...three...wise...men! [Ouch! Segue into the story of the magi, and of the inclusivity of today's reading. Yes, Trito-Isaiah had a vision that all people (even Aggies!) would recognize and come to the light, and the pseudonymous authors of today's second readings suggest that even the "Aggies" of this world might inherit God's kingdom!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Point to the magi in your creche, and/or consider buying or making a king cake (then sharing it after Mass): In the same way that the figurine of the Christ child is hidden inside the bread or cake, the magi recognized the divine in the

Christ child. Are we able to recognize the presence of Christ hidden in the “dough” of others’ lives?

Are you able to chant a few psalm tones? Today is the traditional day for the **proclamation of the dates of the moveable feasts for the coming year**. Have a deacon or cantor sing the traditional text. Remember: Traditionally, this proclamation is *not* made by a priest, and it is omitted if not chanted!

If you minister in a Latino context, you’ll definitely want to purchase enough *rosca de reyes* (a ring-shaped king cake) to go around. Use the *rosca* as a visual in your homily, and explain how Christ is often hidden in the “dough” of others’ lives in such a way that, even though we can’t see him, he’s there! While at the bakery, buy extra plastic figurines of the Child Jesus, to be inserted into the bottom of the bread. Those who find these figurines in their piece of the *rosca* are tasked with providing the *tamales* and *atole* (a hot chocolate drink) for the traditional celebration of *el día de la candelaria* on February 2!

People from various cultures receive gifts from the magi on this day: If you minister to congregants from such contexts, **have three persons dress as the traditional magi and come with gifts for the children and/or for all!**

Epiphany is a traditional day of **house blessing** in some cultures. At the end of Mass, share small pieces of chalk and slips of paper with the traditional “20+C+B+M+20” inscription for the year and the names of the traditional names of the magi (viz., Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar). Lead all present in blessing your worship space, then invite up to nine people to chalk the lintel with those characters!

Some religious orders have the tradition of “**extractions**” on this day: Sing a prayer to the Holy Spirit (e.g., “Come, Holy Ghost”), then have all present pull a piece of paper from a basket containing patron saints for the year, bible verses for the year, and/or words of wisdom for the year. Encourage people to research their patron saints for the year, to learn about their lives and to discern why the Spirit might have “given” them those saints for the year. Tell all present to keep these saints and/or bible verses and/or words in a place (e.g., inside the front cover of their bible, on a bathroom mirror, or on their nightstand) where they can be reminded of them throughout the coming year!

Everyone knows “**The Twelve Days of Christmas**”! This is the 12th day of Christmas: Consider singing the song during your post-Mass activity, perhaps with as many as 12 groups of people acting out the gift of each day, or with the alternate lyrics you’ve created (perhaps even with

visuals), or with earlier versions of the song's lyrics (11 badgers baiting and eight hares a-running, in England, or 10 cocks a-crowing, nine bears a-beating, eight hounds a-running, etc., in early America). Or, find your favorite video version of it (perhaps the Muppets), or have a contest to see who can remember the gift of each day! Or, explain that the song was originally a memory game for kids, and have your own memory game using the names of all present!

Appropriately celebrated in connection with migrating magi, January 5-11 is **National Migration Week**. Consider special prayers and actions in honor of the occasion, and decorate your worship space with a swath of appropriately-colored fabric—free of any inappropriate symbols—from a place like Guatemala, El Salvador, West Africa, India or China.

On **January 5**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. John Neumann**, an early missionary who was named bishop of the largest diocese in the U.S. at that time. If your community has a place in its heart for our immigrant sisters and brothers, illuminate Neumann's love for those he served!

On **January 6**, the Church remembers **St. André Bessette**, the charismatic brother of the Congregation of Holy Cross to whom many miracles were attributed during his life at the St. Joseph Oratory in Montreal. Consider your own charism and your ability to attract others to God and the Church, and take a small step today to grow in this respect!

On **January 6**, we celebrate the birth in 1939 of **David Tracy**, the theologian and priest who was teaching at The Catholic University of America in 1968 when he joined other professors there in rejecting Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae*. He and others were tried by the faculty senate and fired. He subsequently taught at the University of Chicago Divinity School until his retirement and is best known for his works of systematic theology. In his honor, choose to enjoy one of his works!

On **January 6**, the Church of England celebrates the birth in 1956 of **Archbishop Justin Portal Welby of Canterbury**, the Primate of England and *primus inter pares* of the worldwide Anglican Communion. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 85 million Anglicans he serves!

On **January 6**, the Polish National Catholic Church celebrates the birth in 1966 of **Prime Bishop Anthony Mikovsky**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 26,000 people he serves!

On **January 7**, the Church celebrates **St. Raymond of Peñafort**, the patron saint of lawyers, known for his leadership of the Dominican Order, his collection of Church law, and his manual for confessors. Consider how

you're growing in your own pastoral skills, particularly with respect to those who come to you for the sacrament of Reconciliation!

On **January 8**, we remember the passing in 2009 of **Richard John Neuhaus**, an advisor to President George W. Bush on bioethical issues and a leading advocate for denying communion to Roman Catholic politicians who voted against the Roman church's positions on women's reproductive health. He brought the conservative views of his Missouri Synod Lutheran upbringing to his ministry as a "Bushism-made-Catholic," priest, and he was named one of the 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America at that time. In his memory, pray for all who continue to take hardline stances on issues of conscience and who seek to exclude God's holy people from the sacraments of the Church!

On **January 9**, we remember the passing in 1986 of **Michel de Certeau**, the French Jesuit priest who worked to synthesize history, philosophy, psychoanalysis and the social sciences. His most renowned work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, studied the way in which we unconsciously navigate the repetitive tasks of daily life. In his memory, reflect on some of the repetitive tasks that fill your "everyday life"!

On **January 9**, we remember the passing in 2013 of **Anscar Chupungco**, the Filipino Benedictine monk and liturgical theologian known for his work on the inculturation of local customs and traditions into the Catholic Mass. He wrote against "the reform of the reform," which he saw as having "an agenda that can have a regrettable impact on the liturgical gains of the [Second Vatican] council." In his memory, consider your own views toward the liturgical reforms of the Church and the ways in which you push the liturgy forward and/or pull it backward!

Sunday, January 12, 2020

THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

(white)

It's been two years since we've celebrated the Baptism of the Lord on a Sunday (since we celebrated it on a Monday in 2020), so celebrate this day well! If you have any baptisms, this is an appropriate day to **celebrate the sacrament of Baptism** during Sunday Mass!

We are baptized into Christ! If you have no baptisms today, use a **sprinkling rite** as part of the introductory rite, or consider having a **renewal of baptismal vows** in place of the creed, complete with the

sprinkling of holy water (as we do at the Easter Vigil)! If you want to more closely tie this action to the Easter Vigil, share **taper candles** (with *bobaches*) with all, and have congregants light them before the renewal of baptismal vows, and/or, even better, **invite congregants to bring their own baptismal candles** from home, to be lit on this special day as a reminder of their own baptism in Christ!

If you have a sprinkling rite and/or baptism during the Mass, be sure to prominently feature the **paschal candle** and a **large glass bowl of water** (perhaps on a stand covered with a white cloth) as part of your worship environment!

For the intellectually-curious, include a lesson on why the Jesus of the synoptic gospels underwent John's "baptism of repentance," the manifestation of the Trinity in the story, and/or the differences between the various gospel tellings of the story!

The **inclusive nature of today's scriptures** suggest that it's another great Sunday for inclusive Catholic communities: Deutero-Isaiah suggests that the light is not confined to one people or nation or church (Is. 42:6), and Luke paints Peter as proclaiming that "God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34) and that "Jesus Christ...is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36). So, in contrast to what the Roman church long taught, maybe you *don't* have to belong to a certain religion to "see the light" and/or to be saved!

Be mindful of the **exclusive language** in the psalm: Is there any reason a person should proclaim God's Word by saying anything less inclusive than, "Give to the Lord, you *children* of God"?

The thread in today's scriptures: Our baptism manifests that we, like Jesus (Mt. 3:17), are daughters and sons of God! In the synoptic gospels, Jesus' baptism initiated his public ministry – when he set about being a light for the nations, opening the eyes of the blind and freeing the oppressed (Is. 42:6-7). Does our own impartial, inclusive love (Acts 10:34-35) show that the glory of the Lord is revealed in us (Is 40:5), and/or that we follow in the footsteps of the "light of the nations" (Is 42:6)? Are we being instruments of peace, allowing God to bless all people with peace (Ps. 29:11) through us?

Holy humor: The story is told of little Johnny, who used to enjoy "playing church." When he was four or five years old, he would pretend to be a priest – which was usually O.K. One day, Johnny's mother looked out the window and saw Johnny playing church in the backyard with the family's cat, Whiskers. Johnny was preaching to Whiskers, and Whiskers seemed to be quietly listening, and Johnny's mother smiled as she went about her work. And then, a few minutes later, she heard the cat scream!

Johnny's mother ran to the open window and saw him trying to dunk the cat in a tub of water: As part of his playing church, Johnny was trying to baptize Whiskers, who was now hissing at him! The mother yelled, "Johnny, stop!!!" Then, quickly thinking how to explain to Johnny that this was not O.K., she said, "Whiskers is afraid of water!" Johnny looked at his mother, and, with all the self-righteousness he could muster, he replied, "Whiskers is afraid of water? He should have thought about that before he joined my church!" [Segue into the silly idea of any person referring to any church as his/her own. We are all baptized into the Body of Christ, which is larger than any single church. Does our parochial sense of "church" keep us from being a light to the nations, from being instruments of peace, from acknowledging that "Jesus Christ...is Lord of all," and/or from sharing God's inclusive love with all?]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider water and/or light, two of the primary symbols of the sacrament of baptism! Having passed through the "bath of rebirth" (Tit 3:5), we are called to be a light to the nations (Is 42:6)!

Now that a new calendar year has begun and kids are back in school, these weeks of January might be an ideal time for the **formation of your liturgical ministers**. Consider providing them a time of formation and/or retreat, where you can lead them in reflecting on their ministry during the past year and help them envision where the Lord might be leading them and their ministries in this new calendar year!

After Mass today, there's likely a lot of **Christmas décor that needs to come down**: Don't be bashful about asking for volunteers! Take leadership. Assign tasks and responsibilities. Then show your gratitude with hot chocolate and holiday cookies, or some other appropriate food and drink!

On **January 12**, we remember the passing in 1906 of **Theodor Hubert Weber**, the German theologian and philosopher who served as vicar general of the first bishop of the German Old Catholic Church and was later named his successor. He was an important follower and defender of Anton Günther and his philosophy. In his memory, pray for our sisters and brothers of the German Old Catholic Church!

On **January 12**, we celebrate the birth in 1929 of **Alasdair Chalmers MacIntyre**, the Scottish philosopher known for his virtue ethics, as well as for his work in the history of philosophy and theology. He writes that good judgment emanates from good character, such that being a good person is not about following rules or fulfilling obligations. He explains his conversion to Catholicism by suggesting that people don't choose

their religious traditions; their religious traditions choose them. In his memory, reflect on your own virtue and/or how and why you were chosen by the Independent Catholic tradition!

On **January 13**, the Church celebrates **St. Hilary of Poitiers**, who dedicated the exile from his bishopric to study and writing. He was drawn to the Christian religion through the description of God in Exodus (“I AM Who I AM”) that he “chanced upon.” Reflect today on the scriptural verses that best describe God for you!

On **January 13**, we remember the passing in 1941 of **James Joyce**, the Irish novelist, short story writer and poet who is regarded as one of the most influential authors of the 20th century. Having lapsed from the Roman church, he wrote, “Now I make open war upon it by what I write and say and do.” His later works, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, are nonetheless essentially Catholic, suggesting a reconciliation within himself with the Catholic traditions he loved, despite resisting the oppressive power of those who led the church. When he died, a Roman Catholic priest offered to celebrate Joyce’s funeral, but his wife declined, saying, “I couldn’t do that to him.” In his memory, pray for all who have a complex relationship with—and conflicting emotions for—the church they once loved!

On **January 14**, we remember the passing in 1890 of **Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger**, the German priest, church historian and theologian whose reverence for tradition annoyed liberals and whose criticism of the papacy and its power antagonized Ultramontanes. Considered an important contributor to the doctrine, growth and development of the Old Catholic Church, Döllinger derided the dogma of purported papal infallibility as intellectually indefensible. After its proclamation, he convened 44 professors in Munich to issue a declaration to resist the Council’s resolutions—and he was excommunicated by the Roman church. In his memory, recommit yourself to positively contributing to the doctrine, growth and development of Independent Catholicism!

On **January 14**, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2018 of **President Russell Marion Nelson**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 16 million Mormons he serves!

On **January 17**, the Church celebrates **St. Anthony the Abbot**: Challenge listeners often caught up in the busyness of the world to focus on a better active/contemplative balance and to strive for a bit of silence, solitude, and contemplative prayer today!

On **January 17**, we remember the passing in 1996 of **Juan Luis Segundo**, the Uruguayan Jesuit theologian who played a leading role in the Latin American liberation theology movement. A physician by training, he penned numerous works on theology, ideology, faith, hermeneutics and social justice. He was also an outspoken critic of the Roman church's deafness with respect to the oppression and suffering of the poor. In his memory, pause to consider how deaf you might be to the plight and cries of the poor – and commit yourself to at least one concrete way in which you might better be the hands and heart of Christ to them!

On **January 17**, we remember the passing in 2008 of **Joseph M. Champlin**, the American Roman Catholic priest and author of numerous paperbacks on the Roman Catholic faith, including the popular *Together for Life* marriage preparation guide. In his memory, consider how you help to prepare couples for the covenantal life of marriage!

On **January 18**, the Coptic Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2013 of **Ibrahim Isaac Sidrak** as Patriarch of Alexandria. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 175,000 Coptic Catholics he serves!

Sunday, January 19, 2020

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

Winter Ordinary Time is here: Invite congregants to **wear green today!**

We're jumping into Ordinary Time for seven weeks: This is an ideal time to **try out a new musical setting of a few acclamations!**

Think through **the décor for this season.**

- Try a **darker shade of green** for Winter Ordinary Time.
- Be sure that the colors of all fabrics in the worship space are coordinated – including the color of vestments. Be sure to steam or iron your **Ordinary Time vestments!**
- Fill the space with **green plants**, to which you can add accents of white (and/or other colors) for such celebrations as the Presentation of the Lord.
- Sprinkle the décor with **objects you find outdoors** at this time of year (e.g., pine cones and/or dried, seemingly-dead branches).

- **Continue the decoration** into the entrance to your worship space, outdoors, and into other spaces on the grounds, including your Blessed Sacrament chapel, parish hall and classrooms!

Do you have a large, easily-seen **icon of the wedding at Cana**? If so, add it to the décor for this Second Sunday in Ordinary Time!

For the intellectually-curious, there is an abundance of possible lessons!

- Share a refresher on the **Year of Matthew**, and let them know that, after a brief hiatus, we're now back into the first gospel for the next several Sundays. Encourage them to find time this year to read and familiarize themselves with the entire gospel – and to incorporate Matthew's gospel into their personal prayer!
- Share a lesson on **how the dates of Ordinary Time are determined** (viz., beginning on the first Monday after the first Sunday after January 6, and concluding on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday).
- Explain why **the first Sunday in Ordinary Time is actually the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time** (because it kicks off the second full week of the season).
- Note that **the word "ordinary" in Ordinary Time refers to the ordering of weeks with ordinal numbers** (and in no ways suggests that these weeks are not extra-ordinary).
- Let community members know that **Winter Ordinary Time consists this year of the Second through Seventh Sundays in Ordinary Time**, and that why we'll continue after the Lent/Easter season with the Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time on June 21. Explain what will happen to the Eighth week in Ordinary Time (viz., the Church always omits one week that would otherwise precede the resumption of Ordinary Time following Pentecost Sunday, so as to always have a total of 33 or 34 weeks [rather than 32 or 33 weeks] of Ordinary Time), and why we won't celebrate the Ninth, Tenth and Eleventh Sundays of Ordinary Time (which is when we'll celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, and the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ).
- During all of Winter Ordinary Time, the second reading will come from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Take a moment to share of the dating, audience and context for this letter, as well as its structure and themes!

The thread in today's scriptures: In the gospel of John, the Baptist testifies that Jesus is the son of God (Jn. 1:34), and we who are baptized into the Body of Christ are also "sanctified in Christ Jesus [and] called to be holy" (1Cor. 1:2). Like Israel, we are called to be "a light to the nations, that [God's] salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Is. 49:6, echoing the words of Deutero-Isaiah in last Sunday's first reading). Are we willing to say, "Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will"?

Holy humor: Last Sunday, we heard the story of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, and today's gospel continues the story of John the Baptist testifying that Jesus is the son of God. All these stories of John the Baptist and of Jesus' baptism make me think of the story of the drunk man who was baptized down in the river by the Pentecostal pastor. The man was walking along the river one Sunday afternoon when he stumbled into the Pentecostal baptismal service. The preacher called to him from the water, "Are you ready to find Jesus?" The man thought this was odd, but he decided to join the people in the river. As the drunk man approached the preacher, the preacher asked him again, "Are you ready to find Jesus?" And the man replied, "Yes, I am!" The pastor immersed the man's head under the water, then pulled him up again. The preacher asked him, "Have you found Jesus?" The man replied, "No, I haven't." The preacher dunked him again, this time longer, then brought him up and asked him, "Brother, have you found Jesus?" And the man replied, "No, I haven't." And, yes, you know where this is going. Becoming exasperated, the preacher plunged the man's head under the water, this time for nearly 30 seconds, then he brought the man up and asked, "My God, tell me, brother: Have you found Jesus yet?" And the drunk man wiped his eyes and coughed and asked, "Preacher, are you sure this is where he fell in?" [Segue into the way in which the "baptism" opened the man's eyes; have our eyes been opened as a result of our baptism into the Body of Christ?]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a big sign saying, WEIRD (or, if in Austin, a sign saying, "Keep Austin Weird")! Think about it: Some people are just plain weird! In fact, take a moment, and think about the weirdest people you know? What makes them weird? Now, do you know the origins of the English word "weird"? The English word, weird, W-E-I-R-D, comes from an Old English word, WYRD [pronounced the same way], W-Y-R-D, which meant "not like us" or "not of this world." That's really what it means to be...holy! In the ancient sense of the word, to be "holy" was to be "set apart," not like the rest of people. Sure, maybe other people ate porkchops or shrimp or catfish, or played football, or wore cotton-poly

blends—all outlawed by the Bible (Lev. 11:7, 11:12, 11:8, 19:19), but we, Jews, were going to be different. We were going to be “holy,” a nation set apart. In the eyes of others, we were going to be weird! Paul says we’re called to be holy (1Cor. 1:2). Deutero-Isaiah imagined that we’d be “weird” or “holy” as God’s servants (Is. 49:6). In the fourth gospel, John the Baptist pointed out that there was something different (or “weird”) about Jesus (Jn. 1:29-34). Perhaps we should take seriously today’s scriptures and commit ourselves to being “weird” – to being God’s holy people! [Let’s “keep [insert the name of your city] weird”; let’s keep [insert the name of your city]...holy!]

This weekend, the U.S. celebrates a prominent voice for civil rights, **Martin Luther King, Jr.** Incorporate his message with the Christian message of a “discipleship of equals,” and share with all a bookmark or image of him!

With the holidays now fading from memory, these **dark, winter months can be a lonely and/or depressing time for some:** Encourage families to “adopt a grandparent.” Create homemade cards and promote visits to the homebound and those in nursing homes. Host a canned food drive for the hungry and homeless. Find a way to enliven the corporal works of mercy that distinguish the “sheep” from the “goats” (Mt. 25:31-46)!

It’s the beginning of the **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity** (January 19-25)! Historical divisions have rent the Body of Christ: Reflect on the Johannine Jesus’ prayer for unity (Jn. 17:22-23), and pray for those—particularly those church leaders and people of faith—who continue to divide people, rather than create the inclusive community that Jesus imagined. Participate in a local ecumenical gathering and/or prayer service—or invite a pastor or two from another faith tradition to breakfast, coffee, lunch or dinner. Use social media to raise awareness of this important week!

On **January 19**, we remember the passing in 1886 of **George Errington**, the English Roman Catholic coadjutor bishop of Westminster whose estrangement from the provost of Westminster led to his being deprived of his coadjutorship by Pius IX in favor of the provost. He then declined the Vatican’s invitation to travel to Scotland and restore the Roman church’s hierarchy there. At the First Vatican Council, he opposed the neo-Ultramontanism of his rival, the new bishop of Westminster. In his memory, pray for all who suffer the personal and political attacks of their rivals!

On **January 20**, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the birth in 1953 of **Filipe Neri Antônio Sebastião do Rosário Ferrão**, the Latin Patriarch of the East Indies. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the Roman Catholics he serves!

On **January 20**, the Church celebrates **St. Fabian**, the farmer who was proclaimed pope when a dove landed on his head! Reflect today on your own incredible stories of the presence and activity of God's Spirit in your life and in the lives of those around you!

On **January 20**, we celebrate the birthday in 1965 of **John L. Allen, Jr.**, the CNN, NPR and National Catholic Reporter journalist who, as "America's leading Vaticanist," writes on "All Things Catholic." He has authored several books, including the inside story of how Joseph Ratzinger became Pope Benedict XVI, and a work on the controversial *Opus Dei*. *Newsweek* once remarked, "Outside of the North Korean government in Pyongyang, no bureaucracy is harder for a journalist to crack than the Vatican's. And no one does it better than John L. Allen, Jr." In his honor, indulge yourself with a quick internet search of his latest writings!

On **January 20**, we remember the passing in 2006 of **Milan "Emilio" Komar**, the Slovene Argentinian philosopher, essayist and polyglot who spoke eight languages and whose works were more influential in Latin America, Spain and Italy, than in his homeland, where his writings were banned by the Communist regime of Slovenia. As a young man, we was involved in Slovenian Catholic Action, and he established journals, publishing houses and schools in Slovenia before emigrating to Argentina, where he taught philosophy and pedagogy to the "Komar School" that developed around him. In his memory, consider your own willingness to be a prophet in places other than your homeland!

On **January 21**, the Church celebrates **St. Agnes**, who was martyred at age 12 for refusing to marry a prefect's son. 650 million women in our world today were married as children, largely as a result of tradition, poverty and insecurity: Learn more at girlsnotbrides.org, and use this day to advocate for all affected by the issue of child marriage!

On **January 21**, the Church of God in Christ celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2008 of **Presiding Bishop Charles Edward Blake, Sr.** In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 6.5 Christians he serves!

For the Roman church, **January 22** is the **Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children**. Explain the pastoral challenge of such a commemoration: While we esteem a "womb-to-tomb" ethic of life, we also recognize that women and men have found themselves in extremely

difficult situations where they made what they, inspired by the Spirit, believed to be the best choice at that time and in those circumstances. Rather than judge and condemn them, we want to be the loving, healing and forgiving face of Christ: Widen your prayer today to include those who've suffered such circumstances, those who are considering abortion, and those who call themselves "pro-life" but are unable to take strong pro-life stands against the death penalty and/or on such life issues as homelessness, hunger, incarceration, care for immigrants/refugees, & support for public education!

On **January 23**, the Church celebrates **St. Vincent of Saragosa**, who inspired others with his heroic witness of faith, and **St. Marianne Cope**, who cared for the sick and continued St. Damien of Moloka'i's ministry to Hawaiian patients infected with leprosy. Lift them up as models and mirrors of holiness!

On **January 23**, the Serbian Orthodox Church (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2010 of Miroslav Gavrilović as **Patriarch Irinej of Serbia**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 12 million Serbian Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **January 24**, the Church celebrates **St. Francis de Sales**, the Swiss bishop who inspired the development of lay spirituality with his first-of-its-kind book written for laity (and not for clerics), *An Introduction to the Devout Life*. In his honor, lift up the holiness of the laity who are the backbone of the Church and who share in the universal priesthood of Christ, and, in your own time of prayer and contemplation, meditate on de Sales' words: "The measure of love is to love without measure"!

On **January 24**, we remember the passing in 1971 of **William Griffith "Bill" Wilson**, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, the twelve-step spiritual program that helps two million people in some 10,000 groups to achieve and maintain sobriety. AA focuses on belief in a higher power, incorporates prayer into its gatherings, and assists members with the task of reconciliation. In Bill's memory, perform some small act that might benefit those suffering from any number of addictions!

On **January 25**, the Church celebrates the **Conversion of Paul**—proof that no one is outside of God's grace, that even the hardest of hearts can melt, and that "with God all things are possible" (Mt. 19:26)!

On **January 25**, we celebrate the birth in 1958 of **James C. "Jim" Collins**, the American author, lecturer and executive coach known for his study of organizations. His bestselling work, *Good to Great*, chronicles the lessons of organizations that went from good to great—and many of

which are now gone. In his honor, consider the lessons from his works that might help to ensure that your ministry is “built to last”!

On **January 25**, we remember the passing in 2015 of **Richard Peter McBrien**, the Catholic priest and Notre Dame professor who authored 25 books, including his popular *Catholicism*, which was criticized by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. He garnered the ire of conservatives for singling out “single-issue, anti-abortion Catholics,” criticizing church policy on obligatory celibacy and the ordination of women, and for suggesting in 1991 that “ecclesiastical hardliners” were engaged in a “prolonged, slow-motion coup...attempting to reverse the new, progressive course set by Pope John XXIII.” In his memory, consider concrete ways in which you might further the “new, progressive course” of the Church!

Sunday, January 26, 2020

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

Looking for a **new touch for your worship environment**: Instead of storing the Book of the Gospels on a shelf, display it opened, on a lectern, in the entrance to your worship space, and with the ribbon across the page opposite where the gospel of the coming Sunday is located (thus drawing attention to the evangelist’s words), so that anyone who passes by can glance at it!

Be sure to **choose whether the long form or the short form of the second reading will be proclaimed**: The former contains an extended discourse on body parts and ministries, and the latter has a focus on the essence of Paul’s message: We’re all parts of the one Body of Christ!

Also, be cautious of the **exclusive language** in today’s gospel: Many choose to offer more inclusive expressions of “I will make you fishers of men,” including “I will make you fishers of men and women,” “I will make you fishers of people,” “I will teach you how to bring others into the boat,” or “I will teach you to catch people!”

The thread in today’s scriptures: For the third Sunday in a row, we’re hearing of light—but this time from Proto-Isaiah (Is. 8:22–9:1), the psalmist (Ps. 27:1) and the Matthean Jesus (Mt. 4:16). In the long form of today’s gospel, Peter, Andrew, James and John follow the Light. If indeed

we're walking in the light, then we're working for unity (1Cor. 1:10) and ecumenism!

Holy humor: Creation can be exhausting: Just ask God! The story is told in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, of how God created the world. Do you remember the story? This is the way I imagine it took place. Before the earth was created, God was in heaven, talking to one of the angels and telling the angel about God's first day of creation. And God says to the angel, "Do you know what I just did? I just separated darkness from light, and I created a 24-hour period of alternating light and darkness! Isn't that great?" With enthusiasm, the angel replies, "That's great...but what will you do now?" And God replies, "I think I'll call it...a day!" [Insert a "ba-dum tss" drum-and-cymbal sting, then segue into how we're called to bring light to this world!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a source of light: perhaps a lamp or a flashlight, or the flashlight of your smart phone! The message of today's scripture is clear: We're called to be a light and to bring light to the darkness of this world!

It's the conclusion of the **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity** (January 19-25)! Mark the occasion with a prayer for unity!

On **January 26**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **Ss. Timothy & Titus**, Paul's associates who are a study in contrasts for the Apostle: Paul circumcised Timothy, so that Timothy would be accepted by Jewish Christians, but he refused to circumcise Titus after coming to believe that the gospel freed Gentiles from the Jewish Law. Are you the Paul of Timothy, hoping to fit in, or the Paul of Titus, taking a stand? Both Timothy and Titus were considered important enough by early Christian communities that pseudonymous letters were penned in their names and in their spirit; be sure to clarify that these Pastoral Letters were not penned by those whose names they bear!

On **January 26**, we remember the passing in 1977 of **Dietrich Richard Alfred von Hildebrand**, the German Catholic philosopher and theologian deemed "the 20th-century Doctor of the Church" by Pius XII. A vocal critic of Vatican II reforms, he especially resented the Council's liturgical reforms, stating: "Truly, if one of the devils in C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters* had been entrusted with the ruin of the liturgy, he could not have done it better." In his memory, pray for all who block the full and active participation of God's holy people in the Church and/or who resist attempts to make the Body of Christ more loving, inclusive, accessible, and true to the traditions of the ancient Church!

On **January 27**, the Church celebrates **St. Angela Merici**, who was moved by the plight of uneducated girls and laid the foundation for the Order of the Ursulines. Share her story and inspire those for whom she is a matron saint: the ill, the disabled and physically-challenged, and those grieving the loss of a parent!

On **January 28**, the Church celebrates **St. Thomas Aquinas**, whose thought was used to bring uniformity to the nascent seminary system of a fortress church: In honor of his day, take a break from his “straw” and indulge in some good post-scholastic philosophy and/or theology!

On **January 29**, we celebrate the birth in 1954 of **Oprah Gail Winfrey**, the American media executive, actress, talk show host and philanthropist sometimes ranked as the most influential woman in the world. The longtime host of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, she broke 20th-century taboos and allowed LGBTQ people to enter the mainstream of television appearances, and she would later reinvent her show with a focus on literature, self-improvement, mindfulness and spirituality. In her honor, consider how you might reinvent your ministry to reach more minds, hearts and souls!

On **January 29**, we remember the passing in 2010 of **Ralph Matthew McInerny**, the Notre Dame professor known for his Father Dowling mystery series, which was the basis for the 1980’s television series. After nearly 20 works of philosophy and theology, he wrote more than 60 works of fiction using five pseudonyms. In his memory, consider the creative ways in which you might interest others in our Catholic faith!

On **January 30**, we remember the passing in 1948 of **Mohandas Karamchand “Mahatma” Gandhi**, the Indian activist who inspired nonviolent movements for freedom and civil rights throughout the world. His vision of religious pluralism was especially important in a nation torn by Hindu, Sikh and Muslim factions. In his memory, reflect on how you are championing the Catholic values of social justice and peace in our world!

On **January 31**, the Church celebrates **St. John Bosco**, the patron saint of schoolchildren, magicians, disadvantaged youths, and juvenile delinquents. If you have congregants with a Salesian bent, consider hosting a children’s celebration in his honor. Stop by a local magic store and learn a gospel trick or two. Provide simple, kid-friendly food and drink. Invite a clown, balloon artist and/or magician!

On **January 31**, the Chaldean Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2013 of **Louis Raphaël Sako** as Catholicos-Patriarch of Babylon. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 640,000 Chaldean Catholics he serves!

On **February 1**, we remember the passing in 1653 of **Henri van Caelen**, the Dutch archpriest and diocesan censor who approved and glowingly recommended Jansen's *Augustinus*. He was named bishop of Roermond, but the pope refused to confirm his appointment. In his memory, reach out to those who have experienced a recent disappointment – and be the hands and heart of Christ to them!

On **February 1**, we remember the passing in 1899 of **Ernst Melzer**, the German philosopher and educator who was a prominent supporter of Güntherianism, became part of the German Old Catholic Church, and wrote a biography of theologian Johann Baptista Baltzer. In his memory, consider your own stance toward those with novel ideas – even with respect to theology and religion!

On **February 1**, the Russian Orthodox Church (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2009 of Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev as **Patriarch Kirill of Moscow**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the Russian Orthodox Catholics he serves!

Sunday, February 2, 2020

THE PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD

(white)

On **February 2**, the Church celebrates the **Presentation of the Lord** (or “Candlemass”)!

- It's the 40th day of Christmas, the day on which Mary & Joseph appeared in the temple for Mary's “purification.” **Pull touches of white into your décor** (perhaps with white flowers among your Ordinary Time greenery).
- In honor of the traditional celebration of Candlemass on this day, consider **blessing all the candles you'll use during the next year**, and invite congregants to bring candles to be blessed as well, for use in their prayer at home. Share **taper candles** (with bobaches) before the hymn of gathering, bless all candles and sprinkle them with holy water, then light the candles for a **procession** into your

worship space—to symbolize entering the temple with Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Have your thurifer (with incense and boat), crucifer (cross bearer) and lucifers (candle bearers) lead the procession. Place a large container of sand in the sanctuary, where congregants can leave their candles burning during the liturgy.

- **For the intellectually-curious**, note that, for farmers in an age before Groundhog Day, the weather on this day purportedly forecasted whether spring was on its way. The ancients believed that if it was sunny on Candlemass (similar to the groundhog seeing its shadow!), winter would return, and farmers would say: “When the wind’s in the East on Candlemass Day, there it will stick ‘til the second of May!”
- This is a big day in the Latino culture! For Latinos, it’s *el día de la candelaria*, the traditional day for taking down the Christmas creche and bringing the image of the Child Jesus (along with candles) to church, to be blessed. Upon returning home from Mass, rather than pack the image of the Child Jesus in a box for the year, Latino families sit their images of the Christ Child upright on their home altars. If you have a Latino community, **invite congregants to bring their images of the Child Jesus to church for a special blessing**, then share with them a copy of the prayer for the traditional *levantar el Niño Dios*, the rite of placing the image upright on their home altar.
- If you’re celebrating at night, illuminate the path to your worship space with candles inside *luminarias* (paper bags).
- Looking for a great community-building activity? **Invite those who found the image of the Child Jesus in their *rosca de reyes* on Epiphany, to bring the *tamales* and *atole* for a post-Mass gathering!**
- Do you have a relationship with a religious order and/or congregation? The Feast of the Presentation is also **World Day for Consecrated Life!** Honor those who have given their lives to religious life, invite them to renew their vows on this day, and challenge congregants of all ages to reflect on whether God might be calling them to such a life!

Note: **The introductory line of today’s second reading is misleading.** The Letter to the Hebrews is a pseudonymous letter, written in Paul’s name and spirit, but not written by Paul. Rather than confuse your listeners, consider beginning with, “A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews”!

The thread in today's scriptures: Malachi predicted that the Lord would come to the temple (Mal. 3:1), and that's what happens in today's gospel (Lk. 2:22-32), with the child Jesus, who "had to become like his brothers and sisters in every way" (Heb. 2:17). Today's psalm accompanied a ceremony of the entry of God (invisibly enthroned upon the ark of the covenant), followed by the people, into the temple: May we open the "gates" of our hearts and let in the king of glory (Ps. 24:7)!

Holy humor: Perhaps you've heard the tacky, old joke before, of the Sunday school teacher who asked her class, "What happened on Easter day?" We all know what happened on Easter day, right? The class was silent. But little Lisa raised his hand and said, "Teacher, I know what happens on Easter day! On Easter, Jesus comes out of the tomb!" The teacher encouraged Lisa: "And do you know what happens next?" And, without missing a beat, Lisa replies: "Jesus comes out of the tomb, and, if Jesus sees his shadow and goes back into the tomb, there'll be six more weeks of winter!" [Clarify Lisa's confusion of Easter with Groundhog Day, and segue into the fact that secular society celebrates Groundhog Day today, but that, as a Church, we celebrate something far more significant than one animal's weather forecast for a few weeks!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Do you remember the childhood rhyme, "here is the church, here is the steeple"? Before we try it together, we have to hold our hands the right way. Are you ready? Interlock your fingers like this, so your fingers are facing downward, inside the palm of the opposite hand. Now extend your index fingers: They're the steeple. And now cross your thumbs in front of the steeple: Your thumbs are the church doors. Ready? Let's say it together: "Here is the church [look at your hands], and here is the steeple [look at your index fingers]. Open the doors [remove your thumbs from the 'entrance' to the church], and see all the people [invert your hands, so that your fingers inside become the 'people']"! Can you see the "people"? In today's gospel, Simeon and Ana saw something special in their "church": God had come to them! Today's scriptures speak about God coming to God's temple—and isn't that what we celebrate every Sunday? God is present here in this church: in the Word proclaimed, in the bread and wine we share, but also...in the people around you! In the same way that we open the "doors" of the "churches" we make with our hands, to see the "people" inside, we need to open our hearts to God and others. Are we letting God and others into our hearts and into our lives? Let the king of glory enter!

February is here! **For the intellectually-curious**, incorporate the etymology of this month's name into your words at some point during this month! "February" comes from the Latin root, *februa*, "to cleanse." *Februalia* was the month during which the ancient Romans celebrated their annual festival of purification and atonement. This year, appropriately, Lent begins before the conclusion of *Februalia*!

On this first Sunday of February – which is Black History Month – U.S. Roman Catholic bishops invite their faithful to mark the **National Day of Prayer for the African American Family**. Consider your own honoring of **Black History Month**, perhaps even inviting a pastor from a local African American congregation to preach in your community!

On **February 3**, the Church celebrates **St. Blaise**: Consider having the traditional **blessing of throats** after Mass! Before Mass, be sure to find two long wax candles that can be tied with ribbon, in the form of a cross. Forego the tradition of lighting the candles: You create a fire hazard and a seemingly-shamanistic expression, and having to protect the floor from dripping wax detracts from the rite!

On **February 3**, we remember the passing in 1595 of **Cornelius Loos**, the first Roman Catholic priest and theologian to write against the witch trials that raged in Europe during the 1580's and 1590's. He was imprisoned and forced to recant, and his work was confiscated and suppressed by his church, only to be discovered 300 years later. In his memory, pray for all whose words, works and contributions are not appreciated during their lifetimes!

On **February 3**, we remember the passing in 1994 of **Frederick Charles Copleston**, the Jesuit priest, philosopher and historian of philosophy most known for his eleven-volume work, *A History of Philosophy*. He achieved popularity by debating atheist Bertrand Russell on the BBC in 1948. In his memory, wrestle with a paragraph or two of his history of philosophy!

On **February 5**, the Church celebrates **St. Agatha**, who was tortured and killed for spurning a senator's wish to marry her. Pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions her. If you missed the celebration of St. Agnes on January 21, you might steal ideas from that day. Otherwise, Agatha is the matron saint of breast cancer patients: Consider hosting a health fair and/or bringing in a survivor or some other guest speaker to speak of preventative measures for breast cancer. Other forms of cancer – including testicular cancer – are also very real: If you're going to have a moment of raising awareness to cancer, consider the various cancers that might affect your congregants!

On **February 5**, we celebrate the birth in 1928 of **Martin Emil Marty**, the American Lutheran religious scholar who has written extensively on religion in the U.S. He has written more than 5,000 articles and encyclopedia entries – in addition to the two books that he authored and edited each year of his professorship. In his honor, consider what you’re writing – or not – about our faith!

On **February 6**, the Church celebrates **St. Paul Miki and his 25 companions**, missionaries to Japan who were forced to march 600 miles to their crucifixion in Nagasaki. Share prayers for modern-day martyrs who are persecuted for their faith!

On **February 6**, we remember the passing in 1597 of **Franjo Petriš** (a.k.a., Franciscus Patricius), the Venetian philosopher and scientist of Croatian descent who undertook a comprehensive study of contemporary science and defended Platonism against followers of Aristotle. He advanced that, whereas Plato foreshadowed Christian revelation, Aristotle’s teaching was in direct opposition to Christianity. In his memory, consider the Aristotelian notions – like transubstantiation – of your own theology and spirituality!

On **February 6**, we remember the passing in 1872 of **Auguste Joseph Alphonse Gratry**, the French priest and gifted academic who held the seat formerly occupied by Voltaire and who advocated for modern scientific exploration in tandem with theology. He helped to reconstitute the French Oratory, a society of priests dedicated to education. Most notably, he was one of the principal opponents of the dogma of purported papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council. In his memory, pray for all who have the courage to question the thoughts and beliefs that are imposed on them by others!

On **February 7**, we remember the passing in 2014 of **Daniel J. Harrington**, the Jesuit New Testament professor who edited the 18-volume *Sacra Pagina* series of New Testament commentaries. His writing interests included biblical interpretation, Second Temple Judaism, the Dead Sea Scrolls, biblical language and theology, the synoptic gospels, and Pauline theology. In his memory, choose a volume of *Sacra Pagina*, and see what you can learn from a quick read of a paragraph or two!

On **February 8**, the Church celebrates **St. Jerome Emiliani** and **St. Josephine Bakhita**. Jerome was dedicated to the poor and disadvantaged; encourage visits to hospitals and orphanages in his honor. Josephine was enslaved for more than 15 years; bring a spotlight to the various slave trades that persist in our world!

On **February 8**, we remember the passing in 1692 of **Matthias Tanner**, the Bohemian Jesuit who served as rector of the imperial university and as superior of his province. He fostered devotion to the Mass and dedicated his leisure time to sharing the heroic deeds of prominent Jesuits. In his memory, consider how you're sharing your leisure time!

Sunday, February 9, 2020

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

Note the **exclusive language** in today's responsorial psalm: "The just *man* is a light" can just as easily be rephrased, "The just are a light," and all male pronouns in the psalm can easily be recast in the third person plural (they/them/their)!

The thread in today's scriptures: Are you salt and light (Mt. 5:13-16)? Can others "taste and see" the goodness of the Lord in you (Ps. 34:8)? Being salt and light has less to do with human strength, courage or wisdom (1Cor. 2:3-5) and more to do with the light we produce when we act with justice (Is. 58:7-8, Ps. 112:4)!

Holy humor: Hold up a light bulb, and loosen up your listeners with a few light bulb jokes. Hundreds are available online. Try three or four of the following, highlight how, despite the humor of these jokes, all the people contained therein are bringing light to their world...through the changing of a lightbulb. Then segue into the theme of light in today's scriptures!

- How many psychotherapists does it take to change a light bulb? One, but the light bulb really has to want to change!
- How many chiropractors does it take to change a light bulb? One, but it takes six visits!
- How many graduate students does it take to change a light bulb? One, but it takes him five years to do it!
- How many college football players does it take to change a light bulb? One, and he gets three credits for it!
- How many police officers does it take to change a light bulb? None. It turned itself in.

- How many folk singers does it take to change a light bulb? Two. One to change the bulb, and the other to write a song about how good the old bulb was!
- How many vertically-challenged people does it take to change a light bulb? One – with a ladder. They’re short, not dumb!
- How many gorillas does it take to change a light bulb? Only but, but it takes a lot of lightbulbs!
- How many lawyers does it take to change a light bulb? How many can you afford?
- How many magicians does it take to change a light bulb? It depends on what you want to change it into!
- How many men does it take to change a light bulb or a roll of toilet paper? No one knows; it’s never happened!

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Yes, this is the fourth Sunday in a row in which the scriptures speak of light. This Sunday, light a pillar candle on the altar (be sure the flame can be seen by all!), and invite listeners to imagine the difference the candle would make if the room were dark. Explain that the candle represents the light of Christ that all of us receive in baptism. Now take an empty tin can – large enough to fit over the candle, but not too large, so that the candle will quickly burn out if the can is placed over it. Talk about how we sometimes tend to hide our light—while quickly covering and uncovering the candle. (Be careful not to let the can be there long enough for the flame to extinguish yet.) Then place the can over the candle (allowing the candle to be snuffed out by the lack of oxygen) and talk about how it is that some people attempt to entirely hide the light of Christ that they received at baptism. What happens? Take the can off the candle to reveal that the flame is extinguished. This is what happens when we attempt to hide the light of Christ, or when the flavor goes out of the salt. Yikes! Relight the candle, hold it high, and speak to the gospel admonition to let your light shine!

Today is **World Marriage Day!** Consider floral arrangements in your worship space to honor and celebrate married couples. Invite couples to stand and renew their vows to one another. Cue couples to stand, invite each person standing to take the hands of his/her spouse, and to insert appropriate names after the words “I” and “you.” Be conscious of the fact that some couples may be same-sex couples: To be inclusive, consider using the words: “I, ___, take you, ___, to be my spouse” or “...as my beloved.” Immediately after the renewal, invite all who are

seated to extend their hands for a prayer of blessing, then lead all in a round of applause for all who renewed their vows!

Valentine's Day is almost here! Secure a volunteer to set up a Valentine's Day photo booth or photo wall, so that couples can get their photos after Mass. Avoid schmaltzy cupids, and be sure the photographer is thinking about how the photos will look when cropped. Looking to score a few points? Print copies of the photos and share them next Sunday with those in the photos!

On **February 9**, the Old Catholic Church remembers the passing in 1920 of **Gerard Gul**, the seventeenth archbishop of Utrecht, known for assisting the establishment of the Polish National Catholic Church in the United States. Gul also consecrated Arnold Mathew Harris, the founder of the Old Catholic Church in Great Britain. Pray today for all who so courageously act to establish new communities and ministries to serve the people of God in new and diverse ways!

On **February 9**, we celebrate the birth in 1925 of **John Boswell Cobb, Jr.**, the American theologian, philosopher & environmentalist often referred to as the preeminent scholar in the fields of process philosophy and process theology. The author of more than 50 books, he has written on religious pluralism, interfaith dialogue, the need to reconcile religion and science, and our need to preserve the world on which we depend. In his honor, consider your own stances toward these important issues!

On **February 9**, we remember the passing in 2012 of **John Harwood Hick**, the English theologian and philosopher of religion who contributed to theodicy, eschatology, Christology and religious pluralism. He is known for comparing the "Ptolemaic view of religion," that Christianity is the only way to true salvation and knowledge of God, with "Copernican" views of religious pluralism. In his memory, reflect on how your view of religion might be like the parable of the blind men and the elephant—and consider your stance toward the many spiritual and religious paths that lead up the mountain of the Most High!

On **February 10**, the Church celebrates **St. Scholastica**, the twin sister of St. Benedict, who invoked a storm to keep him from leaving her deathbed. Consider ways to spend a bit more time with those you love!

On **February 10**, the Old Catholic Church remembers the passing in 1937 of **Francis Kenninck**, the 18th archbishop of Utrecht, who abolished compulsory clerical celibacy in the Old Catholic Church and cleared the path to restored communion between the Old Catholic Church and the Anglican Church. Perform a small act today that might lead to greater unity in the beautifully-diverse body that is the Church!

On **February 10**, the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2013 of John Yazigi as **Patriarch John X of Antioch**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 1.8 million Greek Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **February 11**, the Roman church celebrates the optional memorial of **Our Lady of Lourdes**, the 1858 apparition in which Mary self-identified under the recently-proclaimed (1854) title of the Immaculate Conception and to whom many miracles of healing have been attributed. John Paul II declared February 11 the **World Day of the Sick** and encouraged prayers for those in need of healing. Encourage congregants to call and/or visit family members and friends who might be ill. Host a celebration of the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. Have congregants reach out to the homebound who might be able to join you, if provided a ride. Consider blessing all who work in healing professions as well!

On **February 11**, we remember the passing in 1650 of **René Descartes**, the French philosopher, mathematician and scientist who laid the foundation for 17th-century rationalism and is considered one of the most notable intellectual figures of the Dutch Golden Age and of the Scientific Revolution. Known for his *cogito ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"), he rejected the splitting of corporeal substance into the Aristotelian categories of matter and form, and he insisted on the absolute freedom of God's act of creation. In his memory, consider other possible eucharistic theologies than the outdated Aristotelian categories contained in "transubstantiation"!

On **February 12**, we remember the passing in 1834 of **Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher**, the German theologian, philosopher, and biblical scholar known for his attempt to reconcile the criticisms of the Enlightenment with traditional Christianity. Known as the "Father of Modern Liberal Theology," he played an important role in the modern field of biblical hermeneutics, and Karl Barth's neo-orthodoxy was largely an attempt to challenge Schleiermacher's "liberal Christianity." In his memory, take a moment today to reacquaint yourself with his life and works!

On **February 12**, we remember the passing in 2000 of **Richard A. McCormick**, the Jesuit theologian who helped reshape Catholic thought in the U.S. by his writings on moral theory and social teachings. An expert in Catholic medical ethics, he was one of five moral theologians who crafted in 1964 a political position that would permit abortion in U.S. law. He wrote that the prohibition of discussion of *Humanae vitae* led to "a debilitating malaise that has undermined the credibility of the

[Roman Catholic] magisterium in other areas." In his memory, familiarize yourself with his works and/or send up a prayer for the brave moral theologians who continue to explore positions that may not be accepted by more conservative voices!

On **February 13**, we celebrate the birth in 1943 of **Elaine Pagels**, the American religious historian and Princeton professor who wrote widely on early Christianity and the Gnostic gospels. Her works highlight the way in which women have been viewed throughout Jewish and Christian history. In her honor, perform your own brief study of a Gnostic gospel that didn't "make the cut" in the scriptural canon, so that you can enrich your preaching and storytelling!

On **February 14**, the Church celebrates the brother-saints, **Cyril & Methodius**, the "Apostles to the Slavs"! They were a "bridge" between the West and the East: In their honor, learn about Eastern cultures and/or reach out to persons of other language groups!

On **February 15**, the Syriac Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2009 of **Ignatius Ephrem Joseph III Yonan** as Patriarch of Antioch. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 205,000 Syriac Catholics he serves!

Sunday, February 16, 2020

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

Note the **exclusive language** in today's scriptures: In the first reading, "God understands *man's* every deed" can just as easily be rephrased, "God understands *our* every deed," and the four references to "brother" in the gospel might just as easily be "brother or sister"!

You'll need to **choose whether you'll proclaim the short form of today's gospel or the longer form**, which includes an introductory three verses to note that Jesus came to fulfill the law, and an additional ten verses interspersed among the words of the short form. For the sake of your listeners, don't decide lightly to opt for the longer form!

The thread in today's scriptures: "Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord" (Ps. 119:1) and keep God's commandments (Sir. 15:15)! The Matthean Jesus expands on the Law of Moses: If you get angry, you're guilty of murder (Mt. 5:22), and if you look lustfully at another person,

you're committing adultery (Mt. 5:28)! Paul foreshadows Jesus' great commandment of love for God in the synoptic gospels (Mt. 22:37, Mk. 12:30, Lk. 10:27): We can't even begin to imagine what God has in store for those who love God (1Cor. 2:9)!

Holy humor: Have you read the Bible? If so, you probably know the answer to this simple question: Who was the most flagrant lawbreaker in the whole, entire Bible? Adam and Eve, who disobeyed God? No, they weren't the most flagrant lawbreakers in the Bible. Saul, who persecuted the early Christians before becoming Paul? No, he wasn't the most flagrant lawbreaker in the Bible. King David, who killed a man, just to have the man's wife? No, he wasn't the most flagrant lawbreaker in the Bible. The most flagrant lawbreaker in the Bible was...Moses: He broke all Ten Commandments at once! [Segue to an explanation of Moses breaking the tablets on which the Law was written (Ex. 32:19), then to how it is that we, too, break God's commandments.]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a lit candle and a clear container of water! Sirach 15:16 warns us that our choice to follow God's commandments—or not—is like choosing refreshing, life-giving water—or destructive fire! He continues: "Whatever you choose, stretch out your hand. Before everyone are life and death, whichever they choose will be given them" (Sir. 15:16-17). That's a powerful image! Which will you choose? Are you burning others with the "fire" of anger and/or playing with the "fire" of lust? Oh, that we would all have the wisdom (1Cor. 2:6) to realize what we're doing!

In the U.S., we celebrate **President's Day** this weekend: Be sure to pray in a special way today for our President and for all world leaders!

On **February 16**, we celebrate the birth in 1948 of **Ulrich Leonard "Eckhart" Tölle**, the German-Canadian spiritual teacher and bestselling author referred to as "the most spiritually influential person in the world." After struggling with depression for the first 29 years of his life, he experienced a transformation and went on to pen *The Power of Now* and *A New Earth*. In his honor, be inspired by his works and/or reach out to a loved one who might be suffering from depression!

On **February 17**, the Church celebrates the **Seven Founders of the Servite Order**, seven prominent men of Florence who withdrew to monastic life while finding ways to support their wives and widows. Pause today to consider the active/contemplative balance in your life!

On **February 17**, we celebrate the birth in 1934 of **John Dominic Crossan**, the Irish-American New Testament scholar and historian of early Christianity known for both his scholarly and popular works. A former

Catholic priest, he has focused his research on the historical Jesus and the cultural anthropology of the New Testament world. Crossan's work has garnered controversy due to his suggestions that Jesus' divinity is metaphorical and that the second coming of Christ is a late corruption of Jesus' message. In his honor, enjoy some time reading up on the historical Jesus and his message!

On **February 18**, we remember the passing in 1546 of **Martin Luther**, the German Roman Catholic priest who dared to question the teachings and practices of his church, including indulgences and salvation through works. He translated the Bible to the vernacular, esteemed scripture as the only source of divinely-revealed knowledge, and brought attention to the priesthood of all the baptized. A composer and professor of theology, he refused to renounce his views and was excommunicated by Leo X and condemned as an outlaw by Emperor Charles V. In his memory, pray for all who are ostracized by those whom they love!

On **February 20**, we celebrate the birth in 1947 of **John Calvin Maxwell**, the American pastor, speaker and author whose many books primarily focus on leadership. Considered by many to be the #1 author on leadership, he often shares stories of the struggles he faced as a young pastor attempting to build congregations. In his honor, prayerfully consider how you are developing the leader within you – and the leaders around you!

On **February 20**, the Ancient Church of the East celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 1972 of Shlemun Giwargis as **Catholicos Patriarch Addai II of Baghdad & Basra**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the people he serves!

On **February 21**, the Church celebrates **St. Peter Damian**, the gifted scholar and Doctor of the Church who spoke out against clerical abuses and challenged bishops to recommit themselves to their vocation. When is the last time that you spoke out against clerical abuse(s)? If you are a bishop, recommit yourself today to your vocation of leading, teaching and sanctifying God's people – with a special focus on leading, since you can't teach and sanctify others if you're walking alone!

On **February 21**, we remember the passing in 2018 of **William Franklin "Billy" Graham, Jr.**, the prominent Southern Baptist evangelist and advisor to U.S. presidents whose annual "crusades" and sermons helped some 2.2 billion people during his lifetime to explore the Bible and its connection to daily life. He encouraged new converts to become members of the Protestant and Catholic churches near them. In his

memory, consider what you're doing to expand and multiply your efforts to evangelize!

On **February 22**, the Roman church celebrates the **Chair of St. Peter**, the foundational teaching *cathedra* presumed to have been passed by Peter to his purported successors. The feast traces to the fourth-century celebration of *Parentalia*, a winter commemoration of deceased family members and friends when a chair (*cathedra*) was left empty in memory of the deceased. Pray in a special way today for the bishops and church leaders who influenced you. If you celebrate Mass, draw attention to an empty chair as a symbol of their abiding presence with us!

On **February 22**, we remember the elevation in 1940 of **Tenzin Gyatso** as the Dalai Lama, the foremost spiritual leader of the Buddhist people of Tibet. An ecumenical figure holding together disparate religious and regional groups, the Dalai Lama actively models and promotes Buddhist values and traditions to the world. In his honor, consider your own stance toward our sisters and brothers of diverse religious traditions!

Sunday, February 23, 2020

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

Note the **exclusive language** in today's scriptures: The gospel reference to "brothers" might just as easily be rephrased "brothers and sisters"!

This is the last Sunday that we'll sing the **Alleluia** until the Easter Vigil: Sing it with gusto!

The thread in today's scriptures: Last Sunday, we heard Paul speak of the need for us to love God; this week, we turn our attention to loving others (Lev. 19:18)—even our enemies (Mt. 5:44)! In this way, we model the compassion of God, who is kind and merciful (Ps. 103:8), and we respect the fact that others are temples of God (1Cor. 3:16-17)!

Holy humor: The story is told of the priest who was preaching on the need to love and forgive our enemies. She asked her listeners to raise their hands if they had forgiven all their enemies. Many hands went up, but there was one old, gray-haired woman in the back of the church who didn't raise her hand. The priest asked her: "Are you denying forgiveness to your enemies?" "Oh no, dear," the grey-haired woman said. "I just have no enemies. None whatsoever!" "What a blessing!" the

priest responded. "What a wonderful life you must live! Now, for those of us who feel that we have enemies, tell us your secret: How is it that you don't have any enemies?" The woman paused thoughtfully and replied, "I'm 98 years old. Fortunately, I outlived them, and all my goll-darned enemies are...dead!" [Segue to today's message that we're called to share God's love, kindness and compassion with all people – yes, even with our enemies!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Make a visual of the famous phrase attributed to Gandhi: "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." Many images online contain Gandhi's image, but perhaps the image will hit closer to home if it contains a blind person or the Three Stooges (known for hitting one another back) or someone from the news who recently suffered tragic loss at the hands of others. Remember the compassion that John Paul II showed to the young man who tried to assassinate him in 1981? How might we similarly reflect God's love and forgiveness to others?

It's the **last Sunday before Lent**:

- **Invite congregants to bring their palms from past years**, and have a ritual burning of palms in a large brazier at the end of the celebration. Grind the remains, or run them through an old flour sifter, and you have your ashes for Ash Wednesday!
- Host an intergenerational *Mardi Gras* celebration after Mass, with projects and activities to enhance Lenten prayer and reflection at home. Play *Mardi Gras* music in the background. Host a *Mardi Gras* parade with hats and masks (and possibly beads, depending on the symbolism of these in your community), with congregants singing songs like "We Are Marching in the Light of God."
- Lent is almost here! Is your **Lenten calendar** finalized? Consider opportunities of prayer, like the weekly Stations of the Cross, the praying of the Sorrowful Mysteries of the rosary, and/or a parish mission/retreat. Think about community-building opportunities, like fish fries or soup dinners. Consider "fasting" from a parish meeting or two, as a way of honoring this season and allowing people more time to focus on the reason for the upcoming season. Schedule times for individual confession and a communal rite of reconciliation and a celebration of the rite of anointing. Are your palms and paschal candle ordered? Will you have a live enactment of the Way of the Cross? Do you have catechumens who will receive sacraments at the Easter Vigil? Remember that

the Church's sacraments of initiation are not celebrated during Mass on the Sundays of Lent.

- To prepare for the Lenten season of reconciliation, consider how your environment might be made more hospitable and welcoming; host a **“wheelchair challenge,”** where clergy and lay leaders tour all parts of your property and facilities in wheelchairs and/or walkers, to see what aspects of the property and facilities might be made more accommodating for persons with more limited mobility. Those who participate will grow in empathy and have several ideas for improvements!

If you haven't already given a nod to **Black History Month**, this might be an ideal Sunday for hosting an African-American preacher with all the energy and enthusiasm s/he might bring!

On **February 23**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Polycarp**, the presumed friend of various eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry. The Romans tried to burn him at the stake—and failed. Pray today for those members of the Roman church whose fixations and lack of psychological and/or emotional health continue to affect our ministries in the Independent and Old Catholic traditions!

On **February 24**, we remember the passing in 1862 of **Franz Jacob Clemens**, the German philosopher and Catholic layman who defended the theological stances of the Church. He was so popular that 70 students followed him when he was transferred from the University of Bonn to the University of Münster. In his memory, consider your own defense of our liberating faith!

On **February 24**, we remember the passing in 1863 of **Anton Günther**, the Czech-Austrian priest whose “liberal Catholic” Hegelian ideas of the Trinity, of the person of Christ, and of creation as the “non-ego” of God were condemned by scholastic theologians of his day. After the First Vatican Council, many adherents of Güntherianism joined the Old Catholic Church. In his memory, pray for all who attempt to enrich theology with ideas and perspectives from other disciplines!

On **February 24**, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2013 of Simeon Nikolov Dimitrov as **Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 11 million Bulgarian Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **February 25**, we celebrate the birth in 1939 of **Paul Francis Knitter**, the theology professor known for his writings on religious pluralism. Criticized by Joseph Ratzinger, he was one of 97 Catholic theologians and

leaders in 1984 who signed a statement calling for pluralism in the Roman church's conversations on its myopic position on abortion. In his honor, consider the place of pluralism in your own views and theology!

On **February 25**, the Maronite Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the birth in 1940 of **Cardinal Patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rahi**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 3.5 million Maronite Catholics he serves!

Wednesday, February 26, 2020

ASH WEDNESDAY

(purple)

Catholics are famous for wanting their ashes and their palms: Be sure to **schedule your Ash Wednesday Mass(es) and/or service(s) at times that are convenient** for those who have families and/or other responsibilities, like work or school!

Be sure that **your worship environment** expresses the starkness of Lent.

- **Strip the altar and ambo.**
- **Remove all flowers, green plants, and unnecessary furnishings.**
- Find a way to draw attention to the **crucifix** (e.g., drape purple cloth behind the head and over the arms of the cross), and to the **Stations of the Cross** (if they adorn your space).
- **Use fabric sparingly**, remembering that purple is used to mark the season, not to decorate it.
- Consider incorporating **decorative accents**, like, burlap, ashes, rocks, sand, broken pottery and cacti.
- **Decorate the entrance to your worship space** with wood or metal crosses and/or wreaths of dried grapevines.
- Be sure to steam or iron your **Lenten vestments**—and to coordinate the color of your vestments with any other touches of purple in your worship space!

Think through **the details of this day**:

- Do you have ashes?
- How, when and by whom will they be blessed? [Remember: Ashes are only blessed once.]
- Will you share them after the homily, or outside the Mass?

- Will you need other ministers (clergy and/or laity) to assist with the distribution? When/how will you train them? Which formula will they use for the imposition of ashes? Do they know how they will clean the sacramental of ashes from their fingers, perhaps with premoistened towelettes?
- Do you have a song or instrumental music to accompany the distribution of ashes?
- Try something different: Because the Church's rite doesn't mandate signing the forehead with ashes in the form of a cross, designate (and announce) a minister who will be happy to assist with the more ancient symbol of sprinkling ashes on the heads of those who, in line with the gospel mandate (Mt. 6:16-18), would like a different experience of Ash Wednesday!

Remember: The Penitential Rite is *not* used due to the distribution of ashes, the Creed is omitted, and the *Gloria* and *Alleluia* are *not* sung today; lead the congregation in another, easy-to-sing gospel acclamation!

The thread in today's scriptures: The Matthean Jesus speaks of what we now know as the three traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting & almsgiving (Mt. 6:1-6 & 16-18). The first reading (Jl. 2:12-18) and psalm (Ps. 51) are acknowledgements of our sinfulness (Ps. 51:4-6)—but more importantly of God's mercy and compassion (Jl. 2:13 & Ps 51:3). "Reconciled to God" during this Lenten season, may we be worthy "ambassadors of Christ" (2Cor. 5:20)!

Holy humor: The story is told of the youth minister who was a bit of a prankster. He was invited to be an ash minister on Ash Wednesday, and to share ashes with some of the young people who were known to pull pranks on him from time to time. So when the young man who often instigated the most pranks stepped up to him for ashes, the youth minister traced a cross of ashes on the young man's forehead [trace a cross in the air with your right thumb, as if sharing ashes with an invisible person], reverently saying, "Repent and believe the good news." And then he quickly swiped his ash-filled thumb over the young man's upper lip [make a small arc with your thumb, as though marking the person with a big ash moustache]. The youth minister flashed a wry smile, thinking revenge is so sweet, and you know what he said, right? "Happy 'Stache Wednesday!" [Segue into a lesson on the symbolism of the ashes and why we don't wear the ashes like a moustache, but instead have them sprinkled on our heads or marked on our foreheads in the shape of a cross.]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider the ashes! Congregants will leave with the ashes on their forehead: Tie a strong message to that visual! As your “hook” (to pique interest), invite congregants to sing with you “Ring around the rosie,” then draw attention to the imagery of “ashes, ashes” and note how “we all fall down” in death—hence, the symbolism of the ashes, which come from a plant that has died and been burned! Speak to the ancient connection of ashes with repentance.

Congregants will likely default to the thinking with which they were programmed: that they should “give up something” for Lent (e.g., candy, desserts, soda, coffee, smoking, Facebook). Explain that these are forms of fasting. Encourage them to consider instead **a Lent of service** as a sacrifice that might help others: assisting an elderly neighbor, serving a meal at a soup kitchen, visiting the homebound, etc.

Encourage congregants to go deeper in their exploration of all three traditional Lenten practices. For those on social media, suggest a “**virtual**” Lenten journey:

- Pray by sharing scripture, prayers and reflections to social media;
- Fast from mean comments, mean-spirited memes, rigid views on religion and/or politics;
- Fast by spending less time on social media and/or by abstaining from sites that may detract from holiness; and
- Engage in almsgiving by raising awareness of and contributing to worthy online campaigns for persons and organizations in need!

Ash Wednesday is a traditional day to **abstain from meat**: consider sharing the connection between going meatless and protecting the environment. Search the internet for resources (e.g., <https://www.downtoearth.org/go-veggie/top-10-reasons>).

For the intellectually-curious, share a history of Lent, how the first day of Lent is determined, how the 40 days are counted, and how Sundays are not numbered among the 40 days of Lent!

If you’re thinking ahead to Easter, this may be an opportunity to share giving envelopes with those wishing to help buy **Easter lilies**, to decorate your worship space for the Triduum! Tell them what the suggested donation is for each lily, and tell them that they’ll be able to take their lily/lilies home with them at the conclusion of the Easter Mass they

attend. These lilies can be shared with loved ones on Easter and/or planted outside!

On **February 27**, we remember the passing in 1854 of **Hugues Félicité Robert de Lamennais**, the French priest, philosopher and political theorist who is considered a forerunner of liberal and social Catholicism. In response to Rome's reactionary absolutism, he renounced his priesthood and published a polemic against the Roman church and its conspiring with kings against the people. Gregory XVI condemned the work, calling it "small in size, but immense in perversity" – an act largely seen as squelching open expression of modernist ideas in Catholic circles. Lamennais' views on religion and government softened, giving way to staunch Ultramontane views. In his memory, pause to consider how your own views and beliefs have changed over time!

On **February 27**, we remember the passing in 2003 of **Fred McFeely Rogers**, the Presbyterian minister, musician and writer who became the beloved American television personality in "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood." Known as a kind, neighborly educator of kids, he was famous for saying, "You've made this day a special day, by just your being you. There's no person in the whole world like you, and I like you just the way you are." In his memory, take a moment today to let as many people as possible know that...you love them just the way they are!

On **February 28**, we remember the passing in 1979 of **Hugh George de Willmott Newman** (a.k.a., Mar Georgius I), the Independent Catholic bishop whose conditional "cross-consecration" with bishops from 1945 to 1955 resulted in the consolidation of several lines of apostolic succession that were subsequently shared with hundreds of bishops around the world. In his memory, share a prayer of thanksgiving for all who have allowed Independent Catholics throughout the world to enjoy the Church's sacraments!

On **February 28**, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church celebrates the anniversary of the appointment in 2013 of Teklemariam Asrat as **Catholicos and Co-Patriarch Abune Mathias I**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the people he serves!

On **February 29**, the Eastern Orthodox Church celebrates the birth in 1940 of **Dimitrios Arhondonis**, who became Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 260 million Eastern Orthodox Catholics he serves!

Sunday, March 1, 2020
FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT
(green)

Remember: The *Gloria* and Alleluia are *not* sung today. Lead the congregation in another, easy-to-sing gospel acclamation!

You'll need to choose whether you'll proclaim the shorter form of today's second reading, or the longer one, which suggests that Adam was "the type of the one who was to come" and intersperses additional verses throughout the shorter form.

Note the **exclusive language** in today's scriptures: In the first reading, the creation of "man" is really the story of the creation of the human person, and the second reading can easily be rephrased, "death came to all *people*, inasmuch as all sinned." Note also the three problematic uses of "one man."

The thread in today's scriptures: Paul tells us that "through one man, sin entered the world" (Rom. 5:12), and that story is shared by the Yahwist author of Genesis (Gen. 3:1-7). Like Adam and Eve, all of us have sinned and are in need of God's mercy (Ps. 51:3). In contrast, the *Quelle* Jesus was able to resist sin and temptation (Mt. 4:1-11).

Holy humor: The story is told of how Adam and Eve were wandering in the Garden of Eden, now in their new, makeshift clothes, since they tasted the forbidden fruit and realized that they were naked. Suddenly, God comes into the garden, and, seeing the clothes, God begins to yell with a thunderous voice: "Why?!? How could you do this?!? Were all the other fruits of the garden not enough?!? Why are you wearing those clothes?!?" Scared and surprised, Adam looked at Eve and realized it was no using lying to God. Shaking, he said with a trembling voice: "We... we just... we just... we just updated our privacy policy!" [Segue into the story of Adam & Eve's sin, which led to their new "privacy policy."]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a fig, pomegranate and/or citron! Because the same Latin word (*malum*) can mean "apple" or "evil," Western Europeans invented the notion that the forbidden fruit of Genesis 3:6 was an apple. Blow your congregants' minds with the suggestion, rooted in scholarship, that it wasn't an apple! Rabbi Nechemia is credited with suggesting that the forbidden fruit was a fig, since Adam and Eve purportedly clothed themselves with fig leaves. The ancient Greeks associated Persephone's pomegranate—a fruit indigenous to the Middle East—with knowledge of the underworld.

Other scholars suggest it was a citron. Regardless, the problem wasn't the apple, fig, pomegranate or citron in the tree; the problem was the pair (the "pear") on the ground!

If you have **catechumens** who will receive sacraments at the Easter Vigil, consider hosting the **Rite of Election** as part of your Mass today, with your catechumens' bishop in attendance! Prepare lovely copies of the Creed and Lord's Prayer, to be shared with them. Provide catechesis on the elements of the rite, including the *ephphetha*.

March is here! **For the intellectually-curious**, share a lesson on the etymology of this month! Named after Mars, the Roman god of war, March was the month to resume military campaigns interrupted by the winter. As the outside world thaws, reflect on those "frozen" aspects of your life that might benefit from a bit of thawing!

Daylight Saving Time begins next Sunday: Be sure to remind people to "spring forward" – or they'll arrive an hour late for Mass!

On **March 1**, the World Evangelical Alliance celebrates the anniversary of the 2015 installation of **Secretary-General Efraim Tendo**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him & for the 600 million Evangelicals he serves!

On **March 3**, the Church celebrates **St. Katharine Drexel**, the American heiress-turned-educator who dedicated her life to Native Americans west of the Mississippi. Consider how you are working for racial justice, and inspire philanthropists with stories of their matron saint!

On **March 3**, we remember the passing in 1900 of **Franz Heinrich Reusch**, the Roman Catholic priest excommunicated for his stance against purported papal infallibility. He then exercised his priestly ministry in the Old Catholic Church, serving as Vicar General for Old Catholic Bishop Joseph Reinkens—a position he resigned when the German Old Catholic Church allowed clergy to marry. A prolific writer, he served on the Old Catholic theological faculty at the University of Bonn and was the official reporter of the Reunion Conferences held in Bonn during those years. In his memory, pray for all who struggle to find a home in the various manifestations of the Catholic Church!

On **March 3**, the Russian Old Orthodox Church celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2003 of Alexander Kalinin as **Patriarch Alexander of Moscow and all Russia**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the people he serves!

On **March 4**, the Church celebrates **St. Casimir**, the Polish prince renowned for his piety and devotion. He was made weak from fasting, and he died of a lung disease. Pray and/or reach out today to those who might be growing weak under the burdens that life has handed them!

On **March 4**, we remember the passing in 1896 of **Peter Richard Kenrick**, the Roman Catholic archbishop of St. Louis, Missouri, who courageously stood against American Ultramontane bishops and opposed the definition of purported papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council. He wrote, "We think it most inopportune to define as a dogma of faith an opinion which seems to us a novelty in the Church, destitute of solid foundation in Scripture and Tradition, and contradicted by indisputable evidence." Subsequent harassment caused him to turn over his archdiocese to his coadjutor. In his memory, pray for all who take courageous stands on the issues, knowing that such strong stands may result in unexpected consequences!

On **March 5**, we celebrate the birth in 1933 of **Walter Kasper**, the German Roman Catholic cardinal and theologian who built bridges between various denominations as President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. For 10 years, he met with like-minded cardinals to discuss reforms of the Roman church with respect to such issues as collegiality, the appointment of bishops, the primacy of the papacy, and the Church's approach to sexual morality. He is known for his proposal to admit divorced and remarried couples to communion—but also for his criticism of the Anglican Church, for its allowance of female clergy and same-sex marriage. In his honor, pray for all who esteem and work to strengthen ecumenical relations!

On **March 5**, we celebrate the birth in 1963 of **Joel Scott Osteen**, the American televangelist and author whose sermons are viewed by seven million viewers each week. He has written ten books that have been ranked #1 on *The New York Times* bestseller list. In his honor, listen to one of his sermons and/or read a chapter from one of his books, to see what you might learn and apply to your own style of preaching, teaching and community building!

On **March 5**, the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2007 of Isaac Thottumkal as **Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis, Major Archbishop-Catholicos of Trivandrum**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 500,000 Syro-Malankara Catholics he serves!

On **March 7**, the Church celebrates **Ss. Perpetua & Felicity**, the wealthy noblewoman and slave girl who were united through their martyrdom. Both were mothers of very young children. Pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions them, and find a way to acknowledge the many sacrifices parents make as they “lay down their lives” for their children!

On **March 7**, we celebrate the birth in 1946 of **Daniel Goleman**, the journalist and author most known for his longtime bestseller, *Emotional Intelligence*. He has written on a wide variety of topics, including self-deception, creativity, transparency, meditation, and the ecological crisis. In his honor, consider how you might enhance your own EQ—and that of those around you!

Sunday, March 8, 2020
SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT
(purple)

Remember: The *Gloria* and Alleluia are *not* sung today. Lead the congregation in another, easy-to-sing gospel acclamation!

Note: **The introductory line of today’s second reading is misleading.** The Second Letter to Timothy is a pseudonymous letter, written in Paul’s name and spirit, but not written by Paul. Rather than confuse your listeners, begin the proclamation with, “A reading from the Second Letter to Timothy”!

The thread in today’s scriptures: As our Lenten journey continues, we journey with the faithful Abraham, who trusted the God who called him and his family to a foreign land (Gen. 12:1-4). We can imagine Abraham and his family saying with the psalmist: “Lord, ...we place our trust in you” (Ps. 33:22)! We also journey up a mountain with Peter, James and John, who enjoy an “appearance of our savior Christ Jesus” (2Tim. 1:10)—the transfiguration of the Lord (Mt. 17:1-9)!

Holy humor: Four weeks ago, on February 9, we had a number of lightbulb jokes that focused on light. This Sunday, try three or four of the following lightbulb jokes, culminating in those that speak of resistance to change, then segue to Abraham’s willingness to place his trust in a God who called him to change his address, then to the story of Jesus’ friends who witnessed the change of his transfiguration—in which he became brighter than any lightbulb imaginable: “His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light” (Mt. 17:2)! As we undertake our own

Lenten journey, how willing are we to change, so as to bring more light into this world?

- How many Pentecostals does it take to change a light bulb? Only one, but 99 more to cast out the spirit of darkness!
- How many Fundamentalists does it take to change a light bulb? None. The Bible doesn't mention light bulbs!
- How many Southern Baptists does it take to change a light bulb? One to change the bulb, and 16 million to boycott the company that made the old bulb—for bringing darkness into the church!
- How many TV evangelists does it take to change a light bulb? One, but, for the message of light to continue, please donate today!
- How many Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb? Change? Lutherans don't do change!
- How many Catholics does it take to change a light bulb? What? Change the lightbulb? My grandparents donated that lightbulb!

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider the yellow tape used at crime scenes and construction sites! You can buy it at any home improvement store. Why are crime scenes and construction sites cordoned off, so that no one can walk through them? That's the same reason that Peter suggested setting up three tents: to cordon off and keep people from trespassing the "holy ground" where the transfigured Christ appeared with Moses and Elijah! Retreats are sometimes referred to as "mountaintop experiences," from which we eventually have to descend: During these 40 special days of Lent, how are you "cordoning" off a bit more time and space, to retreat to and ascend the "mountain" with our transfigured Lord?

Will you be sharing any **Easter cards** this year with those who support the ministries of your community? If so, you might begin thinking now about the design and printing of Easter cards!

On **March 8**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. John of God**, who suffered temporary insanity, was sobered by life inside the mental institutions of his day, and dedicated the rest of his life to ministering to those living in such places. Take advantage of this day to raise awareness of the mental illnesses that afflict one in every four to five American adults!

On **March 8**, the Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates the birth in 1947 of **Pedros Keshishian**, who would become Catholicos Aram I of Cilicia. In his honor, pray for him and for the 9 million people he serves!

On **March 9**, the Church celebrates **St. Frances of Rome**, who inspired the wealthy of her day to visit the poor and to care for the sick. In a spirit of Lenten almsgiving, share of your time, talent and/or treasure with the poor and the sick in your community!

On **March 9**, we remember the passing in 2005 of **Josef Fuchs**, the German Jesuit theologian credited with achieving in moral theology what Karl Rahner had accomplished in systematic theology. He chaired the Pontifical Commission on Population, Family & Birth, whose report on artificial birth control within marriage was rejected by Paul VI. In his memory, pray for all who struggle with the very real conundrum of differing with those who hold power over them!

On **March 11**, we celebrate the birth in 1933 of **Walter Brueggemann**, the American Protestant theologian widely considered one of the most influential Old Testament scholars of the 20th century. His research has focused on the Hebrew prophetic tradition and the sociopolitical imagination of the Church. In his honor, consider how prophetic your stances really are toward consumerism, militarism and nationalism!

On **March 12**, we celebrate the birth in 1936 of **Michał Kazimierz Heller**, the Polish priest and professor of philosophy & science who has authored more than 50 books and who received the Templeton Prize for his attempts to reconcile the “known scientific world with the unknowable dimensions of God.” His current research provides new perspectives on quantum entanglement and the EPR paradox. In his honor, consider your own attempts to simultaneously honor what science tells us about our world, and “the root of all possible causes” that forms the foundation of our faith tradition!

On **March 13**, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2013 of Jorge Mario Bergoglio as **Pope Francis**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 1.3 billion Roman Catholics he serves!

On **March 14**, we remember the passing in 2016 of **Virgilio P. Elizondo**, the Mexican-American Roman Catholic priest and activist who was a leading scholar of Hispanic theology and Latin American liberation theology. Widely regarded as “the father of U.S. Latino religious thought,” he examined the similarities between Jesus’ Galilean background and the *mestizo* experience. He viewed Our Lady of Guadalupe as the ultimate symbol and product of *mestizaje*, the mixing of people of different backgrounds. In his memory, reacquaint yourself with any one of his many works!

Sunday, March 15, 2020
THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT
(purple)

You'll need to **choose which gospel you'll proclaim today**: the shorter form, or the longer form, which includes an additional 16 verses that could just as easily be summarized in your homily!

Remember: The *Gloria* and Alleluia are *not* sung today. Lead the congregation in another, easy-to-sing gospel acclamation!

Be mindful of the **exclusive language** in today's psalm: Is there any reason a person should proclaim God's Word by saying anything less inclusive than, "where your *ancestors* tempted me"? Remember: Even the Samaritan woman speaks of "our ancestors" – rather than "our fathers" – in today's gospel!

The thread in today's scriptures: The thirsty Israelites grumbled (Ex. 17:3-7), and their grumble was forever memorialized by the psalmist (Ps. 95:8-9)! The woman at the well realized the thirst she had for the living waters that the Johannine Jesus could provide (Jn. 4:15). We pray during these weeks of Lent that our thirst might be quenched by the love that God pours into our hearts (Rom. 5:5)!

Holy humor: The story is told of the Hollywood star who was shopping on Rodeo Drive when she came across a man begging on a street corner. The man held out his cupped hand and pleaded, "I haven't eaten in four days." She paused, looked at him over her sunglasses, and replied, "I wish I had your willpower!" [Segue into the fact that food and water are essential for life, then to how it is that many of us, like the Israelites and the Samaritan woman, are focused on the things of this world, while our spiritual lives languish for lack of "living water" and spiritual nourishment!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a clear pitcher of water and a glass! Water is essential for life—which is why the Israelites were so concerned with finding water in the wilderness! As you pour the water into the glass, refer to the second reading, on how "the love of God has been poured out into our hearts" (Rom. 5:5). The Johannine Jesus promised the Samaritan woman "living water" (Jn. 4:10) – not stagnant water at the bottom of a well, but the life and love that he would pour into her heart!

If you have Elect (a.k.a., catechumens who have celebrated the Rite of Election and are preparing to receive sacraments at the Easter Vigil), celebrate the **First Scrutiny** during Mass today!

On **March 16**, we celebrate the birth in 1955 of **Tina Beattie**, the English professor of Catholic Studies who has raised awareness of social justice, non-violence, women's rights, same-sex marriage and women's ordination. She has challenged the Roman church's teachings on contraception and has advocated for a more-nuanced ethical approach to the question of early abortion. In her honor, consider how you are raising awareness of the key social justice issues that intersect with theology!

On **March 16**, the Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 1998 of Minas Mutafian as **Patriarch Mesrob II Mutafyan of Constantinople**. In his honor, pray for him and for the 9 million people he serves!

On **March 17**, the Church celebrates **St. Patrick**. This year, he'll be happy to know that the focus is *not* on him, but on the Sunday celebration of our Lenten journey. Be extremely careful not to inject St. Patrick, the color green, shamrocks, or any other detail into today's liturgy; these will distract from our time with Jesus in the desert! If this day were to fall outside a Sunday, you might reflect on his analogy of the shamrock for the mystery of the Trinity and/or note that the color originally associated with St. Patrick was...blue!

On **March 18**, the Church celebrates **St. Cyril of Jerusalem**, the early Church theologian thrice-exiled for teaching that Jesus was fully divine. He sold his gifts from the emperor, to raise money for the poor. If you're hosting a parish auction in place of the St. Joseph Table (on March 19), connect what you're doing to the actions of this saint!

On **March 19**, the Church celebrates the **Solemnity of St. Joseph**, Jesus' stepfather and the patron saint of workers and of the Universal Church!

- Wear white – and the *Gloria* may be sung today.
- Pray the **Litany of St. Joseph** and consider **cultural celebrations**, like the Blessing of Bread, the blessing of the St. Joseph Table (a Sicilian tradition of blessing food principally intended for the poor) and/or the sharing of ravioli (another Italian tradition) on this day! If you're in New Orleans, build your three-tiered St. Joseph altar and bake your *pupa cu l'ova*!
- **For the intellectually-curious**, share a lesson on what the scriptures say (and don't say) about today's saint. Note that he was a *tekton* (literally, a handyman, and not a carpenter, as mistranslation and popular imagination suggest), that he

protected Jesus from the slaughter of the Innocents, and that he “disappeared” after Luke’s story of the child Jesus in the temple. Explain that we infer that he died prior to Jesus’ public ministry, and certainly before Jesus’ death (or else he would have claimed Jesus’ body from the cross). Share the tradition of him dying in the arms of Jesus and Mary, and thus being known today as the patron of a happy death. Also, share the superstitions related to this saint (e.g., burying St. Joseph upside-down to sell your home, stealing a lemon from the St. Joseph altar to find a spouse, the carrying of blessed fava beans as a talisman, and freezing bread to ward off hurricanes).

- As an alternative to the St. Joseph Table, consider hosting a **Lenten auction** of donated breads and homemade pastas, with the income designated for a Lenten alms project.

On **March 19**, we remember the passing in 1637 of **Péter Pázmány**, the Hungarian Jesuit who was a noted statesman, philosopher, theologian and cardinal. An important figure in the Counter-Reformation of Hungary, he created the Hungarian literary language. In his memory, pray for the people of Hungary who continue to benefit from his legacy!

On **March 19**, we celebrate the birth in 1928 of **Hans Küng**, the Swiss Catholic priest, theologian and author known for his rejection of purported papal infallibility. Despite not being officially allowed to share Roman Catholic theology, Küng continues to teach ecumenical theology at the University of Tübingen. In his honor, pray for all who are persecuted for following their Spirit-enlightened consciences!

On **March 20**, we remember the passing in 1879 of **Johann Nepomuk Huber**, the German philosopher and theologian who opposed purported papal infallibility and was an early leader in the Old Catholic Church. He attracted attention by pseudonymously co-authoring *The Pope and the Council*, which challenged Ultramontane promoters of the First Vatican Council. He also pseudonymously published *Roman Letters*, a redaction of secret reports leaked from Rome during the Council. In his memory, pray for all who lack the freedoms we take for granted—including freedom of the press!

On **March 20**, we remember the passing in 1885 of **Christopher Wordsworth**, the English Anglican bishop who wrote several books and hymns, including “Songs of Thankfulness and Praise.” He represented the Anglican Church at the Reunion Conferences of 1874 and 1875, where Old Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox clergy convened to discuss possible paths to unification. In his memory, pray for all who continue to

open their hearts to and build relationships with persons of different backgrounds!

On **March 20**, we celebrate the birthday in 1943 of **Richard Rohr**, the prolific Franciscan spiritual writer who founded the New Jerusalem Community in Cincinnati and the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque. Emphasizing an “alternative orthodoxy” that allows for advocacy against such issues as religion-based oppression of LGBTQ persons, Father Richard has inspired millions of readers and listeners. In his honor, ruminates on a few paragraphs of his wisdom!

On **March 21**, we remember the passing in 1999 of **Jean Guitton**, the French philosopher and theologian who was the first lay person to be invited to be an observer of the Second Vatican Council. During the course of 60 years, he authored some 50 books on a wide range of philosophical and theological topics. In his memory, pause to consider the great gifts of the lay persons who enrich the Church!

On **March 21**, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2003 of **Filipe Neri Antônio Sebastião do Rosário Ferrão** as Latin Patriarch of the East Indies. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the Roman Catholics he serves!

On **March 21**, we remember the passing in 2005 of **Vekoslav Grmič**, the Slovenian bishop and theologian known as “the red bishop” for his strong Socialist leanings. A supporter of liberation theology, of the political-religious thought of Swiss reformer Hans Küng, and of the collaboration of the Catholic Church with Marxism in Yugoslavia, Grmič was removed from his bishopric by John Paul II. He was the author of more than 40 books and several translations. In his memory, pray for all who champion the apostolic ideals of shared ownership of resources and the equitable distribution of goods and services in our world!

On **March 21**, the Church of England celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2013 of **Archbishop Justin Portal Welby of Canterbury**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 85 million Anglicans he serves!

Sunday, March 22, 2020
FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT
(rose or purple)

It's *Laetare* Sunday:

- Pull out the **rose vestments**, if you have them; make sure they're ironed or steamed!
- Incorporate **small touches of rose** into your otherwise-stark worship environment!

You'll need to **choose which gospel you'll proclaim**: the shorter form, or the longer form, which adds 26 verses that you could just as easily summarize in your homily!

Remember: The *Gloria* and Alleluia are *not* sung today. Lead the congregation in another, easy-to-sing gospel acclamation!

Note: **The introductory line of today's second reading is misleading.** The Letter to the Ephesians is a pseudonymous letter, written in Paul's name and spirit, but not written by Paul. Rather than confuse your listeners, begin the proclamation with, "A reading from the Letter to the Ephesians"!

The thread in today's scriptures: The pseudonymous author of the Letter to the Ephesians admonishes us to "live as children of the light" (Eph. 5:8), thus preparing us for the gospel irony: The blind man sees, and those with eyes (*viz.*, the Pharisees) are blind! Jesse and his family were blind, too: They didn't see that God was shepherding (Ps. 23:1) the shepherd-king in their midst (1Sam. 16:6-13)!

Holy humor: The story is told of the nun who knocked on the bathroom door of the convent and told her mother superior, who was showering, that there was a blind man there to see her. The mother superior replied, "Well, if he's a blind man, it doesn't matter if I'm in the shower, so send him in." So the blind man walked into the bathroom where the mother superior was showering, and she began to share her gratitude with the blind man. He interrupted her, "That's nice and all, ma'am, but when you get out of the shower, could you tell me where to put these blinds?" [Summarize that not all "blind" people are blind, segue to the blind man in today's gospel, then tie back to the mother superior when you talk about how it is that not all people with eyes can "see"!]]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a blindfold! The blindfold keeps those with eyes from seeing. In what ways are you “blind”? What are you not “seeing”? Maybe it’s time to take off the “blindfold”!

If you have Elect (a.k.a., catechumens who have celebrated the Rite of Election and are preparing to receive sacraments at the Easter Vigil), celebrate the **Second Scrutiny** during Mass today!

On **March 22**, we celebrate the birth in 1930 of **Joseph Bracken**, the American Jesuit philosopher and theologian who has attempted to synthesize Christian trinitarian doctrine with the process theology of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. In his honor, reacquaint yourself with Bracken’s works and/or with the works of process theology!

On **March 22**, we remember the passing in 2005 of **Clemente Domínguez y Gómez**, one of the more bizarre stories in the Independent Sacramental Movement! Domínguez y Gómez was a blind Palmarian bishop (consecrated by Roman Catholic archbishop Pierre Martin Ngô Đình Thục) who claimed to enjoy apparitions and the stigmata, and who proclaimed himself the successor of Pope Paul VI, took the name Pope Gregory XVII, and reigned for only 11 days less than his “rival,” Pope John Paul II. He admitted sexual improprieties with several of his priests and nuns, and was satirized in the Spanish film “*Manuel y Clemente*.” In his memory, pray for all whose questionable words and actions cast long shadows over the Independent Sacramental Movement!

On **March 23**, the Church celebrates **St. Turibius of Mogrovejo**, the Spanish nobleman who traveled all of Peru as bishop there. He is most known for baptizing St. Rose of Lima (the first saint of the Americas) and St. Martin de Porres, and for his defense of the native peoples against the injustices of the Spanish government. In his honor, commit to doing a better job of visiting those entrusted to your spiritual care, and consider how you might better advocate for those who suffer injustice in our world!

On **March 23**, we remember the passing in 1888 of **Henry Nutcombe Oxenham**, the English Anglican priest who converted to the Roman church, traveled to Germany, and began a friendship with Döllinger, whose work he translated to English. He translated Hefele’s *History of the Councils of the Church*, and he published several pamphlets on the reunion of Christian churches. In his memory, pray in a special way for all who support us in our ministry and in our efforts to bring unity to the Body of Christ!

On **March 24**, the Church celebrates **St. Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez**, the archbishop of San Salvador who spoke out against poverty and violence during the civil war in El Salvador. Hailed as a hero by social activists and liberation theologians, Romero actively denounced violations of human rights, particularly against the most vulnerable. As a result, the United Nations has proclaimed March 24 as International Day for the Right to the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims. In Romero's memory, pause to consider how you are defending human rights and promoting the dignity of those who suffer violence!

On **March 25**, the Church celebrates the **Annunciation**—the archangel Gabriel's incredible news that Mary would conceive and bear God's Son!

- If you want to place **an image of the Annunciation** in your worship space, search for one that portrays Mary as something other than a literate, Italian noblewoman. Decorate the image with **candles and lilies** or other white flowers.
- Invite an art historian to talk about the **iconography of Mary**.
- Find time to pray the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary — or at least **the first Joyful Mystery**.
- Wear white, and the *Gloria* can be sung today.
- **For the intellectually-curious**, explain the timing of this solemnity (exactly nine months before the celebration of Jesus' birth), and the different annunciation stories in Matthew and Luke.
- Many **women's religious communities** celebrate this day with great festivity: Take a moment to pray a rosary for the religious sisters who have touched your life, and consider gathering together those who might be open to discerning their own vocation to religious life and/or ordained ministry in the Church!

On **March 25**, we remember the passing in 1991 of **Marcel François Marie Joseph Lefebvre**, the French Roman Catholic bishop who was a leading conservative voice at Vatican II. Lefebvre founded the Society of Saint Pius X for seminarians, then consecrated four bishops in 1988 against the expressed prohibition of Pope John Paul II, who excommunicated him and the four bishops he had consecrated. In his memory, pray for persons of all theological stripes who seek to live their Catholic faith outside the structures and strictures of Rome!

On **March 25**, the Maronite Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2011 of **Bechara Boutros al-Rahi** as Cardinal Patriarch of Antioch. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 3.5 million Maronite Catholics he serves!

On **March 25**, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2012 of **Francesco Moraglia** as Latin Patriarch of Venice. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the Roman Catholics he serves!

On **March 26**, we remember the passing in 1924 of **Eduard Herzog**, the Swiss priest and theologian who became the first Old Catholic bishop in Switzerland. After the First Vatican Council, he expressed his opposition to purported papal infallibility at the Old Catholic Congress of 1872 and began serving as an Old Catholic priest and professor. He was consecrated by Joseph Reinkens of the German Old Catholic Church and was subsequently excommunicated by Pius IX. In his memory, pray for all who have the courage to step outside the institutions they love, in order to faithfully follow the promptings of the Spirit!

On **March 26**, we remember the passing on Palm Sunday in 1961 of **Carlos Duarte Costa**, the Roman Catholic bishop who shared valid lines of apostolic succession without the permission of the Roman papacy. Known by many as St. Carlos of Brazil, the patron saint of Independent Catholicism, he was a vocal critic of papal encyclicals, of clergy (including the pope!) with loyalties to Nazi and Fascist regimes, and of the Brazilian government's mistreatment of the poor. Honor his memory by considering how courageous you are in denouncing mistruths and mistreatment!

On **March 27**, we remember the passing in 1885 of **Friedrich zu Schwarzenberg**, the Austrian prince who became archbishop of Salzburg at age 26 and a cardinal at age 33. He was sympathetic to the adversities suffered by Reformers and their families as a result of being expelled from the empire. He zealously defended his teacher, Anton Günther, repeatedly appealing to Rome to prevent the condemnation of Günther's writings. In his memory, pray for all our friends and advocates in other churches—including the Roman church—who courageously speak up for and defend us!

On **March 27**, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2011 of **Sviatoslav Shevchuk** as Patriarch of Kyiv-Galicia. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 4.5 million Ukrainian Greek Catholics he serves!

Sunday, March 29, 2020
FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT
(purple)

You'll need to **choose which gospel you'll proclaim today**: the shorter form, or the longer form, which adds 18 verses that you could just as easily summarize in your homily!

Remember: The *Gloria* and Alleluia are *not* sung today. Lead the congregation in another, easy-to-sing gospel acclamation!

The thread in today's scriptures: Ezekiel's prophecy of opened graves (Ez. 37:12) is realized with the raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11:1-45), which foreshadows the resurrection of the risen Christ! We trust that the "fullness of redemption" (Ps. 130:7) awaits us as well, and that, since "the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in [us], the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to [our] mortal bodies also" (Rom. 8:11)!

Holy humor: The Sunday school teacher asked her students if they knew any of Jesus' miracles. Terry raised her hand: "Yes," she said. "Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead!" The teacher encouraged her: "And what can you tell us about that miracle?" Terry's eyes widened, as she said, "Jesus said, 'Lazarus, come out!' And it's a good thing that Jesus said his name, 'Lazarus,' because otherwise it would have been like a zombie apocalypse, with all the dead people stampeding out of that tomb!" [Segue to the images of zombies that listeners see in countless movies and television series, then to Ezekiel's prophecy of God's ability to raise an entire stampede of dead people. Because of God's life-giving power, we live with the hope that God "will give life to [our] mortal bodies also" (Rom. 8:11)!

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a plastic skull! The skull is a symbol of death, and all four gospels state that Jesus was crucified at the "place of the skull" (Mt. 27:33, Mk. 15:22, Lk. 23:33, Jn. 19:17). Physical death awaits all our mortal bodies – but today's scriptures suggest that death is not the end of the story: The resurrections of Lazarus and of the risen Christ give us the hope that "the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to [our] mortal bodies also" (Rom. 8:11)!

If you have Elect (a.k.a., catechumens who have celebrated the Rite of Election and are preparing to receive sacraments at the Easter Vigil), celebrate the **Third (and final) Scrutiny** during Mass today!

Have you hosted a **Lenten reconciliation service** already? If not, consider a communal celebration of the sacrament today!

On **March 30**, we celebrate the birth in 1934 of **Charles E. Curran**, the Roman Catholic priest and moral theologian known for his dissenting views on contraception, his co-authoring of a response to *Humanae Vitae*, and his suggestion in 1971 that homosexual acts within committed relationships might not be morally evil. In 1986, he was removed from his faculty position at The Catholic University of America for his dissent of the Roman church's moral teaching. His views on divorce, artificial contraception, masturbation, pre-marital sex, and homosexual acts were later condemned by Joseph Ratzinger. In his honor, pray for all moral theologians and persons of faith who, while respecting the teaching office of the Church, find themselves led by the Spirit to disagree with the sometimes-myopic moral views of others!

On **March 30**, we remember the passing in 1984 of the renowned 20th-century Jesuit philosopher and theologian, **Karl Rahner**. Perhaps the greatest voice on the post-conciliar understanding of the Catholic faith, Rahner was a prolific writer of voluminous—and often difficult-to-understand—works. In his memory, pull one of his works off the shelf and wrestle with a paragraph or two of his profound thought!

On **March 31**, the U.S. celebrates civil rights advocate **César Chávez**: Incorporate his social justice message into your preaching!

On **March 31**, we remember the passing in 1997 of **John Norman Davidson Kelly**, the British Anglican priest who specialized in biblical studies, patristics, and early Christian creeds and doctrines. For years, his *Early Christian Creeds* and *Early Christian Doctrines* were standard seminary textbooks. In his memory, thumb through his works and reacquaint yourself with the beliefs of the early Church!

On **March 31**, the Syriac Orthodox Church celebrates the anniversary of the election in 2014 of Sa'id Karim as **Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II of Antioch and All the East**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the people he serves!

On **April 2**, the Church celebrates **St. Francis of Paola**, a hermit dedicated to solitude, asceticism and the contemplative life. Lift him up as a model of Lenten prayer!

On **April 2**, we remember the passing in 2015 of **Robert Harold Schuller**, the American Christian televangelist, motivational speaker and author who shared his weekly, televised "Hour of Power" from the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California. Schuller focused on the positive

aspects of our Christian faith and deliberately avoided condemning people for sin, saying that Jesus “met needs before touting creeds.” In his memory, consider how positive and non-judgmental your words, actions and ministry are!

On **April 3**, we celebrate the birth in 1927 of **Joseph Blenkinsopp**, the Old Testament scholar who wrote widely on the Pentateuch, the prophets, and Ezra-Nehemiah. In his memory, explore more deeply the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew scriptures!

On **April 3**, we remember the passing in 1991 of **Graham Greene**, the Nobel Prize winning novelist who explored ambivalent moral and political issues through a Catholic perspective. He is best known for *The Power and the Glory*, which told the story of a renegade “whisky priest” during the government suppression of the Catholic faith in Mexico. In his memory, pray for the “whisky priests” of our world, who, like Greene’s protagonist, teach high standards while manifesting signs of weakness!

On **April 4**, the Church celebrates **St. Isidore of Seville** (not to be confused with St. Isidore the Farmer, who is celebrated on May 15). He organized the church of Spain through his theology and the hosting of councils. Consider how conciliar or authoritarian you are, and allow today’s saint to challenge you toward a spirit of greater conciliarity!

On **April 4**, the Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the birth in 1952 of **Ilias Giannopoulos**, who would become Patriarch Theophilus III of Jerusalem. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 500,000 Greek Orthodox Catholics he serves!

Sunday, April 5, 2020

PALM SUNDAY

(red)

“Get your palms!” **Let people know when your Palm Sunday Masses are – and they’ll show up!**

Decorate your worship space!

- Decorate with **plentiful palm plants and fronds**, using them to draw attention to the altar and ambo.
- Use **red ribbon** to attach large fronds to the processional cross.

- Consider a **long red runner** hanging down over the sides of an otherwise bare altar.
- Be sure all **red vestments** are ironed or steamed—and that they match any other red used in the worship space. If there is a procession, be sure to steam the **cope** as well!
- **Continue the decoration** into the entrance to your worship space, outdoors, and into other spaces on the grounds, including your Blessed Sacrament chapel, parish hall and classrooms. Pique the curiosity of congregants and passersby with outdoor touches of palms and red ribbon!

Be sure to familiarize yourself with the details of today's rite!

- Decide whether you'll have a **solemn or simple entrance**.
- Be sure your deacon is **prepared to proclaim both gospels** today.
- Have a **bowl of holy water and an aspergillum** on hand for the blessing of palms, and think through whether your worship space permits a procession with the palms. Consider swapping out your metal aspergillum (which likely shares very few drops of water with every swing) for a natural broom sprinkler adorned with red ribbons.
- If you'll have a procession, **prepare a song to accompany the ritual action**, and be sure those leading the procession (viz., your thurifer, cross bearer & candle bearers) know the route you'll use.
- If you'll use **incense**, be sure the thurible, charcoals, and boat of incense are prepared.
- If processing with several people and/or a long distance, **think through how you'll sustain the singing in unison throughout the procession**. To maintain singing, place gifted vocalists at the beginning, middle and end of the procession.
- If you'll be using a **cope** during the procession, prepare your altar servers to know when to take it from you, and when to hand you your chasuble.
- Let your altar servers know that **the passion will be proclaimed without incense or candles**.
- If the passion will be proclaimed by multiple people, be sure you have sufficient copies and that all ministers are prepared.

Have hospitality ministers share palms with congregants as they arrive. Instead of skimping, order plenty of extra palms and encourage congregants to take an extra palm to share with a homebound family member, friend or neighbor. Be sure, though, to **divide your supply of**

palms across your various Masses, so that the last Mass won't be left without palms!

Remember: The *Gloria* and Alleluia are *not* sung today. Lead the congregation in another, easy-to-sing gospel acclamation.

You'll need to **choose which passion narrative you'll proclaim**: the shorter form, or the longer form, which adds 83 verses that you could just as easily summarize in your homily! If you expect listeners to suffer through the longer form, be sure it's proclaimed well, perhaps even with ample participation!

Be sure the person who proclaims (or begins) **the passion** knows that there is no greeting ("The Lord be with you") before the passion, nor is the Book of the Gospels signed before proclaiming the passion. Consider dividing the proclamation of the passion among various voices, but know that only a deacon asks for the blessing of the presider before proclaiming the gospel. Or, even better, have various cantors chant the passion this year, to highlight the solemnity of this day!

During the proclamation of the passion, remember to **kneel for a prolonged period of silence after Jesus' death**. Remember: True silence begins when all shuffling, rustling and other noises end. Find a way to say this without words (e.g., in your Mass program and/or PowerPoint), so that all will know to kneel in silence to reflect on Jesus' death.

The thread in today's scriptures: The "roller coaster" of Holy Week has begun: Today's first gospel (Mt. 21:1-11) begins on an extremely high note, with the people of Jerusalem acclaiming Jesus as king. By the end of today's second gospel (Mt. 26:14–27:66), the same people have called for his crucifixion, and he has been executed. We'll again hear the story of his passion and death on Good Friday, but we know his descent to the dead is not the end of the story—and, at the Easter Vigil, we'll celebrate his rising to new life! We all pass through dark valleys, when we feel the buffets and beatings of life (Is. 50:6), perhaps when we even feel abandoned by God (Ps. 22:1). Paul's words (Phil. 2:6-11) gives us the hope that we, too, might one day be exalted with Christ!

Holy humor: We just heard the proclamation of Jesus' death on the cross, so skip any attempts at humor. Today's solemn celebration marks the beginning of Holy Week. Perhaps it's best to try another "hook" to grab listeners' attention today? It could be as simple as a show of hands: How many of us have ever ridden a roller coaster? How many of us love roller coasters? How many of us would never ride a roller coaster, even if we were paid to? Segue into the "roller coaster" of Holy Week, which has already left the station!

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider drawing a big circle in the air and/or appealing to the palms with which we began this liturgy! Saint Bonaventure was fond of the image of the circle: Christ started in heaven (start with your hand above your head), then came down to earth (begin drawing the circle counter-clockwise, so that it's clockwise from the vantage of your listeners, until you reach the bottommost point of the circle), and was exalted to the heavens again (complete the circle)! The palms we hold today remind us of the same polarities: They were waved to proclaim victory, and they are burned to make the ashes that recall our own deaths. Christians know that death does not have the final word – and that what goes down...must go up!

Know that many families who leave after Mass today will not return until next Sunday: **Encourage them to be part of your *Triduum* celebrations!** Be sure that everyone leaves Mass today knowing your *Triduum* schedule. Consider printing special postcards for those who might be willing to help spread word of your *Triduum* services this week. As we enter Holy Week, encourage congregants to re-read the passion narrative later today or sometime this week.

In some places, Palm Sunday is known as **Carling Sunday**, named for carling peas. In other places, it's known as **Fig Sunday**, due to the tradition that Jesus ate figs after his entry into Jerusalem. If you're looking for appropriate dishes to share after Mass, consider split pea soup, peas porridge, and/or figs!

Holy Week is the traditional time for the annual **Chrism Mass**.

- If your bishop is joining you for the *Triduum*, consider when you'll celebrate the Chrism Mass as a community. Know that **Tuesday is a common day** for this celebration.
- **Spread word of the celebration**, so that all can join you in this **celebration of the priesthood** – complete with the blessing of the oils that we'll use during the next year!
- Be sure to incorporate **the burning of this year's holy oils** as part of your parish mission or a Lenten night of prayer: Simply pour the oils into a flame-resistant receptacle and add a wick!

On **April 5**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Vincent Ferrer**, the Dominican friar who forced Spanish Jews to convert to Catholicism. Pray today for all who mistakenly believe that God's salvation could ever be limited to their church alone, and for all throughout history whose fervor for "evangelization" was responsible for erasing indigenous cultures and centuries of rich religious traditions!

On **April 6**, we remember the passing in 1876 of **John Dobree Dalgairns**, the English Catholic convert and friend of John Henry Newman who translated Aquinas, wrote on Cistercian saints and German mystics, and included a history of Jansenism in his *Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*. In his memory, consider your own contributions to theology and/or to the sharing of the stories of the saints whom you've known!

On **April 7**, the Church celebrates **St. John Baptist de la Salle**, the first to emphasize classroom teaching over individual instruction. This patron saint of teachers taught in the vernacular, rather than Latin. In his honor, lift up and pray for all teachers in your community!

On **April 8**, we celebrate the birth in 1926 of **Jürgen Moltmann**, the German Reformed theologian who contributed to a number of areas of Christian theology. He shared his "theology of hope," a form of liberation theology predicated on a view that God suffers with humanity but that the hope of the resurrection promises us a better future. In his memory, consider the place that hope holds in your own theology and worldview – and how it is that you might be a better instrument of hope in this world!

On **April 8**, we remember the passing in 2010 of **Antony Garrard Newton Flew**, the English philosopher of religion and advocate for atheism known for his criticism of concepts of God, life after death, free will, and the problem of evil. Late in life, he shocked colleagues by changing his position, choosing to believe in an intelligent creator, and clarifying his own personal concept of God. In his memory, pray for all who struggle to believe the good news we daily teach and preach!

Thursday, April 9, 2020

HOLY THURSDAY

(white)

Remember: Unless you have a Chrism Mass, **no Mass is celebrated today until the evening celebration of the Lord's Supper**. Lent officially ends with your celebration of the Lord's Supper, and this evening's celebration is the beginning of a **three-day liturgy** – our *Triduum*: There is no blessing and dismissal tonight or tomorrow, and there is no introductory rite for Good Friday or the Easter Vigil. We begin the Mass of the Lord's Supper with the introductory rite – and the solemn blessing

and dismissal will come at the conclusion of this three-day rite, at the Easter Vigil on Saturday night!

Our Easter *Triduum* begins: Be sure to think through the details of your **worship environment** as we transition to white today, then to red for tomorrow, then back to white for the Easter Vigil.

- Use **flowers** in moderation, reserving a full flowering of your worship space for the Easter Vigil.
- Prepare easily-visible **footwashing stations** for the *mandatum*, perhaps even throughout the church. Have on hand **enough pitchers of warm water, basins, towels and a mop**. If using paper towels instead of towels, have baskets or small trash receptacles into which used paper towels can be placed. Designate persons to quietly clean up after the footwashing ritual, with minimal distraction. Have a means for the presider to wash his/her hands after the rite of footwashing, preferably with warm water and soap.
- Create an **altar of repose** conducive to prayer and meditation, perhaps bringing to mind the Synoptic Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. If necessary, place a kneeler for the presider before the altar of repose; otherwise, leave the altar unobstructed. Be sure to have enough seats for those who might wish to spend time in prayer with the Blessed Sacrament.
- Think of possible accents (e.g., candles or *luminarias*) that might **illuminate the journey from your worship space, to the altar of repose**. Beforehand, fill the space with green plants, illuminated by candlelight, and turn off any overhead lights.
- Be sure the **cope** and **humeral veil** are ironed or steamed.

Will you incorporate your **reception of the holy oils** into this Mass? If so, consider the following:

- Will you incorporate this into the introductory rite, or as part of the presentation of gifts?
- Prepare an ambry table in the sanctuary to receive the holy oils.
- Have texts that speak to the symbolism of the oils, and of the function of each.
- To emphasize the symbolism of each oil, consider having a catechist or student carry the Oil of Catechumens, a medical professional carry the Oil of the Sick, and a member of the clergy or someone who has recently received (or will receive) the sacraments of initiation carry the Sacred Chrism!

Be sure to familiarize yourself with the rite of this special day! **Think through how you'll do the washing of feet:**

- Will seats be reserved for this, or will chairs need to be placed and removed?
- Choose an easy-to-sing musical setting for this ritual action, perhaps a Taizé-style refrain or a song that can be sung antiphonally between the cantor and congregation.
- Consider addressing a few pastoral words to those who might find footwashing countercultural and/or awkward.
- If you'll be washing a large number of feet, think through details like the refilling of pitchers (with warm water), the emptying of water basins, and what to do with soiled towels (or paper towels).
- If you'll be removing your chasuble for this rite, let altar servers know if you'll need their assistance with your vestments.
- Will you wash the feet of others, or have a more-inclusive gesture of inviting them to wash one another's feet? If you alone will be washing the feet of others, choose a representative cross-section of women and men, young and wise, healthy and less-mobile, clergy and laity, persons of different language groups, etc. Consider going to them, rather than having them come to you! Be sure your actions are highly visible, so that people are not left wondering "What's going on?"

We're celebrating a solemnity: **Consider using incense!**

- Make sure your thurifer is familiar with all his/her responsibilities and is ready with the thurible (with burning charcoals) and boat: for the hymn of gathering, gospel acclamation, preparation of gifts and the procession to the altar of repose.
- Be sure those who are leading music know that the hymn of gathering and/or preparation of the altar and presentation of gifts may be prolonged due to incensation.
- Be sure your deacon knows how to incense the Book of the Gospels prior to proclaiming the gospel.
- Be sure to tip off your altar server(s) to the fact that the handwashing will occur *after* the incensation of the altar and gifts!

If you have a multilingual community, **think through how you'll make a single community celebration meaningful to persons of all languages!**

- Consider music that incorporates all languages.

- Divide the scriptures between languages, and, so that all can understand them, consider printing the scriptures in the language in which they're not being proclaimed.
- Have a multilingual psalm and proclamation of the gospel.
- Be sure the presider and homilist are able to easily transition between languages for prayers and preaching, without sharing a homily that's repeated in two languages.
- Share a multilingual invitation to share the sign of peace.
- Invite people to pray the Lord's Prayer in their own languages.
- Rather than guess the language of those coming to communion, train eucharistic ministers to alternate between "The Body of Christ" (or "The Blood of Christ") and its equivalent in the other language.

Think through the details of your **procession to the altar of repose**.

- Will you need assistance putting on the cope?
- Will the altar be stripped while you hold the consecrated elements?
- Will incense be used?
- Does the person leading the procession know the route?
- What will you sing during the procession? Is the song easy to sing while walking in the dark? (Remember: *Pange lingua* is the traditional hymn for this in many places, but many people don't know Latin and/or don't know it well enough to sing it in the dark and/or without words.) Consider a Taizé-style refrain, or, if you have a Spanish-speaking community, the refrain of "*Bendito, bendito, bendito sea Dios.*"
- To maintain the song, place gifted vocalists at the beginning, middle and end of the procession.
- Beforehand, invite people to stay as long as they wish, to pray before the altar of repose.

Be sure to prepare all ministers, so that they know their role and responsibilities for this special celebration. For the smoothest-possible liturgical experience, consider having a rehearsal!

Have the traditional **ringing of bells** during the *Gloria*—with someone ringing the church bell and/or with altar servers and congregants ringing bells. (Remember to never allow anyone to ring a bell who hasn't practiced in advance: The liturgy is never an appropriate time to practice ringing a bell!) If you have an organ, use it for the *Gloria*. Remember:

After the ringing of the bells at the *Gloria* tonight, all bells will remain silent until the *Gloria* is sung at the Easter Vigil.

Inform musicians that, after the singing of the *Gloria*, **the music becomes increasingly solemn this evening**, with musical instruments used after the *Gloria* only to support the singing.

Note the **exclusive language** in tonight's psalm: The psalmist's presumed maleness need not result in a proclamation that is any less inclusive than, "I am your servant, the *child* [not *son*] of your handmaid"!

Remember: The Alleluia is *not* sung today. Lead the congregation in another, easy-to-sing gospel acclamation!

The thread in today's scriptures: The Jewish celebration of Passover (Ex. 12:1-8 & 11-14) was an important part of Jesus' faith tradition: God led God's people to life and liberty! Indeed, how could we make a return to the Lord for all the good God has done for us (Ps. 116:12)? As Jesus prepared to celebrate the Passover with his friends, with the traditional bread and wine (1Cor. 11:23-26), he shared with them – and with us – a lesson on servant leadership (Jn. 13:1-15)!

Holy humor: A lot of work goes into planning the liturgies – the services – of Holy Week, so have you heard this one before: What's the difference between a liturgist – a person who plans Masses like this – and a terrorist? If you've been to a seminary – a place where lots of people are planning lots of Masses – you know the answer. What's the difference between a liturgist and a terrorist? You can negotiate with a...terrorist! [Segue into the Johannine Peter's firm-as-a-liturgist attitude against having his feet washed, and the Johannine Jesus' line-in-the-sand statement that servant leadership is a necessary part of discipleship. "Unless I wash your feet, you will have no part with me" (Jn. 13:8) is a clear non-negotiable!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider an image of the Last Supper and/or a pitcher and basin! Paul provides a snapshot for the foundation of traditional images of the Last Supper – but interestingly, John provides us a whole different picture: The image he leaves us is that of Jesus stooping down to wash the dirty feet of his friends! We call ourselves followers of Jesus: How often do we humble ourselves and find ways to figuratively "wash one another's feet" (Jn. 13:14-15)?

Will you have a **collection** during this special liturgy? Let your hospitality ministers know!

Many presiders fall into a rut of always using the same eucharistic prayer: **Use a different, perhaps-lengthier eucharistic prayer today**, to bring attention to this part of the Lord's Supper!

If the Blessed Sacrament is brought from the tabernacle before communion, have a minister **leave the tabernacle door open and extinguish the vigil light there**, so that it will be clear that **the tabernacle will remain empty** until the Blessed Sacrament is returned there at the conclusion of the Easter Vigil.

Post-Vatican II communities share the Eucharist under the forms of bread and wine. If your community doesn't ordinarily **share communion under both forms**, consider doing so tonight!

Be prepared for **the many details of the procession to the altar of repose**:

- Have all eucharistic ministers bring any remaining bread and wine to the altar after communion.
- After communion, add incense to the thurible, kneel before the Blessed Sacrament, and incense it three times.
- Put on the humeral veil and take the Blessed Sacrament.
- Remember: Tonight's procession is led by the cross bearer and candle bearers, followed by the assembly, then followed by the thurifer and presider.
- Conduct the procession to the altar of repose with reverence and noble simplicity.
- Be sure that those who lead the procession walk slowly enough that congregants stay together!
- Place the Blessed Sacrament on the altar of repose, or, if it is placed in a tabernacle, leave the door open until after the Blessed Sacrament is incensed there.
- Be sure the thurifer is ready to assist with the incensing of the Blessed Sacrament at the altar of repose.
- Let all ministers know that all (who are able) will kneel before the Blessed Sacrament, and that ministers will not leave the space in procession; instead, all ministers will stand, genuflect, and depart, with no formal procession—a functional leaving of ministers, rather than a ritual departure.
- Invite congregants beforehand to remain in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament as long as they'd like.
- Be sure that those who decorate your worship space aren't immediately rushing off after this service to change the décor for

Good Friday – particularly if these actions will be seen or heard by those praying at the altar of repose!

Some churches have a traditional **distribution of loaves** on this night: Visit your local baker and ask him/her to individually package small loaves for you, to which you can add a prayer for the breaking of bread as family!

On **April 9**, we remember the passing in 1347 of **William of Ockham**, the English Franciscan friar and scholastic philosopher and theologian who was one of the major figures of medieval thought and was at the center of major intellectual controversies of the 14th century. He is known for “Ockham’s razor,” the problem-solving principle that simpler solutions are more likely correct than complex solutions. In his memory, reflect on simple solutions to various challenges you face!

On **April 9**, we remember the passing in 1945 of **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, the German pastor and theologian executed by the Nazi regime and best known for *The Cost of Discipleship* and other writings on justice, the role of faith in a “world come of age,” and a “religionless Christianity” where God might be unfettered from the metaphysical constructs of the previous 1900 years. In his memory, consider ways in which you might shed a “garment” or two covering your own faith!

Friday, April 10, 2020

GOOD FRIDAY

(red, without chasuble/dalmatic)

Good Friday is a somber day, as we meditate on Jesus’ death and entombment.

- The environment and lack of instrumental music should reflect this.
- Abstain from ringing bells today.
- For those looking for ideas on how to pray on this day, suggest the Stations of the Cross and/or the Sorrowful Mysteries of the rosary.
- Noon is traditionally marked as the hour of Jesus’ crucifixion, and 3:00 p.m. as the hour of his death: Know that any services at these hours may be sparsely attended by those who must work. Some

churches do have a *Tre Ore* service and/or time of prayer during these three hours.

Think through **the details of today's worship environment:**

- **Today's color is red, except for the veiling of the cross, which is violet.** Remember, though, that color is used today to highlight, not to decorate.
- **Remove all images and crosses** from your worship space. **Cover with red cloth those images and crosses that can't be removed.**
- **Take away all plants and flowers and candles.**
- **Strip the altar.** (Remember: Post-Vatican II altars contain no crosses, candles, bookstands, images or accoutrements; on this day in particular, there should be nothing—*nothing*—on the altar.)
- **Empty holy water fonts of water**, and consider filling them with sand instead. In this way, people aren't left wondering, "Did someone forget to fill the holy water fonts?"
- There is no need to decorate anything today—but do **cover with a violet cloth the cross that will be used for the adoration of the cross.** Be sure the cross is without a *corpus* (Jesus' body). Let the symbol speak: Find a large cross for this rite, perhaps even inviting an artist in your community to craft this. Before the liturgy, place the cross in a spot where the person carrying it will know where to find it. Have a plan for the cross after the adoration: Ideally, find a way for it to remain upright in the sanctuary.
- No Mass is celebrated today, so **the credence table is not prepared as usual.** Know, though, whether the corporal (and/or any other items) will be brought to the stripped altar during the rite, and by whom.

This is the one day each year in which **no Mass is celebrated anywhere in the world.** Because the chasuble and dalmatic are worn only for the celebration of Mass, be sure to **vest only with alb and stole**—and perhaps with a cope for the presider.

Think through music for this commemoration of the Lord's suffering and death. **Totally abstain today from musical instruments**, and have *a capella* music; or, if necessary, soft accompaniment simply to sustain singing. Also, **prepare a song for the adoration of the cross!**

If the passion will be proclaimed by multiple people, be sure all ministers are prepared and that you have sufficient copies of the passion for them!

Good Friday (like Ash Wednesday) is one of two days of **fasting and abstinence** in the Western Church: Invite congregants to participate in this ancient ritual as a way of preparing for the celebration of Christ's resurrection!

If you have a multilingual community, **think through how you'll make a single community celebration meaningful to persons of all languages!**

- Consider music that incorporates all languages.
- Divide the scriptures between languages, and, so that all can understand them, consider printing the scriptures in the language in which they're not being proclaimed.
- Have a multilingual psalm and proclamation of the gospel.
- Be sure the presider and homilist are able to easily transition between languages for prayers and preaching, without sharing a homily that's repeated in two languages.
- Share a multilingual invitation to share the sign of peace.
- Invite people to pray the Lord's Prayer in their own languages.
- Rather than guess the language of those coming to communion, train eucharistic ministers to alternate between "The Body of Christ" (or "The Blood of Christ") and its equivalent in the other language.

Be sure to prepare all ministers, so that they know their role and responsibilities for this special celebration. For the smoothest-possible liturgical experience, consider having a rehearsal!

The liturgy begins in the silence, with the ministers coming to the sanctuary and lying prostrate before the altar.

- The cross, candles and Book of the Gospels are not part of this procession.
- Think through whether all ministers are able to lie prostrate, or whether accommodations need to be made.
- Ideally, all congregants kneel during this action; think through a way of communicating this without speaking it—perhaps with a note in your Mass program and/or PowerPoint.
- While lying prostrate, the presider should allow for a prolonged period of true silence, which begins when all shuffling, rustling, and other noises end.

Remember: The liturgy continues with the collect (opening prayer), but without the customary "Let us pray."

The Alleluia is *not* sung today. Lead the congregation in another, easy-to-sing Gospel Acclamation!

During the proclamation of the passion, remember to **kneel for a prolonged period of silence after Jesus' death**. Remember: True silence begins when all shuffling, rustling and other noises end. Find a way to communicate this without words (e.g., in your Mass program and/or PowerPoint), so that all will know to kneel in silence to reflect on Jesus' death.

Note: **The introductory line of today's second reading is misleading.** The Letter to the Hebrews is a pseudonymous letter, written in Paul's name and spirit, but not written by Paul. Rather than confuse your listeners, begin your proclamation with, "A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews"!

The thread in today's scriptures: Deutero-Isaiah says it well: "Who would believe what we have heard?" (Is. 53:1). Like the Lord's servant (Is. 52:13 – 53:12), Jesus suffered and was led to the slaughter (Jn. 18:1 – 19:42). We believe that "he suffered, and, when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all" (Heb. 5:9), and so we trust in God, saying with the Johannine Jesus: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Ps. 31:5).

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider foregoing any type of object lesson today. Today's environment is stark. Today's liturgy is somber. Keep your words brief. Let silence speak.

Today is an especially appropriate day for **periods of silence** during the liturgy. Consider a moment of prolonged silence after your homily.

Think through **how you'll bring the cross into your worship space:**

- Will the deacon retrieve it alone or be accompanied by altar servers with candles?
- Has the person holding it practiced the chant "Behold the wood"?
- Will s/he pause three times: inside the entrance to the church, in the middle of the church, and at the entrance to the sanctuary?

Think through **how you'll perform the adoration of the cross:**

- What will you sing, and will congregants know how to respond?
- Who will lead the adoration of the cross, and who will invite congregants to participate in this action?
- Will hospitality ministers assist the flow of people?
- Remember: We genuflect to the cross on this day!

- Try something new this year: If you're wearing sandals, slip them off before you approach the cross and/or invite all to remove their shoes (a ritual gesture common in many world religions), to symbolize the holiness of the act and the "holy ground" now marked by the cross.
- In many places, there is a custom of wiping the cross with a purificator at the place at which a person kisses it. Will this be done? If so, by whom?
- After the adoration, is there a way to stand the cross upright in the sanctuary, perhaps flanked by the candles that accompanied it in procession?

Know how you'll share the **solemn intercessions** on this day.

- Will you use the traditional rite, shared between the deacon and presider, with periods of silence and alternating times of kneeling and standing—or will you avoid the up-and-down movement by inviting congregants to kneel for a prolonged time of silent prayer only once during the entire rite?
- Be sure that all assisting with this (e.g., your deacon) know how these prayers will be shared.

Will you have a **collection** during this special liturgy? Let your hospitality ministers know! It's Good Friday; you might do well to abstain from a collection today. The Roman church has the custom of taking up a collection on this day for the Holy Land; if you have a collection, consider having it for such a need, outside the operating expenses of your community.

Think through the **Rite of Communion** today:

- Plan how the Blessed Sacrament will come from the altar of repose to your worship space at the appropriate time. This might best be performed by your deacon, with a humeral veil. Ideally, have an altar server or two accompany the Blessed Sacrament with candles.
- After communion, return the Blessed Sacrament to the altar of repose without procession, then be sure to consume the consecrated bread and wine after the service, so that none is left.
- Extinguish the candle at the tabernacle, and leave the tabernacle door open, so that no one will think that the Blessed Sacrament is inside.

Think through **the details for concluding today's rite:**

- At the conclusion of the service, all ministers genuflect to the cross, then depart in silence.
- Invite all to remain after the service to adore the cross – a parallel action to the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament last night.
- Be sure that those who decorate your worship space aren't immediately rushing after this service to change the décor for the Easter Vigil – particularly if these actions will be seen or heard by those spending time in prayer before the cross!

Designate persons – perhaps clergy, eucharistic ministers, and/or altar servers – to help **consume any of the Blessed Sacrament that remains** after today's commemoration. The altar of repose can be disassembled after this liturgy as well.

If you have a vibrant Latino community with plentiful lay leaders and creative talent, consider organizing the necessary talent to host a *Viacrucis en vivo*, the live reenactment of the Way of the Cross that is popular in Latin America. Begin the Way of the Cross in one location, with the judgment of Jesus by Pontius Pilate, then recite the rosary or sing mournful songs *en route* to the place of crucifixion. Various Latino traditions can be appended to such a celebration, including the **seven last words of Jesus**, the *pésame a la Virgen* (an expression of condolence to Jesus' mother), the **veneration of an image of the entombed Jesus**, and the popular *quemada de Judas* – the burning of an effigy of Judas filled with firecrackers!

On **April 10**, we remember the passing in 1955 of **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin**, the French paleontologist, idealist philosopher and Jesuit priest who popularized Vladimir Vernadsky's concept of the noosphere and conceived the vitalist idea of the Omega Point toward which the universe is evolving. In his memory, reflect on possible connections that might be made between his thought and the daily lives of your community members!

Saturday, April 11, 2020

THE EASTER VIGIL

(white)

Research online when the sun will set at your place of worship. **Plan to begin this evening's service after sunset.** Remember: Each day of the Jewish calendar begins at sunset (hence the Church's celebration of vigils!). If you light the Easter fire outside, and if the hour of your service is close to the start time, invite congregants to come and watch the sunset—and to experience the dawning of a “new day”—before you light the Easter fire!

Transform your worship space into a proclamation of the Easter message!

- Place **the stand for the paschal candle** next to the ambo, and consider decorating it with flowers and/or ribbon.
- Locate **the symbol of baptismal water** in close proximity.
- Have a **bowl and aspergillum** ready for the sprinkling after the renewal of baptismal vows. Let the symbol speak: Consider swapping out your metal aspergillum (which likely shares very few drops of water with every swing) for a natural broom sprinkler adorned with white and gold ribbons.
- Be sure **the holy water fonts of the church are empty**, ready to be filled after the sprinkling rite.
- Don't skimp on the **Easter lilies**—the traditional Easter flower that resembles the trumpets announcing Christ's resurrection! Rather than leave the lilies in their purple plastic-wrapped pots, think how you'll cover the pots in a way that ties them to your décor.
- Consider decorating the space with **flowering plants and floral arrangements** as well.
- Cover the altar with your **finest altar cloth**.
- Be sure to steam or iron your **Easter vestments**—and to coordinate the color of your vestments with other decorative details in your worship space!
- If your worship space contains the **Stations of the Cross**, consider removing them or making it clear that they culminate in the 15th Station, the resurrection of Christ from the dead!
- Jesus is off the cross: Consider removing or replacing any crucifix that has a *corpus* (Jesus' body) on it. Drape white fabric behind the

head and over the horizontal bars of every sizeable cross, to create the look of the “**Easter cross.**”

- Think how you might use white cloth to **draw the eyes of congregants upwards**, perhaps with sheer, white fabric suspended over the congregation and/or between pillars.
- If you have a Latino community, have congregants create **white/gold paper flowers or *papel picado*** (cut tissue paper) that might lift eyes upward and toward the sanctuary.
- Consider **banners** with images of Easter joy and/or the Easter symbol of the empty tomb.
- **Continue the decoration** into the entrance to your worship space, outdoors, and into other spaces on the grounds, including your Blessed Sacrament chapel, parish hall and classrooms!
- If you’re celebrating with an outdoor **Easter fire**, gather the necessary materials: a pit, newspaper, wood, a lighter, a wick to transfer the Easter fire to the paschal candle, and a nearby fire extinguisher. Let the symbol speak: Be sure to have a skilled camper build and tend a bonfire; don’t risk an inexperienced fire-builder placing a few fire starters among loosely-wadded newspaper and green twigs. Have a “Plan B” for a smaller, indoor fire (perhaps in a small, tabletop grill), in the event of inclement weather.
- Prepare the necessary **taper candles (with bobaches)** and Mass programs.
- Ready the **paschal candle** and its **nails**. [The Roman church mandates that the paschal candle “must be made of wax, never be artificial, be renewed each year, be only one in number, and be of sufficiently large size so that it may evoke the truth that Christ is the light of the world”; reflect on how this fits with your practice, particularly if your “paschal candle” is a plastic tube with an oil canister.]
- If there may be any hint of wind, be sure to have a **glass topper** on hand to protect the flame – and a “Plan B” in the event that the wind extinguishes the paschal candle while the procession is in process.
- Be sure the **thurible** is ready, that you have plenty of **charcoal**, and that the **boat is filled with incense**.
- Prepare for Mass as usual, making sure to include **gluten-free hosts** in the communion bowl, if necessary.

- If it's your community's custom to bring to the altar during the Lamb of God a ciborium with the Blessed Sacrament, let the appropriate person know that **there is no Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle this evening**, to be brought to the altar.
- Before the first congregant arrives, **be sure all lights in the church are turned off, no candles are lit, and that all ministers know to maintain a prayerful environment.**
- Designate someone to **share Mass programs and taper candles with congregants** as they arrive; think of this as a ministerial opportunity for children and/or for the families of those who will be receiving sacraments.

If you have a multilingual community, think through how you'll make a single community celebration meaningful to persons of all languages!

- Consider music that incorporates all languages.
- Divide the scriptures between languages, and, so that all can understand them, consider printing the scriptures in the language in which they're not being proclaimed.
- Have a multilingual psalm and proclamation of the gospel.
- Be sure the presider and homilist are able to easily transition between languages for prayers and preaching, without sharing a homily that's repeated in two languages.
- Share a multilingual invitation to share the sign of peace.
- Invite people to pray the Lord's Prayer in their own languages.
- Rather than guess the language of those coming to communion, train eucharistic ministers to alternate between "The Body of Christ" (or "The Blood of Christ") and its equivalent in the other language.

Be sure to prepare all ministers, so that they know their role and responsibilities for this special celebration. For the smoothest-possible liturgical experience, consider having a rehearsal!

Think through the details of **the procession from the Easter fire into the worship space**:

- Be sure your thurifer is ready for his/her responsibilities tonight—including his/her leading of the procession and assistance with the deacon's (or presider's) incensation of the paschal candle.
- Be sure your deacon (or the person carrying the paschal candle) knows how to chant "Light of Christ" and where s/he will stop

to chant it. Have him/her consider chanting this from the same three spots from which the proclamation “Behold the wood” was chanted on Good Friday.

- Plan how you’ll spread the Light of Christ quickly and reverently after the second singing of “Light of Christ.”
- Have the person holding the paschal candle place it in its stand after the third singing of “Light of Christ.”
- Let altar servers know when to light all candles in the sanctuary and when to turn on the lights of the church (e.g., before the *Exsultet* is proclaimed—as a symbol of the paschal candle completely illuminating everything—or during the singing of the *Gloria*, as a symbol of Light of Christ becoming flesh).
- Similarly, your deacon should know when to tell congregants to extinguish their taper candles.

The *Exsultet* is a complex chant: today is *not* the day to begin practicing it. Be sure to select weeks in advance the deacon or cantor who will proclaim this, so that s/he can be preparing over the course of weeks! If it is your deacon, s/he should approach the presider for a blessing, which is the same blessing as the one given before the proclamation of the gospel at Mass, except that the words “paschal praise” are used instead of “gospel.”

Determine **how many scriptures you’ll proclaim**, knowing that this is not a night to “cut corners,” and that the reading from Exodus must be proclaimed. Choose congregants who can proclaim well the narratives, poetry and prophecy of this night! If the church lights won’t be turned on until the *Gloria*, be sure those who proclaim the Word will be able to do so by candlelight—and be sure there’s a plan for the presider to be able to read the prayers of the missal. Consider chanting the gospel, to highlight the solemnity of the resurrection account!

- If you use the creation story, you’ll need to **choose which form of the first reading you’ll proclaim**: the shorter form, or the longer form, which includes 26 verses on all that was created before the human being. Note the **exclusive language**: The first reading is understood to mean that “God created *the human person* [and not *man*] in God’s image” —since “male and female God created them.”
- You’ll need to **choose which responsorial psalm you’ll sing or proclaim after the first reading**: Psalm 104 or Psalm 33. The exclusive phrase in Psalm 104 can be reworded, “You raise grass

for the cattle and vegetation for *our* use,” and the exclusive phrase in Psalm 33 can be reworded, “The Lord sees all *humankind*.”

- If you use the story of Abraham, you’ll need to **choose which form you’ll proclaim**: the shorter form, or the longer form, which adds seven verses.
- The **exclusive phrase** in the responsorial psalm after Exodus is likely intended to mean, “the God of my *ancestors*.”
- The fifth reading (Is. 55) contains an **exclusive phrase**: “Let the scoundrel forsake his way, and the wicked man his thoughts; let him turn to the Lord for mercy.” Because most of the reading is in the second person, this could just as easily be rephrased, “Forsake your wicked ways, and turn to the Lord for mercy.”
- The **exclusive phrase** in Ezekiel can easily be rephrased, “you shall live in the land I gave your *ancestors*.”
- You’ll need to **choose the responsorial psalm that you’ll use after Ezekiel**: If you’ll be celebrating baptisms, use Form A of the responsorial psalm after Ezekiel; otherwise, choose between Form B or Form C.

The singing of the *Gloria* returns the congregation to the **full instrumental use** that we haven’t heard since the *Gloria* on Holy Thursday. Like Holy Thursday, consider the **ringing of bells** during the *Gloria*. For all other music before the *Gloria* (e.g., the responsorial psalms), use a *capella* singing or softer accompaniment.

The Alleluia returns for the first time since Winter Ordinary Time: Sing it with gusto! Consider using a **triple Alleluia** tonight, with three verses from Psalm 118. If possible, sing each succeeding refrain a half-step higher. Remember: Candles are not used during the proclamation of the gospel on this day!

For all other songs after the Alleluia, **consider tunes that might be familiar** to those who may not attend Mass very often outside of Christmas and Easter. Also, consider ways in which you might **assist them in knowing the responses of the assembly!**

This is an especially appropriate night for celebrating the Church’s **sacraments of initiation!**

- Know whether you’ll be celebrating sacraments this evening, and, if so, for whom.
- Be sure they’re prepared and that they know how you’ll celebrate these sacraments and what they need to do.
- Prepare the necessary oil(s).

- Have baptismal candles and white vestments on hand.
- Have a plan for dressing the newly-baptized in these white garments after they are baptized; consider giving them a space in which they can dry off and change clothes (if necessary), while the “veteran” Catholics renew their baptismal vows.
- Consider incorporating into the Litany of Saints the patron/matron saints of the newly-baptized and also of your community.
- Make them feel “part of the family”: Be sure to include the names of the newly-baptized in the Prayers of the Faithful.

Will you have a **collection** during this special liturgy? Let your hospitality ministers know!

Because of the complexity of this service and its various rites (e.g., for the reception of sacraments by persons of different age groups, or for celebrations in which no sacraments are received), **consider assembling your own “missal” for this Mass**, inside a beautiful binder!

We celebrate the solemnity of solemnities tonight: Consider using hypoallergenic **incense** during your liturgy—but be sure that all who touch the thurible and/or boat have practiced in advance! Be sure to tip off your altar server(s) to the fact that the handwashing will occur *after* the incensation of the altar and gifts! Because of the high nature of this solemnity, train your thurifer to swing the thurible during the song of sending forth in a vertical circle, with his/her swinging forearm parallel to the floor and his/her elbow at his/her side. It’s a simple flipping of the wrist: forward, back, loop forward, back, loop forward, back, etc. Be sure s/he understands the laws of physics: Once the thurible (with flaming charcoals) is set in motion, the centrifugal force can’t be stopped when the thurible is upside-down in the air!

The thread in today’s scriptures: Like people gathered around a campfire, we listen tonight to highlights from the story of our salvation: The creation of the world (Gen. 1:1 – 2:2), the great faith of our ancestors (Gen. 22:1-18), and God’s great act of freeing us from slavery (Ex. 14:15 – 15:1). We hear God speaking through the prophets, telling us how God’s love is everlasting (Is. 54:5-14), how God is merciful, generous and forgiving (Is. 55:1-11), and how we are called to walk in the ways of prudence, wisdom and understanding (Bar. 3:9-15 & 3:32 – 4:4), with the hope that God might replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh (Ez. 36:16-28). The glorified Christ was raised from the dead (Lk. 24:1-12), and Paul assures us that we, too, will “live in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4)!

Holy humor: The Sunday school teacher had prepared a lesson on Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday. She asked her students, "What did Jesus do on Easter Sunday?" There was no response. So she gave her students a hint: "It starts with the letter R..." And one boy blurted out, "Jesus recycled?" [Segue from "resurrection," the answer the teacher expected, to the fact that Christ's resurrection from the dead broke the cycle of sin and death, bringing us full-circle from death, back to life! It's Easter: Feel free to point to other examples of life-to-death-to-life, like the Easter lilies in your worship space, which are alive today, will eventually die, but will bloom with life again next Easter!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider the objects in your worship environment! The paschal candle is a symbol of the Light of Christ vanquishing the darkness, and the tapers are symbolic of our sharing in the Light of Christ! The water has returned (recall that Good Friday is the one day in which our holy water fonts are empty) and is symbolic of the new life we receive in baptism, our being cleansed from sin, and the fact that we have died with Christ in baptism and will share in his resurrection! The Easter lilies recall the trumpets that heralded Christ's resurrection! Imagine for a moment what this world would be like if we took seriously our baptismal promises and, nourished by Word and Sacrament, went forth to be heralds of Christ's light in this world!

Know how you'll celebrate **the blessing of water, the renewal of baptismal promises, and the sprinkling rite.**

- Be prepared to remove the paschal candle from its stand and lower it into the water once (or three times, depending on local custom), holding it in the water for the remainder of the prayer.
- Be sure to have a taper on hand, for relighting all tapers from the paschal candle, for the renewal of baptismal promises. Have a plan for quickly relighting the taper candles of all congregants at this moment in the rite.
- If you anticipate a large number of congregants and a generous sharing of water, consider having an altar server follow you with another pitcher or bowl of holy water.
- If, at the end of the sprinkling rite, you have only a small amount of holy water left in the bowl you're carrying, let the symbol speak: Hand the aspergillum to your altar server, and conclude the rite by tightly holding the bowl and throwing the remaining water high over the heads of all congregants!

- Instruct an altar server on the moment during the rite in which s/he should use a pitcher to take the newly-blessed water, to fill all holy water fountains of the church.

After communion, **the Blessed Sacrament is returned to the tabernacle**, which has remained open since Holy Thursday. Instruct the appropriate minister to lock the tabernacle and light the vigil light there.

Be sure your deacon knows how to **chant the double Alleluia of the dismissal**.

After Mass, have hospitality ministers prepared with baskets, in which they can **collect the taper candles**.

If you serve a Latino community, consider having **holy water bottles** for purchase: Many people have the custom of taking holy water home at the conclusion of Easter Masses!

On **April 11**, when it doesn't fall on Holy Saturday, the Church celebrates **St. Stanislas**, the patron saint of Poland, who bravely spoke out against a cruel and unjust king. In iconography, he's the bishop being cut to pieces at the foot of an altar. In his memory, listen to Franz Liszt's last and unfinished work, the *Oratorio St. Stanislaus*, and/or voice support today for the courageous prophetic women and men who, inspired by the Spirit, continue to speak out against injustices and/or unjust leaders.

Sunday, April 12, 2020

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

(white)

This is a high solemnity: **Keep in place all décor** from your celebration of the Easter Vigil!

Be sure your hospitality ministers are ready to **welcome the "Christmas & Easter Catholics"** who may not often come to church. Encourage ministers to make newcomers feel so welcomed that they might consider returning!

Be sure to **choose which second reading you'll use**: the Colossian message that "you were raised with Christ" (Col 3:1), or Paul's message that we celebrate the sacrifice of Christ with the new "yeast" of sincerity and truth (1Cor. 5:8).

The Church shares four “great sequences” each year: Today’s is the *Victimae Paschali Laudes*. Consider having a gifted cantor sing or chant a setting of this, before segueing into the gospel acclamation!

The thread in today’s scriptures: Filled with Christ’s Spirit, Peter (previously known for his denial of Jesus) now boldly proclaims the risen Christ (Acts 10:34a & 37-43), whose rising is told in today’s gospel (Jn. 20:1-9). With the psalmist, we sing: “This is the day the Lord has made: Let us rejoice and be glad!” (Ps. 118:24).

Holy humor: Sometimes Easter can be stressful: with early-rising children eager to see what the Easter Bunny brought them, getting everyone dressed for church, preparing for family gatherings, and all the other details that fill this day. So, do you want to know how to make Easter easier? I’ll tell you how to make Easter easier. How do you make Easter easier? Simply replace the “t” of Easter with an “i,” and you’ve just made “Easter” “easier”! [Segue into the fact that maybe the simple change of a letter won’t necessarily make Easter easier, but, through his resurrection, Christ changed an otherwise-ordinary Sunday into the reason for our hope and the source of our salvation! He changed our destiny from death, to life! From sin, to mercy and forgiveness! From darkness, to light! He is risen! Alleluia!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a baseball! Easter signals that spring has arrived, and baseball season is right around the corner. Throw the baseball in the air, and note the physical laws of this world: What goes up...must come down! We know that God often sees this world from a very different perspective; indeed, from God’s perspective, as evidenced in today’s scriptures, what goes *down* (into the grave)...must come *up*!

Consider having a **sprinkling rite** this morning, with the holy water from the Easter Vigil: This could be at the beginning of Mass (in place of the Penitential Rite), or after the Renewal of Baptismal Promises (which would be in place of the Creed).

For the intellectually-curious, speak to the etymology of Easter (with Eostre, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of the dawn), explain that Easter is a moveable feast (celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox), note that the bunny was an ancient Egyptian symbol of fertility, and/or share how eggs, a symbol of new life, were forbidden during Lent by the medieval Church! Note also that, though we’re in the Year of Matthew, we won’t hear from Matthew again on a Sunday until the Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time; John and Luke will “fill in” until Matthew’s reappearance on June 21!

Happy Easter! Consider engaging kids through an **Easter egg hunt** and/or a visit from the **Easter Bunny**. Photos with the Easter bunny can be extremely popular and will likely be posted by congregants to social media!

On **April 12**, the Church celebrates **Julius I**, the pope who defended Athanasius against Arian accusers. In his honor, pray for those who courageously stand in defense of others!

On **April 12**, we remember the passing in 1838 of **Johann Adam Möhler**, the German priest and theologian who died at age 41 but was influential on other young minds, like Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar. A prominent exponent of liberal thought, he supported Döllinger's criticisms of the papacy and its claims of purported papal infallibility. In his memory, pray for the young people who dedicate their lives to bringing fresh thought to sometimes-stale institutions!

On **April 13**, the Church celebrates **St. Martin I**, the pope imprisoned by Emperor Constans II and who died as a consequence of the mistreatment he received from fellow Christians. In iconography, he's a pope in a prison cell or a pope holding money. In his memory, read up on the Lateran Council that he convened and the Monothelism and Monothelites condemned at that council, and/or pray today for all who are persecuted by "Christians" and by our fellow Catholics—and for those "Christians" who fail to see the error of their myopic ways!

On **April 13**, the Church also celebrates **St. Hermenegild**, the Visigoth (Spanish) prince who defied his Arian father by converting to Catholicism, the religion of his devout wife, who was the daughter of the king of the Franks. Hermenegild was imprisoned and beheaded, which is why he's depicted in iconography as a prince in chains and/or holding an ax and being lifted to heaven above the king and bishops below him. His courage inspired his younger brother, Recared, to convert to Catholicism as well. In honor of the patron saint of converts, pray for all who have come to embrace our faith from other traditions!

On **April 15**, we remember the passing in 1975 of **Charles Journet**, the Swiss theologian and cardinal who co-founded the theological journal *Nova et Vetera* with Jacques Maritain and was influential in the Second Vatican Council's writing of *Dignitatis humanae* and *Nostra aetate*. In his memory, reflect on your own concrete efforts to bring to flesh "the Church of the Word Incarnate"!

On **April 16**, the Roman church celebrates the birth in 1927 of **Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger**, who headed the Roman church for eight years as Benedict XVI. Originally a liberal theologian questioning literal

interpretations of the resurrection of Jesus, he adopted conservative views after Vatican II and became John Paul II's closest advisor and "Rottweiler" as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Lift a prayer heavenward today for this "pope *emeritus*" –and for the church that will long feel his legacy of attempting a "reform of the [Vatican II] reform"!

On **April 17**, we celebrate the birth in 1938 of **Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza**, the Romanian-born, German, Roman Catholic feminist theologian who co-founded the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. Her book, *In Memory of Her*, argued for the retrieval of the overlooked contributions of women in the early Church. In her honor, find a way today to advocate for her and Jesus' vision of a "discipleship of equals"!

Sunday, April 19, 2020

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

(white)

It's the Easter season: The **paschal candle** remains in close proximity to the ambo!

This Sunday was traditionally known as *dominica in albis* (White Sunday): Invite the newly-baptized to round out the Easter octave by wearing their white gowns, shirts or dresses again this Sunday! Even better, spread word a week or two in advance, and invite all congregants to wear a touch of white!

The thread in today's scriptures: We hear John's story of Easter night, when the risen Christ wished his disciples peace and shared with them the Spirit (Jn. 20:19-31). As a result, they changed their lives and began working all sorts of signs and wonders (Acts 2:42-47). Speaking of changed lives, God "gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1Pet. 1:3), which is a cause for rejoicing (1Pet. 1:6). Christ is risen, and we can now sing with the psalmist: "This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it" (Ps. 118:24)!

Holy humor: I couldn't make this up: Early Greek Christians referred to the Sunday after Easter as "Holy Humor Sunday"! It was a day of great joy and laughter, to celebrate the "joke" that Jesus played on Sin and Death by conquering them! So, in the spirit of the early Greek Christians, who would tell jokes on this day, I'll share with you the story of the day

that Jesus and Moses played golf in heaven! So there they were, Jesus and Moses, playing golf in heaven, and darned the luck, they both hit their golf balls into the same water trap! So Jesus turned to Moses and said, "Didn't you do something with water once?" And Moses said, "I did," and he did his trick of parting the waters, and he fetched his golf ball from the water trap. Then Moses turned to Jesus and said, "Didn't you do something with water once?" And Jesus said, "I did," and he stepped out onto the water. But almost immediately, he sank into the water. Puzzled, he got out of the water and tried again, this time with a running start—but he ended up in water up to his waist. Jesus was now confused and embarrassed, so Moses asked him, "What are you trying to do?" And Jesus replied, "I used to be able to walk on water." Moses smiled and asked, "But the last time you tried it, did you have those holes in your feet?" [Acknowledge once more that it's Holy Humor Sunday, and segue into the holes in Jesus' feet and hands and side—the proof that he had died on the cross and was now raised from the dead!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a large button! The English word "peace" comes from an ancient Greek root that literally mean "to fasten" or "to button." Just as a button fastens together two pieces of cloth, we are ideally united in the peace that the risen Christ wished his friends. Every time we wish one another peace—at every Mass—we show our desire to be "buttoned" to all those other members of the Body of Christ!

It's the final day of the Easter Octave: Be sure your deacon knows how to **chant the double Alleluia of the dismissal**.

It's **Divine Mercy Sunday**: Find a way to incorporate this into your preaching and/or catechesis! Many people are not familiar with the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy; consider the possibility of having a lay leader guide all present in this prayer!

On **April 19**, the Syro Malabar Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the birth in 1945 of **Major Archbishop George Alencherry**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 5.1 million Syro Malabar Catholics he serves!

On **April 21**, the Church celebrates **St. Anselm**, the archbishop of Canterbury whose metaphysical works continue to shed light on the attributes of God. He resisted his king's efforts to use the Church's money in a war against the king's brother. Consider today how you are stewarding the resources entrusted to your care!

On **April 21**, we remember the passing in 1142 of **Peter Abelard**, the medieval French scholastic philosopher and theologian now legendary for his love affair with Héloïse d'Argenteuil. His work, *Sic et Non*, brought together opposite opinions on doctrinal points from various Fathers of the Church. In his memory, consider opposing perspectives to some of your most strongly-held thoughts and beliefs, and/or re-watch the 1988 film, "Stealing Heaven," which attempted to tell the tale of these lovers!

On **April 21**, we celebrate the birth in 1939 of **Sr. Helen Prejean**, the Roman Catholic sister who authored the bestseller, *Dead Man Walking*, and who became a leading advocate for the abolition of the death penalty in the U.S. Sister Helen founded groups to help the family members of murder victims. In her honor, call to mind others who have lost a family member or friend to similar tragic circumstances – and find a small way to reach out to them today, to let them know you care!

On **April 21**, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the birth in 1965 of **Pierbattista Pizzaballa**, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the Roman Catholics he serves!

On **April 21**, we remember the passing in 2011 of **Catharina Joanna Maria Halkes**, the Dutch feminist theologian who gained notoriety when she was forbidden to address John Paul II during his visit to the Netherlands in 1985. Considered the mother of feminist theology in the Netherlands, she held the first chair of Feminism and Christianity at Radboud University. In her memory, consider your own commitment to gender equality in the Body of Christ (Gal 3:28)!

April 22 is Earth Day: Is there anything that your community might do to mark this day? Consider planting trees, putting in place bins for recyclables (as well as a system for ensuring that objects placed there are recycled), and/or inviting a high school environmental sciences class to do a trash/recyclables/composting audit of your community!

On **April 22**, we remember the passing in 1986 of **Mircea Eliade**, the Romanian philosopher and religious historian who established paradigms for religious study that continue to be used today. He suggested that myths and rituals allow us to actually participate in hierophanies. In his memory, reflect on how our Catholic stories and rituals connect us with the larger spiritual motifs shared by peoples throughout our world!

On **April 23**, the Church celebrates **St. George** and **St. Adalbert**. George was a soldier in the imperial guard, tortured and martyred for refusing to sacrifice to Roman gods. Portrayed in iconography as killing a dragon,

George is the patron saint of England and of Boy Scouts and is venerated by Christians of the East and West – as well as by Muslims. Adalbert was the bishop of Prague who was exiled by clergy refusing to observe his clerical reforms, and exiled again after excommunicating those who violated the Church’s right of sanctuary by dragging a woman accused of adultery from a church and murdering her. Consider a fitting way to honor their legacy!

On **April 23**, we remember the passing in 1616 of **William Shakespeare**, the English playwright widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world’s greatest dramatist. His parents were Catholic at a time when practicing Catholicism in England was against the law. In his and his parents’ memory, pray for those who bring beauty to our world—and to those who bravely profess their faith despite difficult circumstances!

On **April 23**, the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church celebrates the anniversary of the appointment in 2004 of **Patriarch Antonios**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 3 million people he serves!

On **April 23**, the Palmarian Catholic Church celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2016 of Joseph Odermatt as **Pope Peter III**. In his honor, pray for him and for the 1,000 people he serves!

On **April 24**, the Church celebrates **St. Fidel of Sigmaringen**, the “lawyer of the poor,” who divided his wealth between the poor and seminarians in need. On his day, reflect on his words: “Woe to me if I should prove myself but a halfhearted soldier in the service of my thorn-crowned Captain!”

April 24 is **Administrative Professionals’ Day**: How will you recognize those who assist the administrative functions of your community, and/or how will you empower others to assist with such details?

On **April 25**, the Church celebrates **St. Mark**, to whom the second gospel is attributed. In his honor, thumb through his short work on the life of Jesus!

On **April 25**, we remember the passing in 1958 of **Bernard Philip Kelly**, the English layman who, when not working as a banker or raising his large family, penned philosophical essays and book reviews for *Blackfriars* for 25 years. He developed the social and economic theory of distributism, reflected on the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and outlined an informed, Christian approach to Eastern religions. In his memory, explore elements of an Eastern philosophy and/or religion!

Lent is over: For those who survived without meat on the Fridays of Lent, suggest a continued practice of “**Meatless Mondays**” or “**Fruit & Veggie Fridays**” as a way to address the impact we have on our environment through our consumption of meat!

Sunday, April 26, 2020
THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER
(white)

It’s the Easter season: The **paschal candle** remains in close proximity to the ambo!

Also, Catholic worship spaces are famously decorated with explosions of lilies on Easter Sunday, only for those spaces to begin looking barren when the Easter lilies begin to die.

- Create a plan this year to **spread your Easter decorating budget over the 50 days of Easter**, so that, even after the Easter lilies wither, you’ll have a way to brighten your worship space with color and natural beauty through Pentecost. Consider ivy and potted flowers, like calla lilies, azaleas, and begonias, which can thrive for weeks.
- Decide what to do with the Easter lilies that you cycle out of your worship space: Plant them outside (presuming there’s someone to water and care for them), or give them away to congregants with a “green thumb”!

The thread in today’s scriptures: As the disciples on the road to Emmaus came to see (Lk. 24:13-35), God raised Jesus from the dead (1Pet. 1:21, Acts 2:32), allowing us to sing with the psalmist: “My heart is glad and my soul rejoices; my body, too, abides in confidence because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption” (Ps. 16:9-10)!

Holy humor: The story is told of the man who decided on Friday afternoon to stay out the entire weekend – hunting with his friends and spending his entire paycheck...without telling his wife! When he finally came home on Sunday evening, he was confronted by his angry wife. The exchange became heated, and she asked, “How would you like it if you didn’t see me for two or three days?” And he made the mistake of replying, “Not see you for two or three days? That would be fine with

me!” Monday went by, and he didn’t see his wife. Tuesday and Wednesday came, and he didn’t see her. Finally on Thursday, the swelling went down just enough, so that he could begin to see her just a little bit out of the corner of his left eye! [Note that it likely took the guy a few more days to begin to see again, then segue into how it is that the disciples on the road to Emmaus didn’t “see” that they were with the risen Christ. Theirs wasn’t a gradual opening of eyes, though: They immediately recognized him in the breaking of the bread – and the risen Christ was gone!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Try a hat and a gardener’s spade! You may have used a blindfold on March 22, the Fourth Sunday of Lent; if not, pull out a blindfold for this homily and speak about how the disciples on the road to Emmaus were “blind” to the fact that they were speaking with the risen Christ. If you already used the blindfold, put on a hat and grab a spade instead: This is how Rembrandt painted the risen Christ, who appeared to Mary Magdalene and wasn’t recognized by her. That’s right: Rembrandt’s imagination was seized by the thought of Mary thinking that the risen Christ was...a gardener! The risen Christ appeared to his disciples while they were fishing, and they didn’t recognize him! In today’s gospel, the risen Christ appears to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and they don’t recognize him! Lead your listeners in a reflection on how it is that sometimes we don’t recognize the risen Christ in our daily lives!

On **April 26**, when it doesn’t fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Paschasius Radbertus**, the Carolingian theologian and abbot of Corbie known for his work, *On the Body and Blood of the Lord*, the first lengthy treatise on the sacrament of the Eucharist in the Western world. He affirmed that the Eucharist contains the true, historical body of Jesus – a view that was refuted by his predecessor, Ratramnus, who wrote a work with the same name and advanced that the Eucharist is strictly metaphorical. In Paschasius’ memory, reacquaint yourself with that important controversy in Eucharistic theology!

On **April 26**, the Church celebrates the birth in 1936 of **Joan Chittister**, the Benedictine nun and theologian known for her works on virtue and monasticism and for her advocacy on feminism and women’s role in society. Forbidden by the Vatican in 2001 to address the Women’s Ordination Worldwide conference, she did so anyway. In her honor, pray for all women and men who advocate for Jesus’ and Paul’s vision of a “discipleship of equals”!

On **April 27**, we remember the passing in 2003 of **Dorothee Steffensky-Sölle**, the German liberation theologian who coined the term *Christofascism* to describe fundamentalists. Steffensky-Sölle attempted to bridge theology to practical life, and her best-known work, *Suffering*, offered a critique of “Christian masochism” and “Christian sadism.” In her memory, consider the extent to which your own theology and spirituality press against or reinforce conventional thinking on matters of religion and spirituality!

On **April 28**, the Church celebrates **St. Peter Chanel** and **St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort**. Peter was a Marist missionary and protomartyr of the South Seas, whose death led to the conversion of the island of Futuna. Louis-Marie was an early writer in the field of Mariology, who promoted consecration to Jesus in Mary. Take a moment today to entrust the missionaries of the Church to Jesus and Mary!

On **April 28**, we remember the passing in 1973 of **Jacques Maritain**, the French Catholic philosopher who revived Aquinas, authored over 60 books, and was influential in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A mentor and close friend of Paul VI, who wanted to name him a cardinal, Maritain was especially interested in metaphysics, being, and the apprehension of being through intuition and sense experience. In his memory, re-read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and/or consider the extent to which your knowledge allows you to “Thomisticize” and/or “measure [your] knowing spirit by the real”!

On **April 28**, we remember the passing in 2018 of **James Hal Cone**, the American theologian known for his works on Black theology and Black liberation theology. He noted that Jesus advocated for the same ideals espoused in the Black Power movement—and that White American churches preached a gospel based on White supremacy, antithetical to the gospel of Jesus. In his memory, reflect on how your words and actions oppress and/or liberate persons of different races, cultures and socioeconomic levels!

On **April 29**, the Church celebrates **St. Catherine of Siena**, the 24th of 25 children, who died at the young age of 33. She’s the patroness of Europe and Italy, and is often depicted holding a lily. Draw attention to her dedication to Christ from an early age (a model for children!), her care of the sick and poor, her contemplative life, and her influence in the Church!

On **April 29**, we remember the passing in 1894 of **Augusta Theodosia Drane**, the English Dominican nun and writer who anonymously published a moral essay long attributed to John Henry Newman. Her

major works included histories of St. Dominic, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Thomas More, and an overview of Christian schools and scholars. In her memory, pray for the countless anonymous women whose lives and works have inspired the Church throughout the centuries!

On **April 30**, the Church celebrates **St. Pius V**, the pope whose white Dominican habit would change the papal wardrobe to the present day. In honor of this reformer of the Church, consider the possible reforms needed in your own celebrations of the Church's liturgies!

April 30 is also a big day in Latin America: It's *el día del niño*! If you have a Latino community, and if you won't be doing anything to celebrate the day on April 30, consider hosting children's games and activities after your Sunday Mass. Pull in volunteers to organize games, children's music, food and drink. If your budget allows, rent a moonwalk or contract a clown, a balloon artist and/or a magician!

On **April 30**, the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2006 of **Lucian Mureșan** as Major Archbishop of Făgăraș and Alba Iulia. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 504,000 Romanian Greek-Catholics he serves!

On **May 1**, the Church celebrates **St. Joseph the Worker**, a recent addition to the liturgical calendar, to counteract May Day celebrations of workers in communist nations. In his honor, bring attention to the sanctity and dignity of human labor as a source of holiness!

On **May 1**, we remember the passing in 1550 of **John Major**, the Scottish philosopher, theologian and historian known for his skeptical, logical approach to the Bible and his premise that people and councils should be placed above kings and popes. In his memory, consider the place of logic and/or skepticism in your own approach to the scriptures!

On **May 1**, the Southern Baptist Convention celebrates the birth in 1973 of **President James David Greear**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 15 million Baptists he serves!

On **May 2**, the Church celebrates **St. Athanasius**, whose defense of the divinity of Christ led him to be exiled five times—for 17 of his 45 years as a bishop! Use this day to focus on the Eastern Church that celebrates him, and/or on the detachment from worldly possessions that he esteemed in his *Life of Anthony*!

Sunday, May 3, 2020
FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
(white)

It's the Easter season: The **pascal candle** remains in close proximity to the ambo!

Today is **Good Shepherd Sunday**: Point to the ancient imagery of the shepherd-king, and challenge listeners to be good shepherds of others!

The thread in today's scriptures: On this Good Shepherd Sunday, we recall that Jesus is the shepherd (Ps. 23:1-6, 1Pet. 2:25), the lamb who takes away our sins (1Pet. 2:24), and the sheep gate (Jn. 10:1-10, remember that shepherds and shepherdesses often blocked the entrance to the sheep pen with themselves and with their herding sticks). Following in Jesus' footsteps, Peter, filled with the Spirit, also helped to shepherd others to salvation (Acts 2:36-41).

Holy humor: One day, the shepherdess told her son to go outside and count the family's sheep. A little while later, he came back in, and she asked him, "How many sheep did you count?" He replied, "40." "Forty?", she said, "That's not possible; we only had 38 to begin with!" And the boy replied, "I know. I rounded them up!" [Expect a groan, unless you have a "ba-dum tss" drum-and-cymbal sting. Segue into the responsibilities of shepherds and shepherdesses, which include "rounding up" the sheep, then to how it is that God shepherds us and how we are called to shepherd one another!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a stuffed animal of a lamb! What does it mean to be a sheep? We listen to and follow the Shepherd! What does it mean to be a shepherd? We care for the "sheep"! It's easy for us to love our pets [hold the stuffed animal closely, with affection]; are we sharing the same love and affection with the many "sheep" we meet throughout the week?

May is here! **For the intellectually-curious**, share a brief lesson on the double etymology of this month: *Maia* was the Roman goddess overseeing the plant growth occurring during this month, and it was also the month in which the ancient Romans celebrated their *maiores*, their elders! Give a May nod to the elders of your community!

It's May, the traditional month of Mary! Consider a **May Day crowning of Mary**. Add to the pageantry by inviting First Communicants to wear their white suits and dresses. Invite all to bring flowers from their gardens to honor Mary!

On **May 3**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **Ss. Philip & James**. Philip is depicted in iconography holding loaves, due to his role in the feeding of the 5,000 (Jn. 6:5-7). "James the Lesser" was the "brother of the Lord" and the leader of the Church at Jerusalem. In their honor, pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions them, and reflect on how you're nourishing others and comporting yourself as a sister or brother of the Lord!

If you serve a Latino community, **May 3** is *el día de la santa cruz* [the day of the Holy Cross] and *el día de los albañiles* [Bricklayer's Day] in Latin America. For the former, people decorate crosses and bring them to church for a special blessing: Consider how you might share a cross with your congregants and/or have a crafty congregant lead an activity in which community members can make their own crosses for display at home or to be given as gifts! For the latter, consider a blessing of all who work in building-related trades (e.g., architects, engineers, contractors, painters, electricians, plumbers, etc.) and/or a blessing of their tools and/or machinery!

On **May 3**, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church Canonical celebrates the birth in 1962 of **Oleh Kulyk**, who would become Patriarch Moses of Kyiv. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the people he serves!

On **May 3**, the Syriac Orthodox Church celebrates the birth in 1965 of **Sa'id Karim**, who would become Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II of Antioch and All the East. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the people he serves!

On **May 3**, we remember the passing in 1997 of **Catherine Mowry LaCugna**, the feminist theologian and author of *God For Us*, who sought to make the doctrine of the Trinity relevant to the everyday lives of believers. She died of cancer at age 44, while teaching systematic theology at Notre Dame. In her memory, consider the place of the Trinity in your own daily life!

On **May 4**, we remember the passing in 1995 of **Cornelio Fabro**, the Italian Stigmatine priest and scholastic philosopher who founded the Institute for Higher Studies on Unbelief, Religion and Cultures. Part of the scholastic revival of Thomism, he also studied anthropocentrism, analyzed the relationship of Kierkegaard's thought to Christian philosophy, and critiqued "progressive" theology. In his memory, find a way to probe the skepticism, the existentialism, and the culture of unbelief that are associated with modern philosophy!

In some places, **May 5** is *cinco de mayo*, the day on which some Mexicans and Mexican Americans celebrate the victory of the Mexican Army over the French at the Battle of Puebla in 1862. This day, largely promoted by beer companies, is admittedly more popular in the United States than in Mexico, but, if it's a significant day for your community, find some way to celebrate it—perhaps with Mexican food, drink, music and decorations!

On **May 5**, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the birth in 1970 of **Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 4.5 million Ukrainian Greek Catholics he serves!

On **May 6**, we remember the passing in 1638 of **Cornelius Jansen**, the Dutch Roman Catholic bishop of Ypres in Flanders (modern-day Netherlands), who taught scripture at Louvain and is now known as the father of the theological movement of Jansenism. 75 years after his death, the opposition to his Augustinian theology would become the litmus test for obedience to the Roman papacy, by the Jesuits who enjoyed political and theological power in the church at that time. In his memory, pray for all who insist on rigid conformity by others to their own theologies and worldviews—and to all who suffer as a result!

On **May 6**, we celebrate the birth in 1939 of **Kenneth Hartley Blanchard**, the American author best known for co-authoring *The One Minute Manager*. The CSO (Chief Spiritual Officer) of his own company, he also co-authored *Lead Like Jesus: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time*. In his honor, consider the ways in which you might need to grow as you endeavor to...lead like Jesus!

On **May 7**, we remember the passing in 2018 of **Jean Vanier**, the Canadian philosopher, theologian and humanitarian who founded *L'Arche*, an international federation of communities for people with developmental disabilities and those who assist them. He authored over 30 books on religion, tolerance, disability and normality and is credited with saying, "We must do what we can to diminish walls, to meet each other. Why do we put people with disabilities behind walls?" In his honor, consider the ways in which you erect and/or tear down the walls that separate us from the most determined among us—and commit yourself to honoring them by replacing such words in your vocabulary as "disabled" and "disability," with more chosen words, like "determined" and "special abilities"!

On **May 8**, we remember the passing in 1905 of **Josip Juraj Štrosmajer** (or Strossmayer), the Croatian politician and bishop who was a vocal opponent of unlimited papal power and of purported papal infallibility. He left the First Vatican Council after making a three-hour speech deemed heretical by many in attendance. He promoted religious unification through the use of a single Slavonic rite for Catholic and Orthodox churches. In his memory, consider how you are promoting unity and/or being prophetic!

Sunday, May 10, 2020
FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
(white)

It's the Easter season: The **paschal candle** remains in close proximity to the ambo!

The thread in today's scriptures: The Johannine Jesus suggests that he will take care of us, even preparing a place for us (Jn. 14:3). Like Jesus and like the seven men in today's first reading (Acts 6:1-7), we are called to care for others. In this way, we show that we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart" (1Pet. 2:9), and we reflect God's justice, kindness and unfailing love to those in need (Ps. 33:5)!

Holy humor: There are all sorts of heaven jokes! Try one or two of the following, then segue into the Johannine Jesus' message of preparing a place for us in God's house!

- A man died and went to heaven, and Saint Peter welcomed him into the Pearly Gates and led him down golden streets filled with mansions on both sides. Finally, they reached their destination: a little hut! The man asked Saint Peter why he was getting a hut when there were so many mansions he could live in. Saint Peter replied, "Buddy, I tried to do the best I could with the money you shared with us!"
- A lawyer and a priest entered heaven at the same time. Saint Peter welcomed them both and showed them to their new homes. The lawyer received a huge mansion with great landscaping and several large fountains. He was overjoyed at the sight. The priest was excited, too, imagining that, if the lawyer received such a home, the home that God had prepared for the priest, who had dedicated his entire life to God, must be absolutely incredible!

Saint Peter took the priest to...a shabby, old apartment, surrounded by several other apartments, and with several cars in the parking lot. Saint Peter said, "Here we are: This is where you'll be living!" The priest exploded: "Are you kidding me? I've served God my whole, entire life, and I get this apartment, when that lawyer got such a great mansion?" Saint Peter sighed and replied, "I'll be honest: We get thousands and thousands of priests up here, but she's the first lawyer we've ever gotten!"

- [For the following joke, feel free to substitute the names of other players and teams. Note: A joke like this presumes some background knowledge of the football players and teams mentioned.] NFL quarterback Peyton Manning of the Denver Colts arrived in heaven, and God was showing him to his new home: a modest little house with a faded Colts flag in the window. God said, "Peyton, this is yours for eternity!" Peyton was certainly grateful the place in heaven, but he also noticed the house directly in front of his: It was a three-story mansion with a blue and red sidewalk, a fifty-foot flagpole with an enormous New England Patriots flag, and with Patriots curtains in all the windows. So, Peyton said, "God, I'm not trying to sound ungrateful, but I'm an all-pro quarterback and hall of famer with several NFL records—so how can Tom Brady get a better house than me?" God chuckled and replied, "Peyton, that's not Tom's house. It's mine!"

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider two interlocking magic rings! You can buy them at any magic shop. Hold them separately and explain that one ring represents God, and the other ring represents us. "Magically" interlock the rings, and ask which ring is inside which ring: Is the top ring inside the bottom ring, or is the bottom ring inside the top ring? Both rings are inside one another, in the same way that we are in God, and God is in us (Jn. 14:10)! Now, as you magically separate the rings, talk about how it is that some people try to live their lives apart from God, perhaps thinking that they can leave God at the church and come back the next Sunday to "reconnect" with God. That's not how it is! Magically connect the rings again, and speak of how it is that we carry God with us throughout the week. Why? Because God is in us, and we are in God! [Note: The gospel message of Jesus being in us, and us in Jesus (Jn. 14:20), is repeated next Sunday. If you don't preach this message today, you can save it for next week!]

On **the second Sunday of May**, U.S. society celebrates **Mother's Day**. Each of us has a mother and various mother figures in our lives: Let's celebrate them today!

- Involve women in all liturgical ministries today!
- Incorporate intercessions for mothers—living and deceased.
- Share a special blessing for mothers and mother figures (e.g., stepmothers, godmothers, aunts, teachers, coaches), lead all present in an applause, and share with all mother figures a red, long-stemmed rose or some other symbol of your community's love for and gratitude to them!
- For the intellectually-curious, note that the ancient Greeks celebrated Cybele—the mother of Greek gods—with a spring festival, and/or share a brief lesson on Mother Jarvis' concern that, prior to Mother's Day, there was no day in the U.S. to honor women.

On **May 10**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Damien de Veuster**, who dedicated his ministry to those who suffered leprosy and were exiled to Moloka'i. Consider your own stance toward the "lepers" of your family, community, and/or society, and commit yourself to a concrete act of reaching out and assisting them!

On **May 10**, we remember the passing in 1990 of **Walker Percy**, the American author known for his philosophical novels and his exploration of "the dislocation of [the human person] in the modern age." He and his wife, Mary Bernice, converted to Catholicism together, and his career as a Catholic writer began nearly ten years later with an article in *Commonweal* magazine condemning Southern segregation and demanding a larger role for Christian thought in Southern life. Three months before his death, he made his profession as a secular Benedictine oblate. In his memory, find a way to take a stand against vestiges of segregation that based on such categories as race, religion, economic status, sex, sexuality and gender identity!

On **May 11**, we remember the passing in 1961 of **Yves René Marie Simon**, the French moral and political philosopher who was recognized as one of the world's "most original and distinguished political theorists." More openminded than many Thomists and scholastic philosophers, Simon ardently defended the compatibility of Thomistic virtues and moral action with liberal, Western democracy, arguing that French Catholics erred in believing that their Catholic faith supported adherence to monarchs. In his memory, pray for all who find themselves

in monarchical churches that reflect more the vision and structures of the ancient and medieval Roman Empire, than the reign of God!

On **May 11**, the Independent Sacramental Movement remembers the passing in 1969 of **Salomão Barbosa Ferraz**, the Anglican priest who founded the Free Catholic Church and was consecrated to the episcopacy by Carlos Duarte Costa. Salomão was later received into the Roman church by John XXIII, named a titular bishop, and participated in the Second Vatican Council. He was a husband and the father of seven children—a rare example of a legitimate, married bishop in the Roman church at that time. In his honor, pray for the reconciliation of churches, that we might all recognize our oneness in Christ!

On **May 12**, the Church celebrates **Ss. Nereus & Achilleus**, the eunuch chamberlains of Emperor Domitian's niece, Flavia Domitilla. They were later banished with her to the island of Ponza and beheaded. In their honor, pray for all who serve others and “stick out their necks” for them!

On **May 12**, we remember the passing in 1994 of **Erik Homburger Erikson**, the German-American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst known for his theory of psychological development and his coining of the phrase “identity crisis.” In his memory, pray for all who suffer from mistrust, shame, guilt, inferiority, role confusion, isolation, stagnation and/or despair!

On **May 13**, the Church celebrates **Our Lady of Fatima**, the apparition of Mary to shepherd children in 20th-century Portugal. Faithful to her command to pray for sinners, find a moment today to pray the rosary!

On **May 13**, we remember the passing in 2006 of **Jaroslav Jan Pelikan**, the American Lutheran pastor and scholar of medieval intellectual history, Christianity, and Christian doctrine. He authored more than 30 books, including his five-volume *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, and his later works crossed from the scholarly realm into public popular reading. Late in life, he “returned” to the Orthodox Church that he discovered through his study. In his memory, pause and consider Jesus and/or Mary through the centuries!

On **May 13**, the Lutheran World Federation celebrates the anniversary of the election in 2017 of **President Musa Panti Filibus**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 74 million Lutherans he serves!

On **May 14**, the Church celebrates **St. Matthias**, the man chosen from 120 disciples to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:18-26). Pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions him, and use this day to reflect on how you are forming your own “replacement(s)”: Who could one day do what you

currently do, and how can you assist them in their education and formation?

On **May 14**, we remember the passing in 1742 of **Dominique-Marie Varlet**, the Roman Catholic bishop of Babylon who, without the permission of the Roman papacy, shared valid lines of apostolic succession with four archbishops of Utrecht. Take a moment today to thank God for the tremendous courage and pastoral sensitivity of this giant in the Independent Sacramental Movement!

On **May 15**, the Church celebrates **St. Isidore the Farmer** (not to be confused with St. Isidore of Seville, who is celebrated on April 4). In honor of the patron saint of farmers, share a prayer for all who raise and harvest the foods we all enjoy!

On **May 15**, we remember the passing in 1949 of **Peter Maurin**, the French social activist and co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement who “indoctrinated” Dorothy Day with such ideas as Catholic Worker farms and “houses of hospitality” for the poor. In his memory, consider your own stance toward the poor and those most in need!

On **May 16**, we celebrate the birth in 1929 of **Warren Wendel Wiersbe**, the American Baptist pastor and theology professor who has written and published over 150 books, including the 50+ books of his “Be” commentaries on the books of the Bible. In his honor, pause to consider the contribution that you might make to the recorded history and literature of our faith!

Sunday, May 17, 2020
SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
(white)

It’s the Easter season: The **paschal candle** remains in close proximity to the ambo!

Be careful with the **exclusive language** of today’s gospel: We should not presume that only *men* love God! Perhaps you might proclaim the last two lines in the third person plural: “Those who have my commandments and observe them are the ones who love me. And those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love *them* and reveal myself to *them*.”

The thread in today's scriptures: In today's first reading, Philip, James and John proclaim Christ and are the source of joy for many (Acts 8:8), allowing others to "cry out to God with joy" (Ps. 66:1) and to proclaim what God had done for them (Ps. 66:16). What are Christians to do? "Sanctify Christ in your hearts" (1Pet. 3:15), proclaim Christ (Acts 8:5), and show your love of Christ by carrying out his commands (Jn. 14:15)!

Holy humor: The story is told of the blind man, the paraplegic, and the deaf man who were looking for healing and who had heard of a famous healer who lived on a mountaintop. The blind man went up the trail using his white cane. At the top of the mountain, the healer healed him, he threw his cane off the mountain, and he came back down the mountain. The paraplegic made the difficult trek up the mountain in his wheelchair. At the top of the mountain, the healer healed him, he threw his wheelchair off the mountain, and he came back down the mountain. The deaf man saw what the other two had done. He climbed the mountain with his sign language interpreter – and yes, you know where this is going – at the top of the mountain, the healer healed him, he threw his sign language interpreter off the mountain, and he came back down the mountain! [Segue into the many healings that were taking place in today's first reading – a cause of great joy for many people – and how the early apostles were following Jesus' command to preach, heal and baptize in his name!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a yoke! [A parish carpenter can easily cut two half-circles into a 2x8 board for this.] Begin your homily by holding up the yoke and saying, "This is what married life is like! Literally." Explain that conjugal (or "married") life comes from a Latin root that literally means that you walk "with the yoke" of another person. In marriage, we're yoked together! Now, transition to today's gospel: The Johannine Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15, repeated in Jn. 14:21). Ancient rabbis used the yoke as a symbol of God's law – and those who resisted God's law were branded as "stiff-necked" – like oxen who try to resist the yoke! Fortunately, in the synoptic gospels, Jesus boiled down 613 biblical mandates into two primary ones: Love God, and love your neighbor. Jesus' yoke is definitely easier and lighter than the Mosaic Law (Mt. 11:30)! In this context, the pseudonymous author of 1Peter might be understood to mean that if we shoulder the "yoke" of Jesus' law, he, like the driver of oxen, will "lead us to God" (1Pet. 3:18)!

On **May 18**, the Church celebrates **St. John I**, the elderly pope imprisoned by an Arian king. Pray in a special way for the elderly, the imprisoned, and those who are persecuted by others!

On **May 19**, we remember the passing in 1928 of **Max Ferdinand Scheler**, the German “first man of the philosophical paradise” who developed Husserl’s phenomenology and greatly influenced contemporary philosophy. Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II) defended his doctoral dissertation on Scheler, who suggested that philosophical knowledge cannot be achieved without sharing in the primal essence of love, which opens us to other “beings-of-value.” In Scheler’s memory, pause to consider the values and “disvalues” (negative values) that currently direct your life—and the value that you might be attaching to the realization of lower values at the expense of higher values!

On **May 19**, we remember the passing in 1994 of **Jacques Ellul**, the French philosopher, sociologist and lay theologian who was a noted Christian anarchist and who authored 58 books and a thousand articles during his lifetime. A dominant theme of his work was the threat that technology poses to religion and human freedom. In his memory, consider the ways in which technology limits your freedom and the freedom of those whom you love!

On **May 20**, the Church celebrates **St. Bernardine of Siena**, the orphaned “apostle of Italy” who cared for plague victims, preached devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus, and hosted “bonfires of vanities” to burn unnecessary luxuries. In his memory, encourage acts of care for “untouchables,” share a lesson on the IHS Christogram, and/or encourage congregants to share the extra food in their pantries and the extra clothes in their closets with those in need!

On **May 21**, the Church celebrates **St. Christopher Magallanes & Companions**, the 22 priests and 3 laypersons martyred during anticlerical government reforms in Mexico (1915-1928). Christopher was killed without trial, and after absolving his executioner. Take a moment today to pray for your enemies and for their forgiveness; better yet, find a way to reach out to them today in love!

On **May 21**, we celebrate the birth in 1922 of **Francis A. Sullivan**, the American Jesuit theologian best known for his writings on ecclesiology and in defense of the Roman Catholic magisterium. His research on Pauline charisms was incorporated into *Lumen gentium*, and his students included Avery Dulles, Joseph Komonchak, Richard McBrien and William Levada. He questioned John Paul II’s assertion in *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* that the prohibition of women’s ordination has been infallibly taught, and he emphasized consensus among theologians as a criterion by which it might be determined that a doctrine is universally taught by the Church. In his honor, consider your own role in helping to define an ecclesiology for the Independent Catholic movement!

On **May 22**, the Church celebrates **St. Rita of Cascia**, a victim of domestic abuse, who, as an Augustinian nun, shared the sufferings of Jesus. Pray for all victims of domestic violence—and promotes acts of charity for organizations that assist them!

On **May 22**, we remember the passing in 1885 of **Victor Marie Hugo**, the French poet, novelist and dramatist who wrote *Les Misérables*, is considered one of France's greatest and best-known writers, and whose likeness is on French currency. Largely raised by his Catholic mother, he received a Catholic Royalist education. As a young man, his views became increasingly anti-Catholic and anti-clerical, particularly in light of the Church's indifference to the plight of the working class. The Catholic press responded with some 740 published attacks on *Les Misérable*. In his memory, pray for and/or connect with those who cherish the Church's message of social justice—even if they have challenges with the clericalism, structures and stances of the Church!

On **May 23**, we remember the passing in 1841 of **Franz von Baader**, the German Catholic philosopher, theologian, physician and mining engineer who revived the Scholastic school as a means of countering growing empiricism and atheism in Europe. He is known for introducing to academia the works of Meister Eckhart, the Dominican who suffered the inquisitorial process and was condemned for heresy by the Roman church. In his memory, explore the mystical works of Meister Eckhart, whom von Baader attempted to popularize!

On **May 23**, the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the birth in 1930 of **Major Archbishop Lucian Mureșan**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 504,000 Romanian Greek-Catholics he serves!

Sunday, May 24, 2020

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

(white)

Consider when you'll celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension: If you celebrate it on the 40th day of Easter, know that many people may be unable to join you for a Thursday liturgy. By transferring the celebration to this Sunday, all will be able to celebrate this mystery of our faith!

It's the Easter season: The **paschal candle** remains in close proximity to the ambo!

For the intellectually-curious, there are various lessons today!

- Provide a brief lesson on the ascension in scripture: it can only be inferred in Matthew, it's not contained in the earliest version of Mark, and it may have taken place as soon as Easter Day in Luke's account. Also, be sure to note that the Acts of the Apostles, which contains an ascension account, was written by Luke!
- As anthropologist Joseph Campbell pointed out that, even if the risen Christ blasted off at the speed of light, he'd still be in the Milky Way nearly 2,000 years later; what are more mature understandings that we might have of this mystery, rather than a merely simplistic conception of the resurrected Christ ascending to be atop the "bowl" of the heavens in the ancient cosmology?

Note the **exclusive language** of today's first reading: Why should we presume that there were no women among the "men of Galilee" – since Jesus' mother and other women were among Jesus' disciples?

You'll need to **choose which form of the second reading you'll use**: Ephesians 1, which speaks of Christ being seated at God's right hand in heaven, or Ephesians 4, which says that Christ descended into the lower regions of the earth before ascending "far above all the heavens."

Note: **The introductory line of today's second reading is misleading.** The Letter to the Ephesians is a pseudonymous letter, written in Paul's name and spirit, but not written by Paul. Rather than confuse your listeners, begin with, "A reading from the Letter to the Ephesians"!

The thread in today's scriptures: Matthew concludes his gospel with the risen Christ's admonition to baptize and teach others to observe his commandments (Mt. 28:19-20; note the connections to last Sunday's scriptures), and we hear the ascension account of Luke's second volume (Acts 1:1-11). The psalmist sings of the ascension of the messiah to his throne (Ps. 47:2-9), and the pseudonymous author of the Letter to the Ephesians affirms that God "worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at God's right hand in the heavens" (Eph. 1:20).

Holy humor: The story is told of the priest who was speaking with the small children of her congregation. Before bidding them farewell, she asked if any of the children had any questions for her. Little Rebecca was eager to share what she had discovered this week. She asked, "Do you know why God created the world with only one hand?" The priest was a bit surprised. "God only created the world with one hand?" Little Rebecca continued, "Yes! God created the world with God's left hand – and do you know why?" Deciding to play along, the priest asked, "And

just how do we know that God created the world with God's left hand?" Little Rebecca was quick to answer: "Because Jesus was...sitting on God's right hand!" [Segue into today's celebration of Jesus' ascension into heaven.]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a depiction of ancient cosmology and/or the cross! Ancient depictions of the universe (indeed until some 500 years ago) suggested that the heavens were like an inverted bowl over the flat plate of the earth. So, too, it's time to see this mystery of faith anew. Instead of thinking of Christ as "somewhere up there" (an admittedly androcentric conception by people on any side of the earth), open your eyes: Christ is hidden in the faces of those around you! Medieval mystics suggested that the two beams of the cross lift our attention "vertically" toward God and "horizontally" toward those around us: Consider how this feast has traditionally taken our eyes in a "vertical" direction when, perhaps more appropriately, this celebration should take our eyes in a "horizontal" direction—in the direction of the presence of Christ around us!

It's **Memorial Day** weekend: Include prayers for all who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom!

On **May 24**, we remember the passing in 1871 of **Georges Darboy**, the archbishop of Paris who argued for the episcopal independence of the French church and strongly opposed purported papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council. He stirred controversy by suppressing the Jesuits in his diocese, and Pius IX refused him the cardinal's hat due to his liberal writings. He was among the hostages who were executed when the Paris Commune was about to be overthrown in 1871. In his memory, pray for all victims of violence, oppression, and passive-aggression!

On **May 25**, the Church celebrates **St. Bede the Venerable**, **St. Gregory VII**, and **St. Mary Magdalene de'Pazzi**. Bede challenges us to consider how we are recording history. Gregory VII was a reformer who, because of his disputes with the emperor, is a model for getting along with those who think very differently from us. Mary Magdalene de'Pazzi developed a love of prayer from an early age (a model for children!) and can be lifted up as a model of prayer, penance, eucharistic devotion, and love for the poor!

On **May 25**, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the birth in 1953 of **Francesco Moraglia**, the Latin Patriarch of Venice. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the Roman Catholics he serves!

On **May 26**, the Church celebrates **St. Philip Neri**, the Italian priest and “third apostle of Rome” who founded the Congregation of the Oratory for secular priests. In his memory, consider the ways in which you support and encourage the clergy around you!

On **May 26**, we remember the passing in 1831 of **Georg Hermes**, the German Catholic theologian whose works were posthumously condemned by the Roman church and later championed by his students who joined the Old Catholic Church. Their efforts were in vain, and the condemnation of his works was reiterated by Pius IX—only solidifying their opposition to the oppressive papacracy of the Roman church. In his memory, pray for all who are harshly judged, even after death!

On **May 27**, the Church celebrates **St. Augustine of Canterbury**, the first bishop of Canterbury: Pray today for our sisters and brothers of the Anglican tradition!

On **May 29**, the Syro Malabar Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2011 of **George Alencherry** as Major Archbishop of Ernakulam-Ankamali. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 5.1 million Syro Malabar Catholics he serves!

On **May 29**, we remember the passing in 2013 of **Andrew Greeley**, the Roman Catholic priest, sociologist and novelist who interpreted American Catholicism through his research and fiction. Greeley’s explicit treatment of sex and sexuality, as well as of the Roman church’s sexual abuse scandal, earned him the scorn of critics. In his memory, pray for all whose words and actions are not always charitably received by those they love!

Sunday, May 31, 2020

PENTECOST

(red)

We’re still in the Easter season: The **paschal candle** remains in close proximity to the ambo—and is removed from the sanctuary at the conclusion of today’s Mass. Consider carrying it out of your worship space as part of the procession during the hymn of sending forth!

Think through the **Pentecost décor** of your worship space!

- Decorate your worship space with splashes of **red**!
- Be sure your **Pentecost vestments** are ironed or steamed—and that they coordinate with any other red(s) in your worship environment.
- Consider **banners** with images of the fire and/or dove that represents the Holy Spirit.
- Consider **floral arrangements** that symbolize the diversity of the persons who experienced the Pentecost event, with a variety of flowers of differing shapes, sizes and colors. Consider flowers with intriguing, flame-shaped and/or flame-colored blooms.
- Bring to mind the appearance of the Holy Spirit as a rushing wind by creating **ribbon banners** on portable stands lining your outer aisles, by placing banners outdoors, and/or by hanging bells and/or chimes in trees. When making ribbon banners, always vary the colors, widths and lengths of the ribbons.
- As always, **decorate the entrance to your worship space and even outdoors**, so that the spirit of the celebration is obvious to congregants as they approach your worship space! Also, don't forget the look of other spaces, like your Blessed Sacrament chapel, parish hall and classrooms!
- **Invite congregants to wear red**, or, if you have a multicultural community, invite congregants to dress in native dress, and proclaim the scriptures—particularly the first reading—in a more multilingual way!

There is no more appropriate way to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit than with the **sacrament of Confirmation**: Consider planning well in advance for a celebration of Confirmation on this special day!

There is a **special set of scriptures** for the Vigil of Pentecost, which includes four options for the first reading!

The Church shares four “great sequences” each year: Today's is the *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*. Consider having a gifted cantor sing or chant a setting of this, before segueing into the Gospel Acclamation!

The thread in today's scriptures (for the Mass during the Day): Luke shares the story of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11). John tells a different story, of how the Johannine Jesus breathed forth the Spirit on his friends on Easter night (Jn. 20:19-23). Both point to the same truth: The Spirit is present and active in Christ's Church, endowing us with

gifts (1Cor. 12:3-7) and renewing the face of the earth (Ps. 104:30) through those who've received the gift of the Spirit!

Holy humor: You've likely heard the joke about how you make holy water, right? How do you make holy water? You take water, and you...boil the hell out of it! But have you heard what you get when you mix holy water and...vodka? What do you get when you mix holy water and vodka? A holy...spirit! [Segue to how it is that this day celebrates a different type of holy spirit: God's sustaining spirit in our world!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a glass of milk, a bottle of chocolate syrup, and a tall spoon! Hold up the glass of milk, and tell your listeners "This glass of milk is...you!" Everyone knows the taste of milk. Invite forward an altar server, have him/her taste the milk, and tell you what it tastes like. It tastes like...milk! Now hold up the chocolate, and say "This chocolate is...the Holy Spirit!" (Your listeners can now guess where this is going!) Pour the chocolate into the glass, and have the altar server taste the milk again. What does it taste like? (Be sure to prepare your altar server in advance, so that s/he is not confused.) Because the chocolate pierced the milk and settled on the bottom of the glass, the milk still tastes like...milk. What do you have to do to the chocolate? You have to stir it up! In the same way, we all receive the Spirit in the sacraments of the Church...but we ourselves need to "stir up" the Spirit! As you stir the chocolate into the milk, list a few ways listeners can "stir up" the Spirit in their lives (e.g., prayer, reading scripture, going to church, performing good works). Finally, ask the altar server to taste the milk one last time. What does it taste like? Chocolate milk! End with these words: "Sisters and brothers, we've all received the Spirit. If your life tastes like milk, it's time to...stir up the Spirit!"

On Pentecost, we refresh the special dismissal that we heard during the Easter Octave: Be sure your deacon knows how to **chant the double Alleluia of the dismissal**.

After today, we return to Ordinary Time—beginning with the 9th Week in Ordinary Time this week—but we won't see the color green on a Sunday until June 21.

The school year is winding down: Be sure to have an **end-of-year blessing for all students—and all who serve them**—in thanksgiving for the past year of learning and growth, and asking for God's blessing over them during the summer break! Also, find a fitting way to **celebrate the graduates in your community**—perhaps by inviting them to wear their

caps and gowns to Mass, sharing scholarships with them, and/or having a reception with cake and punch to honor them!

On **May 31**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates the **Visitation of Mary**: Repeat Elizabeth's words as you pray the second Joyful Mystery of the rosary!

On **June 1**, the Church celebrates **St. Justin**, the early apologist who used philosophy to shed light on the mysteries of our faith: Honor him with a brief refresher of his defenses of our beliefs!

On **June 1**, we remember the passing in 1971 of **Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr**, the Reformed theologian and ethicist who has been called the most influential American theologian of the 20th century. He battled with religious liberals over the optimism of their Social Gospel and with conservatives over their naïve view of scripture and their narrow definition of "true religion," and he frequently wrote on the intersection of religion, politics and public policy. In his memory, find a moment today to reacquaint yourself with his life and works!

On **June 1**, we remember the passing in 2009 of **Thomas Berry**, the Catholic Passionist priest, cultural historian and eco-theologian—or "geologist," as he preferred to be called—who was a leading voice in eco-spirituality. A leader in the tradition of de Chardin, he advocated for an interdependent "communion of subjects" in an evolving universe, something that cannot be achieved without the assistance of political, economic, educational and religious systems. In his memory, consider your own stance toward the earth from which we were created!

On **June 2**, the Church celebrates **Ss. Marcellinus & Peter**, the third-century Roman priest and exorcist venerated by the Church after their martyrdom at the hands of Severus. In their memory, pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions them, and pray for those "martyrs" who witness to God's love through their generous sharing of self!

On **June 2**, we celebrate the birth in 1957 of **Gregory A. Boyd**, the American theologian, pastor and author who is a leading voice in the Neo-Anabaptist movement for Christian pacifism and a non-violent understanding of God. He writes widely on Christianity and politics, debunking the myth of a "Christian nation." In his honor, consider your own notions of God's purported violence and the place of peace in Jesus' liberating message!

On **June 2**, we remember the passing in 1987 of **Anthony de Mello**, the Indian Jesuit priest and psychotherapist who drew from mystical traditions of the East and the West for his works on spirituality. In his memory, dust off his works and enrich your preaching and teaching!

On **June 3**, the Church celebrates **St. Charles Luwanga**, the catechist who was burned alive with his 21 companions for spreading the faith in Uganda: Pray for and find a way to support the Church's missions in foreign lands!

On **June 4**, the Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates the anniversary of the enthronement in 2013 of Boghos Manousian as **Patriarch Nourhan Manougian of Jerusalem**. In his honor, pray for him and for the 9 million people he serves!

On **June 5**, the Church celebrates **St. Boniface**, the Anglo-Saxon monk who evangelized Germany. People came to believe in him when he chopped down an oak tree dedicated to Thor – and wasn't immediately struck down. In his honor, reflect on the "sacred cows" that are presumably immune from question or criticism in our own faith tradition, to see if you, too, might grow in a deeper understanding of our faith and our world!

On **June 6**, the Church celebrates **St. Norbert**, the German nobleman-turned-priest whose near-death experience of lightning transformed his life. Consider how your life might change if you had a similar near-death experience – and begin today to live in that way!

On **June 6**, we remember the passing in 1893 of **Karl Josef von Hefele**, the Roman Catholic bishop and German theologian known for his seven-volume work on the Church's councils. At the advent of the First Vatican Council, he published his *Causa Honorii Papae*, which argued for the moral and historical impossibility of purported papal infallibility, based on his vast knowledge of Church history. At the council, he voted against the promulgation of the proposed dogma. In his memory, spend a bit of time researching the complex contexts from which papal infallibility and other dogmas of the Church arose!

On **June 6**, we remember the passing in 1961 of **Carl Gustav Jung**, the Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who influenced the fields of psychiatry, anthropology, archaeology, literature, philosophy and religious studies. He delved into individuation and coined such terms as synchronicity, the collective unconscious, extraversion and introversion. In his memory, dust off a few works on human personality and consider the correlations of various personality traits with religious behaviors!

Sunday, June 7, 2020

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

(white)

Decorate your worship space with a white that matches your vestments for this day, and integrate Trinitarian symbols (e.g., the triangle, or three interlocking figures). Be careful to avoid heretical images of the Trinity: To depict an old man, Jesus, and a bird pushes congregants to tritheistic notions!

The thread in today's scriptures: God reveals God's self to Moses as "the Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity" (Ex. 34:6), and Daniel shares a hymn of praise to the God of our ancestors (Dan. 3:52). Paul shares a Trinitarian farewell (2Cor. 13:14), and John shares his theology of God loving the world so much that God shared with us God's only Son, "that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16).

Holy humor: [Warning: This joke takes some practice to ensure its smooth delivery.] The story is told of how the pope some centuries ago had decided to expel all Jewish people from Rome. Naturally, there was an uproar from the Jewish community. So the pope made a deal: He would have a religious debate with the rabbi of the Jewish community; if the rabbi won, the Jewish people could stay; but if the pope won, the Jewish people would have to leave. The very smart rabbi chosen to debate the pope had one simple request: To make it more interesting, neither side would be allowed to talk! The pope agreed. The day of the great debate came, and the rabbi sat opposite the pope. The pope raised his hand and showed three fingers [raise three fingers of your right hand], and rabbi looked back at the pope and raised one finger [raise one finger of your left hand]. The pope waved his fingers in a circle around his head [wave your right hand in a horizontal circle], and the rabbi pointed to the ground where he sat [point to the ground with your left hand]. The pope pulled out a host and a chalice of wine [hold up a chalice in your right hand], and the rabbi pulled out an apple [hold up an apple in your left hand]. Exasperated, the pope stood up and said, "I give up! You're too good! Your people can stay!" [Put down the chalice and apple.] Afterwards, the cardinals asked the pope what happened. The pope said, "First, I held up three fingers to represent the Trinity [raise three fingers of your right hand], and he responded by holding up one finger [raise one finger of your left hand] to remind me that there was still one God common to both our religions. Then I waved my finger

around me to show him that God was all around us [wave your right hand in a horizontal circle], and he responded by pointing to the ground and showing that God was also right here with us [point to the ground with your left hand]. I pulled out the host and the wine to show that God absolves us from our sins [hold up the chalice in your right hand], and he pulled out an apple to remind me of our original sin [hold up the apple in your left hand]. He had an answer for everything! What could I do?" [Put down the chalice and apple.] Meanwhile, the Jewish community crowded around the rabbi and asked him what happened. "Well," said the rabbi, "First he said to me that we had three days to leave [raise three fingers of your right hand], so I told him that not one of us was leaving [raise one finger of your left hand]. Then he told me that this whole city would be cleared of Jews [wave your right hand in a horizontal circle], and I let him know that we were staying right here. [point to the ground with your left hand]." "And then?" asked a woman. "I don't know," said the rabbi. "He took out his lunch [hold up the chalice in your right hand], so I took out mine [hold up the apple in your left hand]!" [Segue into the theological complexities with which we've surrounded the Trinity and the many and varied perspectives that exist on the Trinity.]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider involving all present in the very Catholic symbol that is...the sign of the cross! Ask listeners how many times in their lives they've made the sign of the cross. Every time we do so, we express our belief in the great mystery of how God created, redeemed and continues to sustain us and our world!

For the intellectually-curious, share a lesson on solid Trinitarian theology, definitions from Trinitarian theology, and Trinitarian heresies. Many missals commit the heresy of tritheism by depicting the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as an old man, Jesus and a bird on a cloud. How far this is from the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* for which we use the codename "God"!

June is here! **For the intellectually-curious,** share a brief lesson on the double etymology of this month: Juno was the Roman goddess who was the patroness of marriage and of women's well-being; June was also the month in which the ancient Romans celebrated their *juvenis*, their young people! Give a June nod to the married couples, women and/or young people of your community!

On **June 8**, we remember the passing in 1889 of **Gerard Manley Hopkins**, the English Jesuit priest whose posthumous fame established him as one of the leading Victorian poets. In his memory, discover his sonnets of desolation!

On **June 8**, we celebrate the birth in 1928 of **Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino**, the Peruvian Dominican priest, philosopher and theologian regarded as one of the formulators of liberation theology. Focusing the movement on love of neighbor, particularly love of those who suffer poverty as a result of unjust social structures, he lifted up the ministry of Jesus to the rejected and despised of his time as a model for the contemporary Church. In his memory, consider whether your words and actions manifest a “preferential option for the poor”!

On **June 9**, the Church celebrates **St. Ephrem the Syrian**, the fourth-century, Syriac-Aramean deacon especially venerated by the Eastern Church. He is the patron saint of spiritual directors and spiritual leaders. In his memory, pray for all who have provided you spiritual direction throughout the years – and for the necessary gifts to help others discern the presence and activity of God in our world!

On **June 10**, we remember the passing in 1930 of **Carl Gustav Adolf von Harnack**, the Baltic German Lutheran theologian and church historian who drew attention to the Greek influence that forever changed the direction of Christianity. He rejected the historicity of the Gospel of John, criticized the Apostles’ Creed, and promoted the Social Gospel. In his memory, pause to critically reflect on those aspects of your faith that you may not have questioned in the past!

On **June 11**, the Church celebrates **St. Barnabas**, who, due to his missionary endeavors, was considered an “apostle” by St. Luke. He parted ways with Paul over issues of circumcision and observance of the Mosaic law. In his honor, pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions him, and highlight the diversity of the Christian/Catholic community and the need to sometimes “agree to disagree” with those we love!

On **June 12**, the Czechoslovak Hussite Church celebrates the birth in 1958 of **Patriarch Tomáš Butta**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 39,000 people he serves!

On **June 12**, we remember the passing in 1999 of **James Earl “J.F.” Powers**, the novelist and short-story writer who often drew inspiration from developments in the contemporary Roman Catholic church. In his memory, consider the inspiration that you draw from contemporary events – and the ways in which you might help to interpret those events through the lens of our Catholic faith!

On **June 13**, the Church celebrates **St. Anthony of Lisbon** (or Padua, if you prefer), the Portuguese nobleman renowned for his Franciscan preaching. For the intellectually-curious, share a brief lesson on his life and why his name is invoked to find lost items (“Tony, Tony, look

around: Something's lost and must be found"). In his honor, host the traditional blessing of St. Anthony loaves, share a loaf with each family, and invite them to share it together and to be inspired by Anthony's example of assisting the poor!

On **June 13**, we remember the passing in 1965 of **Martin Buber**, the Austrian-born Jewish philosopher nominated seven times for the Nobel Peace Prize and best known for distinguishing I-Thou and I-It relationships. A translator of Hasidic lore, he emphasized the Hasidic ideal of living in the unconditional presence of God, with no distinction between daily habits and religious experience. In his memory, pause to consider how you treat people as objects and/or the ways in which you sometimes fail to have a heightened sense of God's presence and activity in your life!

On **June 13**, the Independent Sacramental Movement celebrates the birth in 1930 of **Emmanuel Milingo**, the former Roman Catholic archbishop of Lusaka, Zambia, who shared valid lines of apostolic succession with persons outside the Roman church. Take a moment today to thank God for his courage—and for the courage of so many former Roman Catholic bishops and priests who continue to share the Church's sacraments outside the structures and strictures of Rome!

On **June 13**, the Southern Baptist Convention celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2020 of **President James David Greear**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 15 million Baptists he serves!

Sunday, June 14, 2020

THE BODY & BLOOD OF CHRIST

(white)

Decorate your worship space with a white that matches your vestments for this day, and integrate eucharistic symbols, like wheat and grapes and/or a loaf of bread and a cup!

The Church shares four "great sequences" each year: Today's is the *Lauda Sion*. Consider having a gifted cantor sing or chant a setting of this, before segueing into the Gospel Acclamation!

The thread in today's scriptures: God fed our ancestors with manna—bread from heaven (Deut. 8:3), and the psalmist praises God, who fills us with "the best of wheat" (Ps. 147:14). Paul tells us the bread and cup we

share are a symbol of our unity and a participation in the body and blood of Christ (1Cor. 10:16-17). The Johannine Jesus shares his “Bread of Life” discourse.

Holy humor: Have you heard the story of the Last Supper? On the night before he died, Jesus was enjoying his last supper with his friends. And he took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to his friends, and said, “This is my body.” Then he took a cup of wine, and, giving thanks, he said, “This is my blood.” And then he opened a jar of mayo...and Judas said, “I’m gonna stop you right there!” [Say, “Wait, I’m going to stop right there. Today’s celebration of the Body and Blood of Christ isn’t about bread, wine *and* mayo. It’s about bread and wine: the body and blood of Christ!” Segue into the eucharistic motifs of each reading.]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a loaf of bread and a chalice! Hold up the bread when you speak of manna, wheat, bread, or the body of Christ, and hold up the chalice when you speak of the cup or of the blood of Christ!

Consider hosting a traditional *Corpus Christi* procession on this day! It could be as simple as a procession around the inside or outside of your worship space after the Prayer after Communion. Use a host that was consecrated at today’s Mass, to make clear how our adoration of the Eucharist outside Mass flows from our liturgical action. Have your altar servers lead the procession with incense, cross and candles!

In honor of this Solemnity, consider having a **blessing of your community’s eucharistic ministers!**

On **June 14**, we remember the passing in 1936 of **Gilbert Keith “G.K.” Chesterton**, the English writer, poet, biographer, philosopher and lay theologian best known for his reasoned apologetics, his fictional priest-detective, Father Brown, and his biographies of such figures as St. Francis of Assisi and St. Thomas Aquinas. In his memory, familiarize yourself with his works and reflect on how you might bridge his words to your homilies and teachings!

On **June 15**, we remember the passing in 1941 of **Evelyn Underhill**, the English Anglo-Catholic writer and pacifist known for her numerous works on religion and mysticism. Due to her 1911 work, *Mysticism*, she was one of the most widely-read writers on the subject in the first half of the 20th century. In her memory, reflect on your own stance toward the mystical elements of life and religion!

On **June 15**, the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the birth in 1959 of **Major Archbishop-Catholicos Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 500,000 Syro-Malankara Catholics he serves!

On **June 16**, we remember the passing in 1886 of **Peter Joseph Elvenich**, the German Catholic theologian and philosopher who defended the condemned works of his teacher, Georg Hermes. His work was in vain, he was removed from his teaching post, and, after the Vatican Council, he affiliated himself with the Old Catholic Church. In his memory, pause to consider how you are defending those who lack a voice in our world!

On **June 16**, the Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates the birth in 1956 of **Minas Mutafian**, who would become Patriarch Mesrob II Mutafyan of Constantinople. Pray for him & for the 9 million people he serves!

On **June 17**, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church Canonical celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2005 of Oleh Kulyk as **Patriarch Moses of Kyiv**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the people he serves!

On the Friday after the Solemnity of the Body & Blood of Christ—the Church celebrates the **Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus**. For a deeper understanding of this mystery, challenge yourself to read Karl Rahner’s more mature, contemporary views on this very medieval devotion. After all, what we celebrate is the mystery of Jesus’ love!

On **June 19**, the Church celebrates **St. Romuald**, the self-indulgent young man who became a monk after the death of his father in a duel. In his honor, consider the place of solitude, meditation & contemplative prayer in your life!

On **June 19**, we remember the passing in 1902 of Lord Acton, **John Emerich Edward Dalberg**, the English Catholic historian, politician and writer known for his remark, “Powers tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great [people] are almost always bad [people].” Lord Acton succeeded John Henry Newman as editor of a Roman Catholic paper, sharing his wealth of historical knowledge. Though Roman Catholic, he was hostile to ultramontane pretensions. His independence of thought brought him into conflict with the Roman church’s hierarchy, which censured his paper. In his memory, pray for all who foster Independent Catholic thought in our world!

On **June 19, Juneteenth** is celebrated in Texas: an opportunity for us to show our solidarity with our African American sisters and brothers!

On **June 20**, the Greek Melchite Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the birth in 1946 of **Patriarch Youssef Absi**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 1.5 million Greek Melchite Catholics he serves!

Sunday, June 21, 2020

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

We're back to Ordinary Time: Think about your **worship environment!**

- Decorate your worship space with a **medium green**, lighter than the green used for Winter Ordinary Time and more evocative of the grass and leaves we see outdoors at this time of year.
- Be sure to have **matching medium green vestments** for this season—and be sure they're ironed or steamed.
- Complement your décor with **green plants** with medium green leaves, and **rearrange the green plants periodically**, for variety.
- **Continue the decoration** into the entrance to your worship space, outdoors, and into other spaces on the grounds, including your Blessed Sacrament chapel, parish hall and classrooms!
- Five months of Ordinary time remain during this liturgical year: **Consider changing shades of green!** Use a yellow-green after Labor Day, as autumn approaches, then use a darker green for the final, darker weeks of Summer/Fall Ordinary Time, with matching vestments to mirror these changes!

For the next 13 Sundays, our second reading comes from Paul's Letter to the Romans. **For the intellectually-curious**, share a brief lesson on the dating, audience and context of this letter, as well as its structure and themes!

Be mindful of the **exclusive language** in today's second reading (repeated from the second reading of the First Sunday of Lent): An inclusive proclamation might read, "Death came to all *people* [not *men*], inasmuch as all sinned."

The thread in today's scriptures: Sin and death entered the world through one man (Rom. 5:12), and the sinfulness of humanity leads people to wish us harm—just as Jeremiah's enemies wished him harm (Jer. 20:10-13). Like Jeremiah, we sometimes bear insult and shame as well (Ps. 69:8), but, like Jeremiah, we also trust that God “rescue[s] the life of the poor from the power of the wicked” (Jer. 20:13). The Matthean Jesus—who would ultimately suffer insults and death at the hands of others—tells us not to fear those who wish us physical harm (Mt. 10:28): We are worth more than the sparrows that God protects (Mt. 10:31)!

Holy humor: Have you heard the story of the sparrow that collided with the biker? One day a biker was riding his Harley Davidson down the highway, when a sparrow hit his helmet. In his mirror, he saw the poor little creature bounce on the pavement behind him. Feeling guilty, the biker stopped to pick up the unconscious bird. He took the sparrow home and put it in a cage with some bread and water. The next day, the sparrow woke up. The sparrow saw the bars of the cage. The sparrow saw the bread and the water. And the sparrow put his head between his wings and cried, “Oh no, I killed that biker!” [Segue to how it is that God rescues the lives of the poor, just as the biker rescued the sparrow, then to the gospel story of sparrows.]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Do you have a parakeet? This is the perfect Sunday to bring him/her to church! If not, grab a small, decorative bird from a craft store, to visually drive home the point that “[we] are worth more than many sparrows” (Mt. 10:31)!

On the third Sunday of June, U.S. society celebrates **Father's Day!**

- Incorporate intercessions for father—living and deceased!
- Share a special blessing for fathers & father figures (e.g., stepfathers, godfathers, uncles, teachers, coaches), lead all present in an applause for them, and share with them a keychain, a parish koozie, or some other symbol of your community's love of and gratitude for them!

On June 21, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Aloysius Gonzaga**, the patron saint of youth. He died serving victims of the plague. In his honor, host a special blessing of youth, that they might be inspired by the lives of the saints in the same way that the young Aloysius was!

On June 21, the Greek Melchite Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the anniversary of the election in 2017 of **Youssef Absi** as Patriarch of Antioch, Alexandria & Jerusalem. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 1.5 million Greek Melchite Catholics he serves!

On **June 22**, the Church celebrates **St. Paulinus of Nola** and **Ss. John Fisher & Thomas More**. Paulinus and his wife, Therasia, gave their family fortune to the poor and lived an active/contemplative life by serving the lost and wayward who occupied the first floor of their two-story “monastery.” Thomas More and John Fisher were known for their integrity in the court of Henry VIII. On this day, consider the privilege you enjoy (e.g., education, resources, relationships)—and how it is that you’re using that privilege to advance God’s reign!

On **June 22**, we remember the passing in 1995 of **Yves Marie-Joseph Congar**, the French Dominican priest and theologian best known for his influence on ecumenism at the Second Vatican Council and for reviving theological interest in the Holy Spirit. He promoted the role of laity in the Church, criticized the Roman Curia and its clerical pomp, advocated for a “collegial papacy,” and encouraged openness to ideas from the Eastern Orthodox Church and Protestantism. Following the publication of an article in support of the worker-priest movement in France, he was barred from teaching and publishing, and his book, *True and False Reform in the Church*, was forbidden. In his memory, pray for all who follow the promptings of the Spirit and advocate for the ideas espoused by Congar!

On **June 24**, the Church celebrates the **Solemnity of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist**. Decorate your worship space with large, clear vases of water (turned slightly more blue with food coloring), and pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions him. For the intellectually-curious, share a lesson on the timing of this celebration, six months before Christmas Eve. Challenge congregants to be heralds of the king! If you haven’t recognized your Proclaimers of the Word recently, today might be an appropriate day to share with them a special blessing and a token of your appreciation for their ministry!

On **June 24**, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the anniversary of the appointment of **Pierbattista Pizzaballa** as Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the Roman Catholics he serves!

On **June 26**, we remember the passing in 1988 of **Hans Urs von Balthasar**, the Swiss theologian who was considered one of the most important Catholic theologians of the 20th century and who died before being elevated to his cardinalate in the Roman Catholic Church. He is best known for his works on theological aesthetics, theodramatics of the paschal mystery, his theo-logic on the relationship of Christology to ontology, and his 15-volume systematics. In his memory, take a moment to see what wisdom from his works might enrich your life and ministry!

On **June 27**, the Church celebrates **St. Cyril of Alexandria**, who advanced the view that Mary is the Mother of God (*theotokos*), over the archbishop of Constantinople's "Nestorian" view that Mary is the Mother of Christ (*Christotokos*). He inspired the Chalcedonian teaching on the two natures (viz., human and divine) of Christ. On this day, reflect on the great diversity of high and low Christologies and Mariologies throughout the Church and challenge yourself to see Christ and/or Mary from a different perspective!

On **June 27**, we remember the passing in 2017 of **Peter Ludwig Berger**, the Austrian-born American sociologist and Protestant theologian known for his work in the sociology of knowledge and religion. His co-authored work, *The Social Construction of Reality*, is considered one of the most influential texts in the sociology of knowledge, and his religious works explored the secularization and desecularization of a pluralistic, relativistic world. In his memory, deepen your own knowledge of the mutual influence of sociology and religion!

Sunday, June 28, 2020

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

Be mindful of the **exclusive language** in today's gospel, which could just as easily be rephrased, "Whoever receives a righteous person because he or she is righteous will receive a righteous person's reward" or "Whoever receives the righteous because they are righteous will receive the reward of the righteous." It's also problematic to presume that only *men* can take up the cross and find or lose their lives!

The thread in today's scriptures: Because of her hospitality (2Kgs. 4:8-11 & 14-16), the Shunamite woman experienced the goodness of the Lord (Ps. 89:2). We, too, are called to die to sin (Rom. 6:11) and to ourselves (Mt. 10:39), and to hospitably receive others (Mt. 10:40-42)!

Holy humor: Do you know any good prophet jokes? Share two or three, then segue into today's scriptures! A few examples follow:

- How do you know that God is rich? Because back in Israel, God made...a prophet!
- Why didn't Jesus start a charity? Because charities are...not-for-prophets!

- Did you hear about Jesus' personal trainer? He was making a big prophet!
- What happens if you buy a goat for \$10, name it Jesus, and sell it for \$15? You just made...a prophet!
- Why couldn't Elisha join the [insert the name of a 501(c)(3)] or the [insert the name of another 501(c)(3)]? Because they're...non-prophet organizations!
- I talked to an atheist today. Turns out he's part of a non-prophet organization! [Or, turns out he supports non-prophet organizations!]
- Why are less and less people buying into religion? Prophets are down!
- I started a figurine company that specializes in miniature statues of Jesus. We make...a small prophet!
- What do you call a person who can predict the number of fish a boat will catch? A net prophet!
- What happened when they started selling faulty jet packs to fortune tellers? The prophets went through the roof!

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a mask! In today's first reading, the Shunamite woman receives the prophet Elisha (2Kgs. 4:8-11), and the Matthean Jesus tells us "Whoever receives a prophet...will receive a prophet's reward" (Mt. 10:41) – but do you know where the English word "prophet" comes from? The ancient Greeks invented theater and various theatrical genres, including comedy, tragedy and satire. They created a Greek word, *prophenein*, for the act of "speaking through a mask." Invite an altar server to put on the mask and to speak through it. Who's talking: the mask or the altar server? In the same way, a prophet is a "mask" through which God speaks to our world! We are all baptized prophets: Are you allowing God to speak through you, to those around you?

On **June 28**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Irenaeus**, the second-century Greek bishop who helped bring Christianity to present-day southern France. According to tradition, he received the faith from Polycarp, who, in turn, received it from John the Evangelist. Irenaeus regarded all four now-canonical gospels as essential, and he countered Gnosticism with his three pillars of orthodoxy: scripture, tradition, and apostolic succession. In his memory, pray for those who shared the faith with you – and for those who handed on the faith to them!

On **June 28**, we remember the birth in 1950 of **Gary Robert Habermas**, the American New Testament scholar, philosopher of religion, and apologist who has catalogued and communicated trends among scholars in New Testament studies and the historical Jesus. The author of several works, he has frequently lectured on the resurrection of Jesus. In his honor, update your own knowledge of the trends in New Testament studies and/or on studies of the historical Jesus!

On **June 28**, we remember the passing in 2001 of **Mortimer Jerome Adler**, the American Aristotelian/Thomistic philosopher and author of *How to Think About God*, whose spiritual journey took him from the Jewish religion to the Episcopal Church to the Roman Catholic Church—whose influence he resisted for many years due to its limited views on such issues as abortion. In his memory, pray for those on winding spiritual paths who might welcome the refreshing waters of Independent Catholicism!

On **June 29**, the Church celebrates the **Solemnity of Ss. Peter & Paul**, two preeminent figures in the early Church! Pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions them, and meditate today on the greatness—but also the great humanness—of both saints!

On **June 29**, we remember the passing in 1293 of **Henry of Ghent**, the Italian “Solemn Doctor” and scholastic philosopher who sided with secular priests in their disputes with mendicants at the University of Paris—particularly on the issue of mendicants needing to confess to their parish priests, rather than to the priests of their orders. Henry had a hand in the creation of the 219 condemnations that were shared by the bishop of Paris. In his memory, pray for all zealous defenders of “orthodoxy”!

On **June 30**, the Church celebrates the **first martyrs of the Roman church**—those who were killed in 64 A.D. when Nero needed a scapegoat to assume the blame he was receiving for a fire that broke out in Rome. According to the stories that were shared, some were crucified, others were covered in animal skins and torn apart by dogs, and still others were tied to posts and set on fire. In their memory, consider your own courage for professing our faith!

On **June 30**, we remember the passing in 1315 of **Raymond Lull**, the Majorcan mathematician, philosopher and secular Franciscan credited with the first major work of Catalan literature. A pioneer of computation theory, he had a considerable influence on Leibniz. In his memory, consider the ways in which you are being most pioneering and/or challenge yourself in this respect!

On **July 1**, the Church celebrates **Bl. Junípero Serra**, the Franciscan friar who established the California missions, traveling thousands of miles on foot despite a leg injury. Lift him up as a model for overcoming obstacles in life!

On **July 1**, the Old Catholic Church celebrates the anniversary of the consecration in 2000 of **Joris August Odilius Ludovicus Vercammen** as Archbishop of Utrecht. Pray today for continued blessings for Archbishop Vercammen in his ministry to the people of God!

On **July 2**, we remember the passing in 2016 of **Eliezer “Elie” Wiesel**, the Romanian-born Holocaust survivor, writer, political activist and Nobel Laureate who strongly defended human rights and drew attention to victims of oppression. In his memory, consider how you might better be a messenger of peace, atonement and human dignity!

On **July 3**, the Church celebrates **St. Thomas the Apostle**, the twin known for his doubts and the only apostle believed to evangelize outside the Roman Empire. Pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions him, push yourself beyond your comfort zone, & encourage those with doubts!

On **July 3**, we celebrate the birth in 1946 of **Jean-Luc Marion**, the French Catholic theologian who writes on modern and contemporary philosophy and religion. A student of Derrida and known for his work, *God Without Being*, Marion philosophizes on such concepts as love, self-love, self-idolatry, intentionality and gift. In his honor, pause to consider how your love of others may be nothing more than your love of your own ideas as expressed in the “chance cause” of others!

On **July 3**, we remember the passing in 1984 of **Sydney Eckman Ahlstrom**, the American historian who specialized in the religious history of the United States. In his memory, thumb through his work, *A Religious History of the American People*, to remember again aspects of American religious history you may have forgotten!

On **July 3**, we remember the passing in 1998 of **Bernard Häring**, the German priest and moral theologian who authored 80 books and 1,000 articles, and who achieved notoriety with his three-volume work, *The Law of Christ*. As a young priest, he was conscripted into the German army and, though forbidden by Nazi authorities, shared sacraments with soldiers. As a *peritus* at Vatican II, he was part of the commission that prepared the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*. In his memory, reacquaint yourself with his dialogical approach to moral theology, which esteems the ways in which God awakens and speaks to our conscience!

On **July 4**, the U.S. celebrates **Independence Day**: Use the proper contained in the Proper of Saints, highlight human freedom, and reflect on the *e pluribus unum* (“from many, one”) theme of the second Prayer over the Gifts. After Mass, host a July 4 barbeque with hamburgers and hotdogs, and with games for the kids!

On **July 4**, the Latin American Church celebrates **Our Lady Refuge of Sinners** (a feast celebrated by dioceses of California on July 5 and by the U.S. Church on August 13). The “New Eve” and *Refugium Peccatorum* is the patroness of California and parts of Mexico: If you serve a Latino community, pray the Litany of Loreto, which invokes her!

On **July 4**, the Chaldean Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the birth in 1948 of **Catholicos-Patriarch Louis Raphaël Sako**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 640,000 Chaldean Catholics he serves!

Sunday, July 5, 2020

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

The thread in today’s scriptures: The Matthean Jesus refers to himself as “meek and humble of heart” (Mt. 11:29), fulfilling Zechariah’s prophecy that the messiah would be “meek, and riding on an ass” (Zec. 9:9). With an eye toward the lowly, the Lord “lifts up all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down” (Ps. 145:14). Following the example of the meek and lowly, let us therefore “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13) and put on the spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9)!

Holy humor: The story is told of the meek bus driver who had an interesting passenger on his route. The passenger was seven feet tall and built like a professional wrestler. He would step onto the bus, glare at the driver, and say, “Big John doesn’t pay!” Then he’d go sit in the back of the bus – without paying! The meek bus driver didn’t say anything for weeks. He didn’t dare argue with Big John! Finally, by the end of the summer, the bus driver worked up the courage to confront Big John. The next morning, Big John stepped onto the bus, glared at the bus driver, and said, “Big John doesn’t pay!” And the meek bus driver stammered, “And why doesn’t Big John have to pay?” With a surprised look on his face, Big John replied, “Big John has a bus pass!” [Segue into how being meek doesn’t mean that we allow ourselves to be a doormat for others,

but means identifying with the poor, the humble, the powerless and the marginalized – the *anawim* for whom God has a special love!

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a sword or a spear! The prophets had visions of instruments of war being turned into instruments of peace: Zechariah speaks of God banishing horses, chariots and warriors' bows (Zec. 9:10), and Proto-Isaiah suggested that God's reign would result in the beating of swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (Is. 2:4). Instead of living according to the flesh (Rom. 8:13) and bringing death and destruction to this world, may we "proclaim peace to the nations" (Zec. 9:10)!

July is here! **For the intellectually-curious**, share a brief lesson on the etymology of this month, named after Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.), the Roman dictator after whom the Julian calendar was named. Speak of the difficulties presented by this calendar, which led to the Church's institution of the Gregorian calendar and the Church's attempt to (incorrectly) date it to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. July & August are the two months named after Roman emperors, which, when inserted into the Roman calendar, caused the seventh (September), eighth (October), ninth (November) & tenth (December) months of the year to become the ninth, tenth, eleventh & twelfth months we now know!

On **July 5**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Anthony Zaccaria** and **St. Elizabeth of Portugal**. Anthony was the doctor-turned-priest who popularized the 40-hour devotion of Eucharistic exposition and established three religious orders to reform society and abuses in the Church. Isabel, the wife of the king of Portugal, was known for her peacemaking skills and is a patron saint of Third Order Franciscans. Consider your own commitment to peacemaking and the reform of Church and society!

On **July 5**, we remember the passing in 1962 of **Helmut Richard Niebuhr**, one of the most important Christian ethicists of 20th-century America. The younger brother of Reinhold Niebuhr, he was part of the neo-orthodox school of American Protestantism and was one of the main sources of the "Yale School" of postliberal theology. In his memory, find a moment today to reacquaint yourself with his life and works!

On **July 5**, we also remember the passing in 2010 of **William "Bill" Callahan**, the Jesuit priest whose advocacy for social justice, LGBTQ Catholics, and the ordination of women led to his expulsion from the Roman church in 1991. He went on to found the Quixote Center, Priests for Equality, and Catholics Speak Out, ministering to dissident Catholics and "following the example of Jesus, who was never willing to shut up."

In his memory, pray for the modern-day prophets who model the necessary courage to stand up against powerful religious institutions!

On **July 6**, the Church celebrates **St. Maria Goretti**, the patroness of teenage girls and rape victims. Use this day to advocate for self-determination and against sexual abuse!

On **July 6**, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2013 of Manuel José Macário do Nascimento Clemente as **Manuel III**, the Latin Patriarch of Lisbon. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the Roman Catholics he serves!

On **July 8**, we remember the passing in 1929 of **Joseph René Vilatte** (a.k.a., Mar Timotheus I), the Frenchman who lived on the fringes of various religious traditions and is often referred to as the first Independent Catholic bishop in the U.S. Ordained by the Episcopal Church, he ministered to the Belgian Catholics in Wisconsin who had broken from the Roman church and who had sympathies more aligned with the Old Catholic Church. As Metropolitan of North America for the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, he built the small St. Louis Cathedral in Green Bay. When asked how one might define Independent Catholics, he replied that, in contrast to Roman Catholics, Old Catholics, etc., “We are Catholics without qualification.” In his memory, seek to be less denominational and more *catholic*—more universal & inclusive—in your love for God and others!

On **July 9**, the Church celebrates **St. Augustine Zhao Rong & Companions**—the 87 Chinese Catholics and 33 Western missionaries who lost their lives for failing to renounce their Christian faith between 1648 and 1930. Consider your own commitment to your Church and your ministry!

On **July 9**, we remember the passing in 1848 of **Jaime Luciano Balmes y Urpiá**, the Spanish metaphysician, theologian, sociologist and apologist deemed the Prince of Modern Apologetics. In his memory, consider your own willingness to contribute to the apologetics of the Independent Catholic movement!

On **July 11**, the Church celebrates **St. Benedict of Nursia**, the hermit-turned-monk who established the fundamentals of monastic life. The opening line of his rule says, “Listen carefully.” In his memory, reflect on how it is that the English words “listen” and “silent” contain the same letters, and consider how silence and solitude might assist you in your own journey of spiritual growth!

Sunday, July 12, 2020

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

You'll need to **choose whether you'll proclaim the shorter form of today's gospel, or the longer form**, which includes an additional 14 verses of the Matthean Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Sower. (Remember: Rather than risk boring your listeners with this long narrative, you can always summarize Jesus' explanation in your homily!)

The thread in today's scriptures: God's word descends like rain upon the earth, "making it fertile and fruitful, [and] giving seed to the one who sows" (Is. 55:19). Jesus' Parable of the Sower (Mt. 13:1-9), found in the synoptic gospels, is paraphrased by the response of the psalm: "The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest" (Lk. 8:8). Growth is sometimes a seemingly long, painful process, leaving us "groaning in labor pains" (Rom. 8:22), until we at last bear "the firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23)!

Holy humor: The story is told of the young man who went to a party, hoping to meet his one true love. First, he met a tall, lithe, beautiful blond. She played with him in the same flirty way that she did with every other guy there, and, in the middle of their conversation, she excused herself and went over to the bar, where she began a conversation with another guy. The young man then saw a vivacious red-head, who possessed an amazing sense of humor. They immediately hit it off—but all she could do was crack jokes, so his interest in her quickly withered. He moved on to a petite, exotic brunette, with whom he felt he could share his most intense, passionate feelings—but when he let slip a word that was apparently politically incorrect, he received the most severe tongue-lashing in his life. Finally, he saw a sweet, kind girl over in the corner. He fell deeply in love with her, and she with him. And they married and lived happily ever after some 30% of the time, or 60% of the time, or sometimes even 100% of the time! Let anyone with ears listen! [Segue into how there are different types of people in this world—and how that's the essence of Jesus' message, too: Different people were going to receive Jesus' words in different ways!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Be like the prodigal sower, throwing out handfuls of invisible "seeds" over your listeners' heads! Help your listeners visualize the different types of soil upon the seeds fall. Then ask with which type(s) of "soil" their hearts are filled!

On **July 12**, we remember the passing in 1536 of **Desiderius Erasmus**, the Dutch Catholic priest and Christian humanist who was the greatest scholar of the northern Renaissance. Though faithful, he was critical of the abuses of the Roman church, and he raised questions that would be influential in the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation. In his memory, we pray for all who abuse the power & positions they currently enjoy.

On **July 12**, we remember the passing in 1429 of **Jean Charlier de Gerson**, the French scholar, educator, reformer and poet who served as Chancellor of the University of Paris and was one of the most prominent theologians at the Council of Constance. He was one of the first thinkers to develop natural rights theory, and he defended Joan of Arc and her supernatural vocation. In his memory, consider how you're defending the names, dignity and rights of others!

On **July 12**, the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church celebrates the birth in 1929 of **Patriarch Antonios**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 3 million people he serves!

On **July 13**, the Church celebrates **St. Henry**, the childless German king and Holy Roman Emperor invoked against infertility. Lift up in prayer those who struggle to bring to birth the families they desire!

On **July 13**, we remember the passing in 1877 of **Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler**, the German theologian and bishop of Mainz whose social teachings influenced Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum*. He opposed the formulation of purported papal infallibility as inopportune, and he proposed the founding of prayer societies for the reconciliation of Catholics and Protestants. In his memory, pray that unity might one day be restored to the Body of Christ!

On **July 13**, we remember the passing in 1901 of **Joseph Langen**, the German priest and theologian who was excommunicated with Döllinger and others for not accepting the dogma of purported papal infallibility. As an Old Catholic priest, he published various works on scripture and the New Testament world and was famous for the sound scholarship of his *History of the Church of Rome*. He was instrumental in the German Old Catholic Church and contributed to the Old Catholic *International Theological Journal*. In his memory, consider your own possible contributions to scholarship!

On **July 14**, the Church celebrates **St. Kateri Tekakwitha**, the first Native American to be canonized. Scarred by smallpox, Kateri was embarrassed by her appearance, and she died at age 24, after years of self-mortification. She is the patroness of ecology and the environment, of

people in exile, and of Native Americans. Invoke her on behalf of these important causes!

On **July 15**, the Church celebrates **St. Bonaventure**, the Franciscan philosopher and theologian who was captivated by medieval, Pseudo-Dionysian suggestions that God is self-diffusive Good – goodness that just keeps overflowing, like a cup of coffee, resulting in all that exists. In his memory, reflect on and share God’s self-diffusive goodness!

On **July 16**, the Church celebrates **Our Lady of Mount Carmel**: Consider sharing scapulars as a symbol of our desire to keep Christ and the saints close to our hearts!

On **July 16**, the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the birth in 1948 of **Manuel José Macário do Nascimento Clemente**, the Latin Patriarch of Lisbon. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the Roman Catholics he serves!

On **July 16**, we remember the passing in 2012 of **Stephen Richards Covey**, the American educator and author known for his bestsellers, including *First Things First*, *Principle-centered Leadership*, and *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. In his memory, consider your own mission in life, the many roles you juggle, and ways in which you might schedule greater effectiveness into your life and ministry!

On **July 18**, the Church celebrates **St. Camillus de Lellis**, a patron saint of hospitals, nurses and the sick. In his memory, reach out to someone in need of healing and health!

Sunday, July 19, 2020

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

You’ll need to **choose whether you’ll proclaim the shorter form of today’s gospel, or the longer form**, which includes an additional 14 verses with the synoptic Parable of the Mustard Seed, the quelle Parable of the Yeast, and the Matthean Jesus’ explanation of the Parable of the Weeds. Remember: Your listeners will likely thank you for shorter narratives, upon which you can always expand in your homily!

The thread in today’s scriptures: God is “lenient to all” (Wis. 12:16), which is revealed in the Matthean Jesus’ suggestion that the wheat and weeds are allowed to grow together until the time of the harvest (Mt.

13:24-30). Good news for the “weeds”: God is “good and forgiving, abounding in kindness to all who call upon [God]” (Ps. 85:5), and we can always count on the assistance and intercession of the Spirit (Rom. 8:26)!

Holy humor: There once was a boy named Eric, who thought he was a grain of wheat. That’s right: a grain of wheat! And there was nothing that Eric’s family could say, to convince him that he was a human being and not a grain of wheat. When he saw birds, Eric would panic and run away, thinking that, because birds eat grains of wheat, he was in mortal danger! Fortunately, Eric got help, and, after months of therapy and psychiatric help, Eric seemed to be cured of thinking that he was a grain of wheat. His family was thrilled: He finally recognized that he was a human being! Until one day, when Eric and his cousin were walking in the countryside and saw a chicken. Eric panicked and ran! When his cousin caught up to him, he asked Eric, “Why did you panic and run away? I thought you knew that you aren’t a grain of wheat anymore!” Breathless, Eric replied, “I know that I’m not a grain of wheat—but did the chicken know that?” [Segue into how it is that we really can’t know whether another person is “a grain of wheat” or its similar-looking counterpart, darnel. Leave the judgment and separation of “wheat” and “weeds” to God—and be like God: “abounding in kindness to all” (Ps. 86:5)!

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Hold up large pictures of wheat and darnel (for images, google “wheat and tares”). How difficult (and time-consuming!) would it be for you to weed the wheat field? Rather than engage in that task yourself, leave it to the good judgment of God! If you’re preaching on the Parable of the Mustard Seed, consider sharing a mustard seed with all present, so that each person can hold a mustard seed in his/her hand & reflect on just how small a mustard seed is!

On **July 20**, the Church celebrates **St. Apollinaris**, the patron saint of those suffering from epilepsy and gout—causes of pain and fear in far too many lives. Pray for and reach out to those affected by such maladies!

On **July 21**, we remember the passing in 1160 of **Peter Lombard**, the scholastic theologian and bishop of Paris who authored the *Four Books of Sentences*, which became the medieval textbook of theology. His view on marriage as consensual and needing to be consummated had a significant impact on the Church’s later interpretations of the sacrament. In his memory, thumb through a summary of his lengthy *Sentences*!

On **July 22**, the Church celebrates **St. Mary Magdalene** (or St. Mary of Magdala), the “apostle to the Apostles”: Find a way today to share the inclusive love of the Church with our sisters who have been the backbone of the Church for centuries – and help to empower them for ministry!

On **July 22**, the Jacobite Syrian Christian Church celebrates the birth in 1929 of **Catholicos Baselios Thomas I of India**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 1.2 million people he serves!

On **July 22**, the Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates the birth in 1948 of **Boghos Manousian**, who would become Patriarch Nourhan Manougian of Jerusalem. In his honor, pray for him and for the 9 million people he serves!

On **July 22**, the Romanian Orthodox Church (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the birth in 1951 of **Dan Ilie Ciobotea**, who would become Patriarch Daniel of Romania. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 17 million Romanian Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **July 23**, the Church celebrates **St. Bridget**, the patroness of Europe and of widows: Reach out to a widow or widower, and share with them God’s love!

On **July 24**, the Church celebrates **St. Sharbel Makhlûf**, the Lebanese Maronite Catholic monk known for his holiness. Devotion to him is popular throughout Mexico: If you serve a Mexican community, be sure to send congregants home with an(other) image of him!

On **July 24**, we celebrate the birth in 1940 of **Stanley Hauerwas**, the American theologian and ethicist who has written on a diverse range of subjects and who was named “America’s Best Theologian” by *Time* magazine in 2001. A fierce critic of capitalism, militarism and fundamentalism, he often draws from a number of theological perspectives, including Methodism, Anabaptism, Anglicanism and Catholicism. In his honor, consider the sources that shape your own theology and help you to critique the systems that surround us!

On **July 24**, we remember the passing in 1967 of **Joseph Leo Cardijn**, the Belgian cardinal who earlier in life founded the Young Christian Workers. Imprisoned during World War II and becoming increasingly aware of social inequalities, he dedicated his life to social activism and bringing the Gospel to the working class. In his memory, pause to consider your own efforts on behalf of social justice & the working class!

On **July 24**, we remember the passing in 2010 of **Lawrence Edward Boadt**, the American Paulist priest and scripture scholar who authored *Reading the New Testament* and other works. He advocated for improved relationships between Christians and Jews. In his memory, explore more deeply the world inhabited by our ancient Hebrew and Jewish ancestors!

On **July 25**, the Church celebrates **St. James the Greater**, one of Jesus' close friends and a witness of some of Jesus' greatest signs. He is the patron saint of Spain, Nicaragua and Guatemala, and his shrine in Spain was a popular pilgrimage destination in the Middle Ages. He was invoked during the Crusades as *Santiago Matamoros* (St. James the Moor-slayer): Make an inclusive gesture today to reach out to our Muslim sisters and brothers!

Sunday, July 26, 2020

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

You'll need to **choose whether you'll proclaim the shorter form of today's gospel, or the longer form**, which includes an additional six verses with the Parable of the Net.

The thread in today's scriptures: Let's talk about the things we treasure! Solomon could have asked for anything from God, including wealth and/or a long life for himself; instead he showed that treasured wisdom and understanding beyond all else (1Kgs. 3:12). God's law is to be treasured, since it is "more precious than thousands of gold and silver pieces" (Ps. 119:72 & 127). The reign of God is like a treasure buried in a field, or a pearl of great price (Mt. 13:44-46). What do you treasure? Do you treasure the fact that "all things work for good for those who love God", and/or that, having been foreknown, predestined and called by Christ, you will be justified and glorified by God?

Holy humor: There are innumerable genie jokes: Tell your favorite as a way to segue into today's first reading on God giving Solomon one wish. Need help? Try one of the following:

- Three men found themselves on a deserted island with a magic lamp. A genie appeared and said that, since he could only grant three wishes, he would give each a wish. The first man said, "I really miss my family and friends. I just want to go home." And, poof! He was gone. The second man heard what the first had said

and similarly said, "I miss my family and friends, too. I just want to go home." And, poof! He was gone. Now alone, the third man said, "It sure is lonely here. I wish my friends were still here!" Poof!

- A husband and wife in their early 70's were celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. Knowing that his wife loved antiques, the man bought her an old, brass oil lamp. When she unwrapped it, a genie appeared, thanked them for releasing him from the lamp, and offered to give them one wish each. The wife went first: She wished for an all-expenses-paid, first-class cruise around the world. Poof! She instantly held in her hand the tickets for the entire journey, including meals and shopping! It was now her husband's turn: Despite their good times together, he wished for...a wife 50 years younger than himself. Poof! Instantly, he turned 122 years old!
- A genie appeared to a young engineer and promised her anything she asked for. Being an engineer, she asked for a bridge from California to Hawaii. The genie said, "That's impossible. Think of the logistics! How will the supports reach the bottom of the Pacific Ocean? Think of all the concrete and steel you'd need. It's impossible! Ask me for another wish." The engineer paused. "Well, I really don't understand men at all. Help me to understand men!" Pausing pensively, the genie replied, "Would you like that bridge to be two-lane or four-lane?"

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a genie's lamp, a large pearl, and/or a treasure chest! God's appearance to Solomon resembles the stories of genies appearing and promising to fulfill wishes. The treasure chest and pearl are images from today's gospel.

On **July 26**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates Mary's parents, **Ss. Joachim & Anne**: Bring attention to the Protogospel of James and its stories about them, and invoke them as patron/matron saints of grandparents! In some places, St. Anne is also invoked as the saint who can help a single woman find a suitable spouse. The traditional rhyme to her is: "Saint Anne, Saint Anne, help me find a man!"

On **July 26**, the Jacobite Syrian Christian Church celebrates the anniversary of the appointment in 2002 of **Catholicos Baselios Thomas I of India**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 1.2 million people he serves!

On **July 29**, the Church celebrates **St. Martha**, a model for active ministry and the matron saint of domestic servants, homemakers, cooks and single laywomen. Pray for and lift high those who follow in her footsteps!

On **July 30**, the Church celebrates the “golden-worded” **St. Peter Chrysologus**, known for his 176 extant homilies: Consider the way in which you’re recording and sharing your own “golden words” of inspiration!

On **July 30**, we remember the passing in 1976 of **Rudolf Karl Bultmann**, the German Lutheran theologian who was a prominent voice in the liberal Protestant Christian movement and a major figure in early-20th-century biblical studies. Bultmann attempted to demythologize the New Testament and disregard historical analysis of Jesus’ life in favor of the “thatness” of Jesus (i.e., *that* Jesus existed, preached and died). In his memory, reflect on some of the myths that you might continue to cling to with respect to Jesus!

On **July 31**, the Church celebrates **St. Ignatius of Loyola**, the founder of the Jesuits and the author of *Spiritual Exercises*: Find some time and space to “retreat” today and focus on spiritual exercises meaningful to you!

On **July 31**, we remember the passing in 2014 of **Warren Gamaliel Bennis**, the American scholar and author widely regarded as a pioneer in the field of leadership studies. He suggested that future challenges will be best met by institutions that are less hierarchical and more democratic and adaptive. In his memory, pause to consider the experience, self-knowledge and personal ethics you bring to your life and ministry – and the ways in which you might grow in each!

On **August 1**, the Church celebrates **St. Alphonsus Liguori**, the lawyer whose lost case propelled him to found the Redemptorists, a community of priests dedicated to preaching, hearing confessions, and administering the sacraments: Consider ways in which you and your community might improve your own “Redemptorist” mission!

On **August 1**, the Ancient Church of the East celebrates the birth in 1946 of **Shlemun Giwargis**, who would become Catholicos Patriarch Addai II of Baghdad & Basra. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the people he serves!

On **August 1**, we celebrate the birth in 1949 of **Bruno Forte**, the noted Italian Roman Catholic theologian and archbishop who oversaw the preparation of “Memory & Reconciliation,” which led to John Paul II’s famous liturgy of asking God’s forgiveness for 2,000 years of sins by the Roman church. Known for his works on Trinitarian theology and his

defense of Jesus' historical resurrection, he is considered "one of the more noted theological minds in the Italian hierarchy." In his honor, pause to consider—and ask forgiveness for—the sins you have committed against others!

On **August 1**, we celebrate the birth in 1955 of **Emilie M. Townes**, the African-American Christian social ethicist and theologian who was the first Black woman to be elected president of the American Academy of Religion in 2008. She is the author of various works on womanist ethics, spirituality and justice. In her honor, take a moment today to deepen your own knowledge of womanist theology!

Sunday, August 2, 2020

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

The thread in today's scriptures: How great is "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39): Deutero-Isaiah imagined all people eating well and delighting in the rich fare that God would provide (Is. 55:3), the psalmist spoke of the hand of the Lord feeding us and satisfying the desire of every living thing (Ps. 145:16), and Jesus fed the crowd with five loaves and two fish—a miracle found in all four gospels (Mt. 14:13-21, Mk. 6:30-44, Lk. 9:10-17 & Jn. 6:1-14). Yes, God loves and nourishes us!

Holy humor: The priest instantly realized her mistake: She was launching into her homily on the multiplication of the loaves and fish, and she realized that she had just said that Jesus fed five people with two fish and 5,000 loaves of bread. Oops! She collected—and corrected—herself. She continued, "Actually, the story said that there were 5,000 people." Little Rafa's face registered surprise and confusion. The priest paused and looked in her direction, and she said, "It should be hard feeling 5,000 people; he had 5,000 loaves of bread!" [Segue into the story's suggestion that five loaves fed a multitude. Are we to understand this story as a nice magic trick by Jesus, of creating 5,000 loaves from five, or did his sharing of those two fish and five loaves inspire those gathered to more generously share with others the foods, drinks and snacks that they had brought along with them into the wilderness on that hot day?]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a penny and a check for one million dollars! Hold them up together at the beginning of your homily and ask which your listeners prefer: a check

for one million dollars or a penny doubled each day for a month. If they choose the former, they'll have a million dollars (presuming you have enough funds in your account to cover the check); if they choose the latter, they'll have more than three million dollars at the end of the month! Did you ever wonder what type of math Jesus practiced? Today's gospel suggests it was...multiplication! Imagine for a moment what this world would be like if we all committed ourselves to multiplying love and peace and forgiveness in this world!

August is here! **For the intellectually-curious**, share a brief lesson on the etymology of this month, named after Augustus Caesar (63 B.C. to 14 A.D.), the Roman emperor (and grandnephew of Julius Caesar) who ruled the Roman empire during the first half of Jesus' life. July & August are the two months named after Roman emperors, which, when inserted into the Roman calendar, caused the seventh (September), eighth (October), ninth (November) & tenth (December) months of the year to become the ninth, tenth, eleventh & twelfth months we now know!

On **August 2**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Eusebius of Vercelli** and **St. Peter Julian Eymard**. Eusebius advocated for the divinity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, and urged merciful treatment of repentant bishops who had signed the Arian creed: Consider your own stance toward and (in)ability to forgive the repentant. Peter Julian, the "apostle of the Eucharist," dissuaded sculptor Auguste Rodin from giving up art: Consider how you're encouraging others in the development and sharing of their gifts—and of their understanding and reception of the Eucharist!

On **August 2**, we remember the passing in 1861 of **Gioacchino Ventura dei Baroni di Raulica**, the Italian Jesuit and Theatine orator and philosopher known for his eloquence and his papal funeral orations. He advocated for the separation of church and state, and his diatribe against monarchs and for the union of religion and liberty earned a spot on the *Index of Forbidden Books*. In his memory, pray for all who continue to stand against theocracy and autocracy!

On **August 3**, we remember the passing in 1964 of **Mary Flannery O'Connor**, the American novelist whose writings reflected her Catholic faith. She examined questions of morality and ethics, and highlighted the acceptance or rejection of characters with limitations and imperfections. In her memory, take a few moments to expand your knowledge of her works!

On **August 3**, the Salvation Army celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2020 of **General Brian Peddle**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 1.6 million people he serves!

On **August 4**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. John Marie Vianney**, the patron saint of parish priests! He was internationally known for transforming his community of Arx, France, and 20,000 would come to visit him each year, causing him to spend 16 to 18 hours each day in the confessional. In his memory, pray for your parish priests, and consider how you are transforming your community and serving the needs of those around you!

On **August 5**, the Church of God in Christ celebrates the birth in 1940 of **Presiding Bishop Charles Edward Blake, Sr.** In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 6.5 Christians he serves!

On **August 6**, the Church celebrates the **Transfiguration of the Lord**. Luke's account, which we heard on the Second Sunday of Lent, is the only story that speaks of the disciples napping after their journey up the mountain: Stop to consider whether you're getting enough rest these days, whether you're seeing Christ transfigured in otherwise-ordinary moments of your day, and how you've "come down the mountain" after mountaintop experiences in your life!

On **August 6**, we remember the passing in 1661 of **Jacqueline-Marie-Angélique Arnauld**, the Abbess of the Abbey of Port-Royal des Champs, who was instrumental in the reform of several monasteries. Raised by Cistercian nuns, she desired to be the superior of a convent from a young age and was named coadjutrix to the Abbess at age 12. Her biography was largely the story of her community's heroic resistance in the face of tribulations caused by the Roman church. In her memory, pray for all who display courage in the face of resistance and obstacles!

On **August 7**, the Church celebrates **St. Sixtus II & Companions** and **St. Cajetan**. Sixtus II was bishop of Rome for less than a year before his martyrdom, but is known for reconciling the Western church of Europe and the Eastern churches of Africa on the issue of Baptism. Stop today to consider how you are bringing together and reconciling your sisters and brothers! Cajetan founded the Theatines, an order of clerics who did works of charity, promoted reception of the sacraments, and called clergy to their vocations in a time when many hierarchs in the Church were morally compromised. Pause to consider the example that you're providing others!

On **August 8**, the Church celebrates **St. Dominic de Guzmán**, founder of the Dominican Order, whose friars preached the goodness of the body in contrast to the Albigensian belief that matter—and specifically the body—is evil. His order would become synonymous with the torture and deaths of the Inquisition. Pray for the self-righteous who persecute others, and find ways to reinforce the goodness of the body and its functions, in a world that continues to look askew at things created good by God!

On **August 8**, we remember the passing in 1694 of **Antoine Arnauld**, the French Roman Catholic patristic theologian, philosopher and mathematician who was one of the leading intellectuals at Port-Royal des Champs. He attracted controversy by pointing out the relaxed morals of the Jesuits of his day and by suggesting that frequent communion was a deviation from the ancient Christian practice of celebrating the eucharist on the Lord's Day alone. For more than 20 years, he couldn't appear publicly in Paris. In his memory, pray for outcasts of every kind and those who are scorned—particularly in your family and among those you know!

On **August 8**, we remember the passing in 1874 of **Augustin Theiner**, the German priest, theologian and historian who had access to several sources while serving as prefect of the Vatican's secret archives during the First Vatican Council. His book against the Jesuits was forbidden in the papal states, and he was deposed from his office for communicating to opponents of purported papal infallibility the order of business of the Council of Trent, which had previously been kept secret. Despite these acts and his later correspondence with Old Catholic scholar Johann Friedrich, he was buried adjacent to St. Peter's Basilica, in the German cemetery for those who served the Roman church. In his memory, pray for all the "insiders" of other churches who help us to better know and understand the inner workings of those institutions!

On **August 8**, we remember the passing in 1998 of **Raymond Edward Brown**, the American Sulpician priest and prominent biblical scholar known for his studies of the Johannine community and of the life and death of Jesus. The historical investigation of the Bible was forbidden by the Roman church in 1893, but authorized in 1943, and Brown became one of the first Catholic scholars to apply historical-critical analysis to the Bible at that time. He opposed literalism and was scorned by traditionalists who suggested that he denied the inerrancy of scripture and cast doubt on the historical accuracy of numerous articles of the Catholic faith, including the virginal conception of Jesus. In his memory,

explore his works and/or reflect on the elements of scripture that may be more fantastical than historical!

Sunday, August 9, 2020

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

The thread in today's scriptures: Our ancient ancestors prayed to see God and to see God's kindness (Ps. 85:8). God appeared to the ancient Israelites, giving them the law and its promises, the patriarchs, and ultimately the messiah (Rom. 9:4-5). God appeared to Elijah in a whisper (1Kgs. 19:12-13). And Peter recognized, through his friend's ability to walk on water, that he was truly in the presence of the Son of God (Mt. 14:33)!

Holy humor: There once was a boy who hated going to school because all the kids there made fun of him for not being good at anything. You can imagine what this did to his self-esteem and how many nights he lay awake, crying in his bed. But he prayed to God and asked God to give him an incredible talent, so that the kids would no longer make fun of him for not being good at anything. And it happened: the boy was given the ability to walk on water! His mind was blown: He was so happy! He now had something that he could show others, and they could no longer make fun of him for not being good at anything! Right? The next day, we went to the local swimming pool, where several of his classmates were swimming. And what did he do? He walked onto the water, right out to them in the deep end of the pool! And what did the other kids say? They burst out laughing and shouted, "Look at him! He can't even swim!" [Segue into what it would mean to defy nature's laws and have the necessary buoyancy in the soles of your feet to do the impossible: to walk on water. But this story made sense to the evangelist: If Jesus is Lord, then Jesus must have had power over nature – and this might have been one of the ways in which Jesus' friends recognized him as the Son of God! Eventually move from today's stories of ancient people experiencing God, to how it is that your listeners might experience God today!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Does your worship space have a projector and screen? There are many images in today's scriptures: a heavy wind rending mountains and crushing rocks, an earthquake, a fire, a man hiding his face in his cloak, a man walking

on water, and another man attempting to do the same! If you don't have a projector and screen, try your best to visually represent some of these images: hiding your face in your chasuble or dalmatic, pretending to walk on water, and/or pretending to slowly sink into the waters!

On **August 9**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **Edith Stein**, who became **St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross**. Raised in an observant Jewish family, she is known for converting to atheism, then to Catholicism, before dying in Auschwitz. Pray today for those whose doubts and beliefs are taking them in various directions, and for all who continue to extinguish tremendous light in this world!

On **August 9**, we celebrate the birth in 1937 of **Justo L. González**, the Cuban-American Methodist historian and theologian known for his contributions to the development of Hispanic theology and Latin American theology. His two-volume work, *The Story of Christianity*, is a popular text on Church history. In his honor, enrich your preaching and teaching with his thought!

On **August 9**, the Salvation Army celebrates the birth in 1957 of **General Brian Peddle**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 1.6 million people he serves!

On **August 10**, the Church celebrates **St. Lawrence**, whose words to his persecutors ("Turn me over; I'm done on this side") has made him the patron saint of...comedians! Pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions him, consider how you employ humor in your ministry, and search for a joke to tickle the funny bone of those around you!

On **August 11**, the Church celebrates **St. Clare of Assisi**, the contemplative whose purported act of bilocation resulted in her renown as matron saint of television: Consider how much time you spend watching television—and how you might better use technology to "bilocate" and reach more people!

On **August 11**, we remember the passing in 1890 of **John Henry Newman**, the Anglican priest and Roman Catholic cardinal who was an important and controversial figure in 19th-century England. In his memory, learn a bit about his works or listen to a recording of his hymns "Lead, Kindly Light" and "Praise to the Holiest in the Height." Newly added to the Roman canon, he was canonized on October 13, 2019!

On **August 12**, the Church celebrates **St. Jane Frances de Chantal**, the wealthy widow whose newly-formed congregation admitted women refused by other congregations due to their health or age. Consider your

own biases against those who enjoy less health and/or vigor, and find a way to let them know they are loved and appreciated!

On **August 12**, we remember the passing in 1546 of **Francisco de Vitoria**, the Spanish philosopher, theologian and jurist who founded the School of Salamanca. He is remembered for his contributions to just war theory and international law. In his memory, take a moment to reacquaint yourself with the Church's social teachings on just war.

On **August 12**, we remember the passing in 2003 of **Walter Jackson Ong**, the Jesuit language professor, philosopher and religious historian who explored the impact on human consciousness of the shift from orality to literacy. In his memory, consider the written records generated and maintained by your community, and challenge yourself to better capture your history through "craft literacy" – like the scribes of old!

On **August 13**, the Church celebrates **Ss. Pontian & Hippolytus**: Pontian was a bishop of Rome exiled by the emperor, and Hippolytus was a bishop – known for the invaluable information we now have from the *Apostolic Tradition* – who, ironically, led a schism against Pontian, whose day he now shares! Pray for reconciliation with those who seem most against you!

On **August 13**, the U.S. Church celebrates **Our Lady Refuge of Sinners** (a feast celebrated by the Church of Latin America on July 4). She is the patroness of California. If you serve a Latino community, pray together the Litany of Loreto, which invokes her!

On **August 14**, the Church celebrates **St. Maximilian Kolbe**, the Polish Franciscan who volunteered to die in place of a stranger at Auschwitz. Invoke the patron saint of prisoners on behalf of those who are incarcerated, and consider how you're doing with respect to the corporal work of mercy of visiting the imprisoned!

On **August 15**, the Western Church celebrates the **Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary** into heavenly glory – the last dogma proclaimed by the bishop of Rome. This day is not universally celebrated by Independent Catholics due to its tie to the novel proclamations of purported "papal infallibility" and universal jurisdiction by the Roman church – the same issues that filled bishops and priests of the 1800's with a desire to return to the beliefs of the ancient – or Old – Catholic Church. Pause today to consider the extent to which your Mariology – your views on Mary – are rooted in the beliefs of the ancient Church and/or are influenced by the novelties introduced by hierarchs of more-recent memory! If you do celebrate this day, call to mind the German custom of blessing fruits and herbs on this day by decorating your worship space

with baskets overflowing with ripe fruits & vegetables, calling to mind Mary's fertility. Fill pots with pungent herbs that stimulate the senses. Leave them in place through the Queenship of Mary on August 22.

Sunday, August 16, 2020

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

Don't gloss over today's tremendous scriptural message for Independent and Old Catholic communities: Unlike other "catholic" communities that are not truly catholic (or universal) and that seek to exclude certain persons, most Old and Independent Catholic communities share **the inclusive love of God** manifested in today's scriptures!

The thread in today's scriptures: Even foreigners will be brought to God's holy mountain, since God's house is "a house of prayer for all peoples" (Is. 56:7). The psalmist affirms this: All nations will praise God and know God's salvation (Ps. 67:2-5)! Paul confirms this as well: "God delivered all to disobedience, that God might have mercy upon all" (Rom. 11:32)! And Matthew shares Mark's story of Jesus not denying the request of the Canaanite woman: Even though she wasn't Jewish, she had faith – and, because of that, Jesus healed her daughter (Mt. 15:21-28, Mk. 7:24-30)!

Holy humor: In 2005, the *Guardian* recognized the following joke as the funniest religious joke of all time. Have you heard it before? It's a joke about Baptists, told by Emo Phillips, who says: "Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, 'Don't do it!' He said, 'Nobody loves me.' I said, 'God loves you. Do you believe in God?' He said, 'Yes.' I said, 'Me, too!' I asked, 'Are you a Christian?' He said, 'Yes.' I said, 'Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?' He said, 'Protestant.' I said, 'Me, too! What franchise?' He said, 'Baptist.' I said, 'Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?' He said, 'Northern Baptist.' I said, 'Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?' He said, 'Northern Conservative Baptist.' I said, 'Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?' He said, 'Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region.' I said, 'Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?' He said, 'Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912.' I said, 'Die, heretic!' And I pushed him over." [Segue into how it's easy to fall into us/them dichotomies, loving those who are like us and

demonizing those who are different from us. Does God show such distinctions? No! God loves *all* people, and, for God, *all* means...all!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a big, warm embrace! Every time you speak of God's inclusive love in today's scriptures, put your arms out, as if you were giving a bear hug to an invisible person in front of you. That's how God is: loving and embracing *all* people!

Our students—and those who care for and teach them in our schools—are preparing to return to classes. Consider a special **back-to-school blessing** in their honor, perhaps with the sharing of school supplies for the new academic year!

On **August 16**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Stephen of Hungary**, the founder and first king of Hungary, who established Christianity there. He is the patron saint of kings, masons, and children who are dying. In his honor, consider how you might be the hands and heart of Christ for the thousands of children who daily die—and for their heartbroken families!

On **August 16**, we remember the passing in 1967 of **John Courtney Murray**, the Jesuit theologian known for his advocacy for religious freedom, his efforts to reconcile Catholicism and religious pluralism, and his key role in persuading bishops at Vatican II to adopt *Dignitatis humanae*, the Council's Declaration on Religious Liberty. He had previously helped to draft the 1943 *Declaration on World Peace*, he promoted a close post-war constitutional agreement between the Roman church and the German state, and, in 1954, the Vatican forbade him from writing on religious freedom. In his memory, re-read *Dignitatis humanae* and/or consider your own stance toward issues of religious pluralism and freedom!

On **August 17**, we remember the passing in 1933 of **Henri Brémond**, the French Jesuit priest and philosopher suspended for attending the funeral of his friend, modernist George Tyrrell. He authored several books on Catholicism, including his renowned *A Literary History of Religious Sentiment in France*. Several of his books explored his interest in English topics, including English public schools, the evolution of Anglican clergy, and the psychology of John Henry Newman. In his memory, reacquaint yourself with the life and works of Brémond!

On **August 19**, the Church celebrates **St. John Eudes**, who founded seminaries to equip future priests with the necessary knowledge and skills to help people grow in their relationship with God and others.

Reflect on how you're empowering others and helping them to grow in their knowledge and skills for ministry in the Church!

On **August 19**, we remember the passing in 1662 of **Blaise Pascal**, the French mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer and Catholic theologian who died before reaching his 40th birthday. By age 23, he self-identified as a Jansenist Catholic, and his famous *Provincial Letters* are set in the conflict between the Jansenists and the Jesuits. Because of his chronic poor health, he pleaded with his sister, Jacqueline, not to enter the Jansenist convent at Port-Royal des Champs. Later, he frequently visited the convent and gave her share of their inheritance to the community there. In his memory, pray for and find a way to support the expressions of religious life that exist outside mainstream religions!

On **August 19**, we remember the passing in 1917 of **Johann Friedrich**, the Catholic priest and German theologian who was an early leader in the Old Catholic movement. As secretary to the leading German cardinal at the First Vatican Council, he played an important role in opposing the dogma of purported papal infallibility by supplying historical and theological material for opposing bishops. He was excommunicated in 1871 but continued to serve as a priest and professor. In 1874, he established the Old Catholic theological faculty at the University of Bern. In his memory, reach out to those who continue to exercise their ministry outside the churches they once loved!

On **August 19**, we celebrate the birth in 1944 of **Jack Canfield**, the American author and motivational speaker who co-authored the bestselling *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series. More than 500 million copies have been sold of his 250 books. In his honor, infuse your teaching and preaching with a story or two from his works!

On **August 19**, the Coptic Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the birth in 1955 of **Patriarch Ibrahim Isaac Sidrak of Alexandria**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 175,000 Coptic Catholics he serves!

On **August 20**, the Church celebrates **St. Bernard**, the abbot who wrote numerous theological and spiritual classics. Reflect on how you might better honor the legacy of "Mary's harper," "Our Lady's faithful chaplain"!

On **August 21**, the Church celebrates **St. Pius X**, who, despite his conservative tendencies, lowered the age of reason from 12 to 7, making him the patron saint of First Communicants. Reflect on how you might better eliminate barriers to the sacraments of the Church, particularly for the youngest among us!

On **August 21**, we remember the passing in 1245 of **Alexander of Hales**, the “Irrefutable Doctor,” who played a key role in the development of medieval Scholasticism and the Franciscan School. He quoted Aristotle, cited works not frequently cited by others, and he shared his agreement and disagreement with such theological authorities as Anselm and Augustine. He also formulated the question that became a focal point of philosophical and theological inquiry: Would Christ have become incarnate if humanity had never sinned? In his memory, reacquaint yourself with his life and works!

On **August 21**, we remember the passing in 1724 of **Noël Alexandre**, the French Dominican theologian and ecclesiastical historian who was the pensioned preacher to King Louis XIV. Later banished and deprived of his pension for his opposition to *Unigenitus*, his works are still valued by students of Church history. In his memory, pray for those who suffer loss as a result of their beliefs!

On **August 21**, the Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates the birth in 1951 of **Ktrij Nersessian**, who would become Catholicos Karekin II of All Armenians. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the nine million people he serves!

On **August 22**, the Church celebrates the **Queenship of Mary**: Pray the fifth glorious mystery of the rosary, and reflect on the place of Mary in your own theology and Mariology!

Sunday, August 23, 2020

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

The thread in today’s scriptures: God builds up strength within us (Ps. 138:3), making us like Jesus’ friend Rocky (or “Peter,” if you prefer; Mt. 16:18), who recognized the messiah and was promised “the keys to the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 16:19). The keepers of keys, like Shebna and Eliakim in today’s first reading (Is. 22:19-23), are able to open and shut doors; they can lock people and/or things in, and they can let them loose (Mt. 16:19). No one can know the mind of the Lord (Rom. 11:34), but Paul cracks open the door (or pulls back the curtain) just enough to reveal that all things are “from him and through him and for him” (Rom. 11:36).

Holy humor: The thousands of jokes that place Saint Peter at the pearly gates are rooted in today's gospel. Try a joke or two about Peter at the Pearly Gates, then segue into today's scriptures! Here are a few possibilities:

- A young couple was killed in an accident on the day before their wedding. When they arrived at the Pearly Gates, they asked Saint Peter if they could be married in heaven. "No problem," said Saint Peter. Years passed, and they still weren't married—when they ran into Saint Peter and asked him about the wedding. "Everything is being arranged," he assured them. Several more years passed, and they still weren't married—when they met Saint Peter again. They reminded him about the wedding and said, "We know that in heaven, time is of no consequence, but we have been waiting years now to get married." Saint Peter replied, "I'm sorry. All the arrangements for your wedding were made the day you arrived. There's only one thing that's keeping us from celebrating your wedding: We're waiting for a priest!" (Ouch!)
- A man died and approached the Pearly Gates, where Saint Peter told him heaven was getting crowded, so he had to test people with a point system. If the man got to 100 points, he could enter heaven. So the man told Peter that he gave to the poor, and Peter marked him down for 3 points. The man thought again, then said that he tithed. Peter added one point. The man, desperately searching his memory, finally said that he never cussed. Peter added a half point. By now, the man was frustrated and said, "At this rate, I'll only get into heaven by the grace of God!" And Peter replied, "Come on in!"
- At the Pearly Gates, Saint Peter asked the men to form two lines: "All the hen-pecked husbands—all the men whose wives tell them what to do—are on this side, and all other men are over here." The men formed two lines—but Saint Peter noticed that one hen-pecked man was in the wrong line. He said to the man, "Excuse me, but I said all hen-pecked men are supposed to be over in that other line." "I know," said the man, "but my wife told me to stand here!"
- A teacher, a doctor, and a lawyer all die and end up at the Pearly Gates. Saint Peter meets them and says, "It's good to have you here, but we're a little overcrowded today. You'll each have to answer one question before I can let you in." Peter turns to the

teacher and asks, “What was the name of the famous ship that hit an iceberg and sank in the early 1900’s?” The teacher smiles and says, “That’s easy. The Titanic!” Peter lets her in. He turns to the doctor and asks, “How many people died on the Titanic?” The doctor says, “Now that’s a tricky question, but I just saw a documentary on it. The answer is 1,503.” Peter lets the doctor in, too. Then Peter turns to the lawyer and says, “Name them.”

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Try a set of keys! We all carry them. Today, they provide a great visual on how we’re able to open and shut doors — how we’re able to “bind” and “loose”!

On **August 23**, when it doesn’t fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Rose of Lima**, the patroness of South America, Central America, and the Philippines. She disfigured herself when others complimented her beauty. In her honor, pray for and reach out to those who struggle with their physical appearance!

On **August 24**, the Church celebrates **St. Bartholomew**, the apostle who was skinned alive and beheaded for his faith. Pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions him, consider how much “skin in the game” you have with respect to the faith, and pray for those whose suffering is extremely difficult to endure!

On **August 24**, we remember the passing in 2004 of **Elisabeth Kübler-Ross**, the Swiss-American psychiatrist and pioneer in near-death studies. Her groundbreaking work, *On Death and Dying*, outlined the five stages of grief. In her memory, pray for and find a meaningful way to minister to someone who is approaching the great mystery of death!

On **August 25**, the Church celebrates **St. Louis King of France** and **St. Joseph Calasanz**. Crowned at age 12, Louis dedicated his reign to the promotion of justice and peace, feeding and housing the poor, and negotiating peace with England. He tried to prevent the private wars that plagued his country, and he introduced the presumption of innocence in criminal procedure. In his memory, consider the ways in which you might better promote justice and peace in our world. Joseph was the Spanish priest who founded the Pious School to provide free education to the children of the poor. Together with St. Camillus de Lellis, he served Christ in the “distressing disguise” of plague victims, and his religious order, the Piarists, were last of the religious Orders of solemn vows approved by the Church. As a new school year dawns, find a way to contribute in his memory to the education of those in need!

On **August 26**, we remember the passing in 1910 of **William James**, the philosopher and “Father of American psychology” whose work influenced several 20th-century intellectuals. His renowned work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, suggests that religious experience should take precedent over religious institutions, and that “over-belief” in things that can’t be proven helps us to live fuller, better lives. In his memory, seek out an opportunity today to share with someone of your own religious experiences!

On **August 27**, the Church celebrates **St. Monica**, who suffered a promiscuous, alcoholic husband and a son whose lifestyle greatly pained her. Pray for and reach out to distressed spouses and parents!

On **August 27**, we celebrate the birth in 1952 of **Miguel Ángel Ruiz Macías**, the Mexican spiritual writer who uses the pen name “Don Miguel Ruiz” for his works on indigenous Mexican spirituality. In 2018, he was named one of the 100 Most Spiritually Influential People, and his bestseller, *The Four Agreements*, was a *New York Times* bestseller for more than a decade. In his honor, enrich your teaching and preaching with insights from indigenous religious traditions!

On **August 27**, we remember the passing in 1999 of **Hélder Pessoa Câmara**, the Brazilian archbishop and advocate of liberation theology who championed human rights and democracy during the country’s military regime. He once said, “When I give food to the poor, people call me a saint; when I ask why they are poor, people call me a communist.” In his memory, consider your own words and actions on behalf of the poor and marginalized!

On **August 28**, the Church celebrates **St. Augustine of Hippo**, one of the four great fathers of the Western Church, who suggested that, contrary to the teaching of the Eastern Church, we all bear the consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve. On this day, consider the wisdom of the Eastern tradition—and the consequences of Augustine’s views on the development of such Western novelties as infant baptism and limbo!

On **August 28**, the Serbian Orthodox Church (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the birth in 1930 of **Miroslav Gavrilović**, who would become Patriarch Irinej of Serbia. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 12 million Serbian Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **August 29**, the Church commemorates **the Passion (formerly “the Beheading”) of St. John the Baptist**: Consider the gifts and actions of this greatest of persons (Lk 7:28), which drew to him so many persons desirous of his baptism of repentance!

On **August 29**, we remember the passing in 2015 of **Wayne Walter Dyer**, the American motivational speaker and self-help author whose first work, *Your Erroneous Zones*, was one of the bestselling books of all time. He distinguished between religion and spirituality and famously wrote: “I don’t think that Jesus was teaching Christianity; Jesus was teaching kindness, love, concern, and peace. What I tell people is don’t be Christian, be Christ-like. Don’t be Buddhist, be Buddha-like.” In his memory, find a concrete way today to be more Christ-like!

Sunday, August 30, 2020

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

The thread in today’s scriptures: In a world where people seek to harm others through violence, reproach & derision (Jer. 20:8), we should expect to suffer, just as Jeremiah (Jer. 20:7) and Jesus suffered (Mt. 16:21). If we learn to deny ourselves (Mt. 16:24) and offer ourselves as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1), our souls will be satisfied “as with the riches of a banquet” (Ps. 63:5)!

Holy humor: Begin with a pun on sacrifice, then segue into today’s scriptures! Here are a few examples:

- Why did God ask Abraham to sacrifice his 12-year-old son, Isaac? Because if he had waited another year or two, for Isaac to become a teenager, it would no longer have been a sacrifice!
- My ex- said that relationships are all about sacrifice—and still she screamed when she saw the bloody goats on the altar!
- In order to make a relationship work, you have to make a lot of sacrifices—which is why I keep a large number of goats in my backyard!
- My friend, who lives with his parents, adopted a goat the other day, but his mother said he’d have to get rid of it. As long as he lives with his parents, I guess he’ll have to make sacrifices!
- Today, I was told that I’ll never achieve great things if I never make sacrifices. Anyone know where I can buy some cheap chickens?
- “I’ve made a lot of sacrifices to get to where I am today,” said the Aztec high priest!

- Did you hear about the stage performer who did live sacrifices of celebrities during his act? I gave him five stars!
- When my husband cooks, he treats me like a goddess. Everything is either a burnt offering or a bloody sacrifice!

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a clown nose! People made fun of Jeremiah, causing him to say, “All the day, I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me” (Jer. 20:7). And perhaps Peter thought that following Jesus was going to be fun and easy. Ha! Following Jesus more likely results in the sad clown’s tears, than the painted smiles of circus clowns!

September is here! **For the intellectually-curious**, note that the remaining months of the calendar year are named for the seventh (*septem*), eighth (*octo*), ninth (*novem*) and tenth (*decem*) months of the Roman calendar! Four months remain this year: Are you accomplishing the goals you had for 2020?

On **August 30**, the Indian Orthodox Church celebrates the birth in 1946 of **Paulose Mar Milithios**, who would become Catholicos Baselios Mar Thoma Paulose II. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 2.5 million people he serves!

On **August 30**, we remember the passing in 2012 of **Don Richard Riso**, the American author on the Enneagram’s nine impressionistic sketches of personality types and their implications for spirituality. In his memory, consider the broad strokes of your own personality and the degree to which you manifest various healthy and unhealthy personality traits!

On **September 1**, we remember the passing in 1839 of **Izidor Guzmics**, the Hungarian theologian known for his Hungarian translations of ancient writers and for his work, *On Religious Unity among Christians*. He also founded a school and built an asylum for 150 children. In his memory, pray for Christian unity, and consider how you’re serving the children of your community!

On **September 2**, the U.S. celebrates **Labor Day**: Pray the Proper Mass for Labor Day or the Mass “for the Sanctification of Human Labor,” pray for those currently without employment, and thank the volunteers of your community for their labor of love!

On **September 2**, we remember the passing in 1790 of **Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim**, the priest and professor who used the pseudonym Febronius to denounce papal pretensions, papal absolutism in Germany, and the interference of the Roman church in the affairs of the empire.

Threatened with censure and excommunication, he was forced to retract what he wrote—then to say that he had done so of his own free will. In his memory, pray for the victims of bullying and all who must act anonymously for fear of reprisals!

On **September 2**, we remember the passing in 1997 of **Viktor Frankl**, the Austrian neurologist and Holocaust survivor whose bestselling *Man's Search for Meaning* encourages readers to find meaning—and a reason to continue living—in even the most brutal forms of existence. In his memory, consider the hope and meaning that you share with others!

On **September 3**, the Church celebrates **St. Gregory the Great**, the mayor of Rome who gave half his fortune to the poor, and the other half for the establishment of seven monasteries. His name is associated with reforms: of the calendar, church governance, clerical behavior, and liturgy. Consider your own vocation to reform!

On **September 4**, we remember the passing in 1865 of **Johann Baptist von Hirscher**, the German priest and theologian whose works on moral theology were censured as part of the Roman church's reaction against rationalistic morality. His catechism advanced the teaching of religion in Germany and gave rise to lively discussions, requiring him to vigorously defend it. His book, *The Notion of a Genuine Mass*, was included on the *Index of Forbidden Books* for its relegation of sacrifice to the background. Accused of being "an enemy of Rome and everything Roman," of opposing celibacy and the breviary, and of promoting a German national church, he continued to defend himself through the publication of pamphlets. Those closest to him knew him as a holy, zealous catechist with pure intentions, who spurred a religious awakening in Baden. In his memory, pause to consider how you are contributing to the spiritual and religious awakening of those around you!

On **September 4**, we remember the passing in 1991 of **Henri-Marie Joseph Sonier de Lubac**, the French Jesuit who played a key role in shaping the Second Vatican Council and is now considered one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the 20th century. His *Meditations on the Church* had a profound influence on *Lumen gentium*. Pius XII's *Humani generis* is believed to be directed at de Lubac and other theologians of the "new theology," which respected lay competencies and addressed contemporary concerns through patristic sources. After three of his books were condemned, de Lubac turned conservative, co-edited a journal with Joseph Ratzinger, and was named a non-bishop cardinal of the Roman church by John Paul II. In his memory, pray for all whose prophetic spirit is dulled by the vicissitudes of life!

On **September 5**, the Church celebrates **St. Teresa of Calcutta**, who dedicated her life to the poorest of the poor. Consider your own stance toward the poor, and find a unique way today to recognize your relationship to our sisters and brothers with much less means!

On **September 6**, we remember the passing in 1979 of **Joachim Jeremias**, the renowned German Lutheran theologian and scholar of Near Eastern and New Testament studies. The author of several publications, he attempted to reconstruct the historical context of Jesus and to provide a deeper understanding of Jesus' life and teachings. In his memory, update your own understanding of the New Testament context in which Jesus lived and ministered!

Sunday, September 6, 2020

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

Be sure the coming of Autumn is reflected in **your worship environment!**

- Consider switching out your medium green vestments of Summer Ordinary Time, for **yellow-green vestments** that reflect the changing season! Be sure they match the décor of your worship space – and that they're ironed or steamed!
- **Incorporate elements from the natural world** into your evolving Ordinary Time décor: first fruits from the harvest, colored leaves, and other signs of the season.
- As you change the shade of green, **change the shape and placement of fabric** as well. If you started Ordinary Time with simple vertical fabric, try changing to a draped placement or a series of smaller widths of fabric hung together on a large rod.
- Complement with **green plants, with yellow-green leaves.**

Be mindful of the **exclusive language** in today's first reading: "You, son of *man*, I have appointed a watchman" can easily be rephrased, "I have appointed you a sentinel." To avoid the suggestion that only *men* sin, you might change all instances of the third person singular (he/him/his), to the third person plural (they/them/their). In the gospel, "your brother" could just as easily be "another person," and the many instances of "he" might just as easily be "the person" or "he or she"!

The thread in today's scriptures: We're challenged to speak with others about their faults (Mt. 18:15) and to warn the wicked of their ways (Ez. 33:7-9). "Love does no evil" (Rom. 13:10)! And when God speaks to us through others about our own faults, we're challenged not to harden our hearts (Ps. 95:8). May we open our hearts and our ears to Paul's warnings, to follow God's commandments (Rom. 13:9)!

Holy humor: A man got a job as a night watchman at a factory. There had been a lot of thefts by the workers on the night shift, and so every morning when the night shift workers passed through his gate, it was his job to check their bags and pockets to make sure that nothing was being stolen. Things were going along very well the first night on the job until a man pushing a wheelbarrow of newspapers came through his gate. Aha, he thought, that man thinks he can cover up what he's stealing beneath all that newspaper! So he removed the paper, only to find...nothing. Still he felt that the man was acting strangely, so he questioned him about the paper. The man replied, "I get a little extra money from the newspapers I recycle, so I go into the lunchroom and pick up all the ones people have thrown away." The guard let him pass, but decided to keep a close eye on him. The next night it was the same, and the night after that. Week after week, it went on. The same guy would push the wheelbarrow of newspapers past the guard's checkpoint. The guard would always check and find nothing. A month later, the guard discovered that he had been fired. "Fired?" he asked his supervisor, in total surprise. "Why? What did I do?" His supervisor replied, "It was your job to make sure that no one stole anything from this plant, and you have failed. So you're fired." "Wait a minute," the guard said. "What do you mean that I failed. Nobody ever stole anything from this place while I was on guard!" "Oh, really," his boss answered. "Then how do you explain the fact that we're missing 30 wheelbarrows?" [Segue to the message of today's scriptures of watchfulness and being on the lookout for evil!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a spyglass or a pair of binoculars! Like the sentinel (Ez. 33:7), we're on the lookout for evil. And just as the sailor calls out the sight of land ("land ho!"), and just as the sentinel warns of approaching enemies, we're called to warn others of encroaching evil ("evil ho")!

U.S. society celebrates **Grandparents' Day** today: Mark this day with special prayers for all grandparents, living and deceased, and share a special blessing and gift with all grandparents in attendance! Even better, invite grandparents to bring their grandchildren to Mass today, and take photos after Mass of grandparents with their grandkids!

This is **Labor Day weekend**: Expect lower Mass attendance than usual. Consider planning a barbeque, picnic, or “white party” for those desirous of building community!

On **September 8**, the Church celebrates **the birth of Mary**. Consider a unique way to celebrate this day, perhaps with a small birthday cake and/or prayer of gratitude to God for the birth of Jesus’ mother!

On **September 8**, we remember the publication in 1713 of *Unigenitus*, the papal bull condemning 101 propositions of Pasquier Quesnel as “false, captious, ill-sounding, offensive to pious ears, scandalous, pernicious, rash, injurious to the [Roman] Church and its practices, contumelious to Church and State, seditious, impious, blasphemous, suspected and savoring of heresy, favoring heretics, heresy, and schism, erroneous, bordering on heresy, often condemned, heretical, and reviving various heresies, especially those contained in the famous propositions of Jansen.” *Unigenitus* would become a litmus test for obedience to the Roman papacracy, as it purportedly warned against “false prophets...secretly-spread evil doctrines under the guise of piety and introduce ruinous sects under the image of sanctity.” In memory of this day, pray for all within the Independent Catholic tradition who, inspired by those who’ve gone before us, have risked the ill perceptions of others in order to help the People of God to grow in holiness!

On **September 9**, the Church celebrates **St. Peter Claver**, the Spanish Jesuit who preached missions to plantation owners and ministered to the needs of African slaves in Colombia. Consider new ways to share God’s love with oppressors and the oppressed!

On **September 9**, we remember the passing in 1890 of **Henry Parry Liddon**, the Anglican theologian who communicated with Old Catholic and Russian Orthodox clergy in an attempt to create closer bonds between them and the Anglican Church. Intriguingly known for his pulpit oratory and his defiance to modern thought and scholarship, he was a pioneer in ecumenical relations. In his memory, consider how your own words and actions contribute to ecumenism in our world!

On **September 9**, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints celebrates the birth in 1924 of **President Russell Marion Nelson**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 16 million Mormons he serves!

On **September 10**, we celebrate the birth in 1943 of **Neale Donald Walsch**, the American actor, screenwriter, and author of the longtime international bestseller, *Conversations with God*. Raised Catholic, he informally studied comparative religion and attempted to unify all

theologies to help people relate to God from a modern perspective. In his honor, reflect today on how you are “one with God and one with life,” in a shared global state of being!

Sunday, September 13, 2020

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

Be mindful of the **exclusive language** in today’s scriptures! In the first reading, because the preceding sentence is in the second person, “Could anyone refuse mercy to another like himself, can he seek pardon for his own sins?” might just as easily be rephrased, “Could you refuse mercy to another like yourself, can you seek pardon for your own sins?” In the gospel, “my brother” might just as easily be “another person”!

The thread in today’s scriptures: Kind and merciful and rich in compassion (Ps. 103:8), God doesn’t deal with us according to our sins (Ps. 103:10), but instead pardons our iniquities (Ps. 103:3) and puts our transgressions far from us (Ps. 103:12). We’re called to be kind, merciful, compassionate and forgiving as well (Mt. 18:21-35). Just as the *Quelle* Jesus suggests (Mt. 6:12), we’re called to “forgive [our] neighbor’s injustice, so that when we pray, our own sins will be forgiven” (Sir. 28:2). As Paul suggests, we don’t forgive others for our sake alone (Rom. 14:7-8), we do it “for the Lord” who is the Lord of all (Rom. 14:9)!

Holy humor: The story is told of the boy who prayed every night for a new, red bicycle – until he realized that’s not how God works. So, he stole a bicycle and prayed for God’s forgiveness instead! [Share the disclaimer that your listeners shouldn’t steal, but that the essential truth in the joke is that God is rich in mercy and forgiveness! Segue to the themes of today’s scriptures.]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a measuring cup or a bushel basket! We use measuring cups to measure out ingredients: they’re a visual reminder that the measure of forgiveness that we use with others will be measured back to us. And our ancestors carried bushel baskets that served a dual measuring purpose: they would measure with them the grain they sold *to* others – but they’d also use them to measure the items that they purchased *from* others! The same measure that we use for others is the measure we receive!

On **September 13**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates "golden-tongued" **St. John Chrysostom**, a head and reformer of the Eastern church. How much do you know about the rich traditions of the Eastern church? Take a moment today to increase your knowledge of this saint and his heritage!

On **September 14**, the Church celebrates the **Exaltation of the Cross**: Lift high the cross as the symbol of our redemption!

On **September 15**, the Church celebrates **Our Lady of Sorrows**. Pray in a special way for all whose hearts are pierced by suffering!

This is a week of celebrating freedom in Latin America: **September 15 is Independence Day in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. September 16 is Independence Day in Mexico. September 18 is Independence Day in Chile.** If you serve a Latino community and/or have congregants who descend from these nations, find a fitting way to celebrate their *fiestas patrias*! Invite people to wear traditional dress and to share traditional foods. Decorate with *papel picado* and traditional decorations. Play traditional music. Share the *grito*. Your attempts to honor their culture and heritage will be much appreciated!

On **September 16**, the Church celebrates **Ss. Cornelius & Cyprian**. Cornelius advocated for welcoming back to the Church repentant individuals who had previously renounced their faith, and Cyprian spent much of his life in hiding due to persecution. Pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions them, and, in light of Sunday's gospel on the prodigal son, consider your own stance toward those who express contrition—and your own desire to escape suffering and pain!

On **September 16**, we remember the passing in 1589 of **Michael Baius**, the Belgian theologian and leader of the anti-scholastic reaction of the 16th century, whose presence at the Council of Trent was not allowed before intervention by the King of Spain. His positions on St. Augustine's theology brought him into conflict with Rome, and 79 of his propositions were condemned by Pius V. Despite this and subsequent condemnations, he retained his professorship and was named chancellor of the University of Louvain. His name is most often associated with Cornelius Jansen, the young Blaise Pascal, and the theologians of Port-Royal des Champs. In his memory, pray for all who inspire other to think "outside the box"!

On **September 17**, the Church celebrates **St. Robert Bellarmine**, who prayed for his opponents during a time of deep division in the Church. Honor him by thinking through non-defensive, systematic ways in

which you might articulate your own beliefs with those who have differing views!

On **September 17**, we remember the passing in 1179 of **Hildegard of Bingen**, the German Benedictine abbess, writer, composer and mystic who created the oldest surviving morality play. Named a Doctor of the Church in 2012, she is considered the founder of scientific natural history in Germany. In her memory, delve deeper into her life and works!

On **September 17**, we remember the passing in 1967 of **Adrienne von Speyr**, the Swiss Catholic physician, writer, theologian, mystic and stigmatist who authored over 60 books on spirituality and theology. She was the inspiration for much of the work of the Jesuit priest Hans Urs von Balthasar. In her memory, reach out to the women whose lives and faith have inspired you!

On **September 19**, the Church celebrates **St. Januarius**, the Italian bishop credited with preventing the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Consider the ways in which you might help prevent “eruptions” in the relationships that are boiling around you!

On **September 19**, we remember the passing in 1978 of **Étienne Gilson**, the French philosopher and scholar of medieval philosophy who viewed Thomism as a revolt against Scholasticism. He is perhaps the only Thomist philosopher whose work and reputation have not suffered from the decline in interest in medieval philosophy since the 1960’s. In his memory, reacquaint yourself with a chapter or two of his writings on the philosophy of St. Bonaventure and/or St. Thomas Aquinas!

Sunday, September 20, 2020

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

For the next four Sundays, the second reading comes from Paul’s Letter to the Philippians. **For the intellectually-curious**, take a moment to share of the dating, audience and context for this letter, as well as its structure and themes!

Be mindful of the **exclusive language** in today’s scriptures (repeated from the Easter Vigil proclamation of Deutero-Isaiah): Because most of the reading is in the second person, “Let the scoundrel forsake *his* way, and the wicked *man his* thoughts; let *him* turn to the Lord for mercy”

might just as easily be rephrased, “Forsake your wicked ways, and turn to the Lord for mercy.”

The thread in today’s scriptures: Not only is God “generous in forgiving” (Is. 55:7), as we heard last Sunday (Ps. 103:1-12), but “[God’s] thoughts are not [our] thoughts” (Is. 55:8). We see this in today’s gospel, where all the workers in the vineyard are treated equally (Mt. 10:1-16). The Lord is indeed “compassionate to all” (Ps. 145:9—even to the latecomers in the Lord’s vineyard! And for those already in the vineyard: Continue your “fruitful labor” (Phil. 1:21) and “conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27)!

Holy humor: A mother was preparing pancakes for her young sons when the boys began arguing over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw an opportunity for a lesson! She told her sons, “If Jesus were sitting here, he’d say that the first will be last, and the last will be first. In fact, he’d probably say, ‘Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.’” The younger boy turned to his older brother, and said, “You be Jesus!” [Segue into the human tendency to put ourselves first and to compare what we have to others, then to the themes of today’s scriptures.]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a bunch of grapes! Ancient cultures regarded grapes as sacred and as a symbol of abundance (see Num. 13:23). How are you contributing “fruitful labor” to God’s abundant harvest? And what is your attitude to those who labor with you in the Lord’s vineyard—and to those who are still standing outside the vineyard?

On **September 20**, when it doesn’t fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **Ss. Andrew Kim Tae-gon, Paul Chong Ha-sang & 101 Companions**, who represent the 8,000 Catholics martyred in Korea between 1839 and 1867. Consider your own willingness to lay down your life for your beliefs!

On **September 20**, we remember the passing in 1986 of **Basil Christopher Butler**, the English Benedictine priest and internationally-respected scripture scholar who defended the traditional priority of the Gospel of Matthew and became the pre-eminent English-speaking voice at the Second Vatican Council. He wrote on spirituality, contemplative prayer, ecumenism, and the Church Fathers, and he contributed, often in fluent Latin, to many of the Council’s documents. In his memory, thumb through the documents of Vatican II—particularly *The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, which Butler considered to be the foundation for all other Vatican II documents!

On **September 21**, the Church celebrates **St. Matthew**, the tax-collector-turned-apostle to whom the first gospel is attributed. In his honor, pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions him, and flip through the Gospel of Matthew and refamiliarize yourself with its themes and stories—and find one on which to reflect in a deeper way today!

On **September 21**, we remember the passing in 1862 of **Luigi Taparelli**, the Italian Jesuit who coined the term “social justice” and whose social teachings influenced Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical, *On the Condition of the Working Classes*. In his memory, consider how your own words and actions promote social justice in our Church and in our world!

On **September 21**, we remember the passing in 1996 of **Henri Jozef Machiel Nouwen**, the Dutch Catholic priest and theologian who wrote widely on psychology, pastoral ministry, spirituality, social justice and community. He coined the concept of the “wounded healer” and retired from academia to work with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In his memory, consider how your “growing edges” might actually be great gifts to your own ministry as a wounded healer!

On **September 23**, the Church celebrates **St. Pius “Padre Pio” of Pietrelcina**, the Capuchin priest who purportedly bore the stigmata until his death, when the wounds of Christ were no longer visible. Consider how you & others “bear the marks of Christ” (Gal 6:17) in various ways!

On **September 23**, the Czechoslovak Hussite Church celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2006 of **Patriarch Tomáš Butta**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 39,000 people he serves!

On **September 25**, we remember the passing in 1617 of **Francisco Suárez**, the Spanish Jesuit priest, philosopher and theologian who was one of the leading figures of the School of Salamanca and is regarded as one of the greatest scholastics after Aquinas. His work bridged the scholasticisms of the Renaissance and Baroque phases and influenced Leibniz, Schopenhauer and Heidegger. In his memory, reacquaint yourself with his thought and/or the main currents of the Salamanca School!

On **September 25**, we remember the passing in 2005 of **M. Scott Peck**, the American psychiatrist known for his bestselling *The Road Less Traveled* and *People of the Lie*. He explored the notion of discipline as key for emotional, psychological and spiritual health, and he expounded on such concepts as balance, delayed gratification, acceptance of responsibility and dedication to truth. In his memory, read a chapter or two from one of his works and use it as fodder for self-reflection!

On **September 25**, we celebrate the birth in 1956 of **Miroslav Volf**, the Croatian Protestant “theologian of the bridge” who has attempted to bring Christian theology to bear on culture, politics and economics. Volf has explored dialogues between different faiths, denominations and ethnic groups. In his honor, consider the bridges you’re building and/or burning!

On **September 26**, the Church celebrates **Ss. Cosmas & Damian**, the brothers who practiced medicine and wouldn’t accept money for their services. They are the patron saints of twins, confectioners, the blind, and of many medical professions (e.g., physicians, nurses, dentists). Pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions them, and find a fitting way to honor their memory and those who continue their legacy. If your community has ties to the Franciscan tradition, call these saints to mind through your display of the San Damiano Crucifix.

On **September 26**, we remember the passing in 1863 of **Frederick William Faber**, the English hymn writer and theologian known for his work, *Faith of Our Fathers*. An Anglican vicar, he followed his hero, John Henry Newman, into the Roman church. He was joined by 11 men who formed a religious community that called itself the Brothers of the Will of God. In his memory, pray for all who continue to be inspired to leave their former religious affiliations and to found new communities that seek to realize the will of God!

On **September 26**, we remember the passing in 1952 of **George Santayana** the Spanish-American philosopher, poet and novelist known for his aphorisms. With a fond spot in his heart for the Catholic values, practices and worldview with which he was raised, he described himself as a “Catholic atheist.” In his memory, pray for and/or reach out to someone who may no longer self-identify as Catholic, but who still shares a fondness for our Catholic values and/or traditions!

Sunday, September 27, 2020

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

Be mindful of the **exclusive language** in today’s scriptures: The first reading suggests that only *men* are wicked. Since the reading begins in the second person, simply continue with the second person throughout (e.g., “But if *you* turn from the wickedness *you* have committed, and do

what is right and just, *you* shall preserve *your* life”). And the instance of “his own interests” in the second reading might just as easily be rephrased, “his or her own interests.”

You’ll have to **choose which form of today’s second reading you’ll use:** the shorter form, or the longer form, which adds the six verses of the Philippians hymn that we hear each Good Friday.

The thread in today’s scriptures: Echoing last Sunday’s gospel (Mt. 20:1-16), Ezekiel notes that sometimes it seems that “the Lord’s way is not fair” (Ez. 18:25). It’s not fair that tax collectors and prostitutes would enter heaven ahead of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 21:31-32) – except that sometimes the “virtuous” turn away from virtue (Ez. 18:26), like the second son in today’s gospel (Mt. 21:30), and sometimes those who seem “bad” turn from their sins and the iniquity they’ve committed (Ez. 18:27), like the first son in today’s gospel (Mt. 21:28-29). Yes, God “shows sinners the way” (Ps. 25:8). Which do you more closely resemble: the selfish (Phil. 2:3) son who didn’t go to the vineyard, or the son who completed his father’s joy by being of the same mind and love as his father (Phil. 2:2)?

Holy humor: Comedy is difficult! Sometimes we tell good jokes that go flat, and sometimes the groaners are the best and most memorable. Illustrate this with a “bad” joke or two (or three) from the following,¹ then segue into today’s message on how the “good” is sometimes bad and the “bad” is sometimes good!

- Does anyone need an ark? I Noah guy!
- How does Moses make his tea? Hebrews it!
- How do you make holy water? You boil the hell out of it!
- What do you call a man who can’t stand? Neil!
- Why aren’t shrimp more generous? Because they’re shellfish!
- What does a nosey pepper do? It gets jalapeño business!
- What does a baby computer call her father? Data!
- What did the buffalo say when his son left? Bison!
- What did the symphony director name his twin daughters? Anna one, Anna two!
- I bought some shoes from a drug dealer. I don’t know what he laced them with, but I was tripping all day!
- What do you call a bear without teeth? A gummy bear!

¹ For these and other “best bad jokes,” please visit <https://inews.co.uk/light-relief/jokes/best-bad-jokes/>.

- What does a zombie vegetarian eat? Grrraaiinnnnns!
- Why shouldn't you play poker in the jungle? Too many cheetahs!
- What do you call a person with no body and no nose? Nobody kn-knows!
- I used to work at a calendar factory – but I got fired because I took a couple of days off!
- Don't believe atoms: They make up everything!
- What's the best part of living in Switzerland? I don't know, but the flag is a big plus!
- Ever try to eat a clock? It's time-consuming!
- Did you hear about the circus fire? It was in tents!
- What do I have if I have a deer with no eyes? I have a no-eye deer!

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Use your hands to symbolize the goodness and badness of the two sons of today's gospel! Hold your left hand high (at the top of an invisible circle) when you speak of the "good" son who told his father that he would go to the family's vineyard, and hold your right hand low (at the bottom of the "circle") when you speak of the "bad" son who said that he wouldn't go. But wait, was the "good" son really good? Did he go to the vineyard? No. [Move your left hand in a circular motion to the place of the other.] And was the "bad" son really bad? Did he go to the vineyard? Yes! [Move your right hand in a circular motion to the top.] Yes, sometimes the "good" is bad, and the "bad" is good! And, if you use the long form of today's second reading, you can trace Christ's path in a circle: starting at the top, with Christ being in the form of God, begin tracing a circle downward (counterclockwise, so that it appears clockwise to your listeners) when you speak of him humbling himself and taking human likeness, then complete the tracing of the circle to the top, as you speak of him being exalted above all things. Saint Bonaventure loved speaking of this "circle" that Christ traced, from the heavens to earth and back to the heavens again!

On **September 27**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Vincent de Paul**, who provided for the physical needs of the poor. Cold weather is coming: Plan a clothing drive or a collection of canned goods and imperishable foods in his honor, to benefit a local food pantry or St. Vincent de Paul Society!

On **September 27**, the Assyrian Church of the East celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2015 of Warda Daniel Sliwa as **Catholicos-Patriarch Gewargis III** of Iraq. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the people he serves!

On **September 28**, the Church celebrates **St. Wenceslaus** and **St. Lawrence Ruiz & Companions**. King Wenceslaus evangelized pagan Bohemia and was murdered by his brother. Lawrence was a married father of three who fled from Manila to Japan and refused to trample Catholic images and adhere to the state religion of Japan. He and 231 Catholics were martyred in Japan in the 16th & 17th centuries. Consider the ways in which you steal life and enthusiasm from others!

On **September 29**, the Church celebrates the **Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael**. They are the three biblical archangels: Michael, who led the angels in fighting the dragon (Satan) and hurling it to the earth (Rev. 12:7-9), Gabriel, who appeared to Zechariah and Mary (Lk. 1:19-20 & 26-38), and Raphael, who disguised himself as a human to heal Tobit and free Sarah from a demon (Tob. 12:15). Many people are captivated by the idea of angels and other heavenly beings. For the intellectually-curious, share a lesson on heavenly beings, the rise of angels in ancient religions, the symbolism of such numbers as seven, and the lack of agreement on the names of the other four archangels!

On **September 30**, the Church celebrates **St. Jerome**, the patron saint of scholars and librarians. In his honor, enrich your ministry through the purchase of a new biblical commentary for your personal library!

On **September 30**, the Old Catholic Church celebrates the anniversary of the consecration in 1725 of **Cornelius Johannes Barchman Wuytiers** as the eighth archbishop of Utrecht, by Bishop Dominique-Marie Varlet of the Roman church. This was the second of four consecrations performed by Varlet without the permission of Rome. Pray in a special way today for those who bravely and tenaciously follow their beliefs – despite the consequences!

On **September 30**, we remember the passing in 2005 of **Monika Konrad Hildegard Hellwig**, the German-born British theologian who left religious life to pursue her academic career. As the research assistant to a Vatican official, she was one of the few women permitted to enter Vatican II as an observer. The author of many books, she co-signed a controversial letter in support of Charles E. Curran, who was barred from teaching Roman Catholic theology due to his dissent on the church's teachings on such issues as contraception and homosexuality. In her memory, reacquaint yourself with one of her works!

On **September 30**, the Romanian Orthodox Church (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2007 of Dan Ilie Ciobotea as **Patriarch Daniel of Romania**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 17 million Romanian Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **October 1**, the Church celebrates **St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus**, the “Little Flower,” who was the youngest of five daughters—all of whom became nuns. Don’t be so ageist: Pray that God might continue to manifest God’s self in the vocations of the young!

On **October 1**, we remember the passing in 1871 of **Johann Baptista Baltzer**, the German Catholic priest and theologian who traveled to Rome in an attempt to prevent the condemnation of Anton Günther’s writings. The Holy See subsequently suspended him and asked him to resign his professorship. Baltzer was a strenuous opponent of purported papal infallibility and later promoted the Old Catholic movement in Silesia. In his memory, pray for all who promote and defend Independent Catholicism in our world!

On **October 1**, we remember the passing in 1968 of **Romano Guardini**, the noted Italian-German academic whose *The Spirit of the Liturgy* was a major influence on the Liturgical Movement in Germany, and, by extension, on the liturgical reforms of Vatican II. In his memory, acquaint yourself with his works and/or with the liturgical documents that continue his liturgical legacy!

On **October 2**, the Church celebrates **Guardian Angels**: Incorporate an image into the décor of your narthex or devotional chapel. For the intellectually-curious, share a lesson on the history of and scriptural basis for this belief!

On **October 2**, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, we also celebrate **International Day of Nonviolence**, a day established by the United Nations in 2007 to promote education and public awareness of nonviolence. In honor of this day, reflect on how your words, actions and preaching espouse this universal value!

Sunday, October 4, 2020

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

The thread in today's scriptures: Proto-Isaiah speaks of destruction, outcry and bloodshed in the Lord's vineyard (Is. 5:7), a theme echoed by the psalmist (Ps. 80:12-13 & 16). The Matthean Jesus warns the chief priests and elders that the "bloodshed" in the Lord's vineyard (Mt. 21:35-38) will have consequences: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit" (Mt. 21:43). The good news for those who confront evildoers who destroy and kill: We need not be anxious (Phil. 4:6); God "will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7)!

Holy humor: The story is told of the nuns who started selling flower bouquets to support their convent. Their business quickly grew, since there were no other florists in town—until the Franciscans across the street saw the nuns' success and decided to open their own greenhouse and flower shop! The friars started stealing business from the nuns, so the nuns plotted how they would push the friars out of the community. One night, the nuns snuck into the friars' shop and lit it on fire—but the firefighters quickly extinguished it, leaving it with little damage. The nuns tried to tarnish the friars' reputation with rumors and gossip, but customers saw through it, and the rumors dissipated. Finally, the nuns contracted Hugh, a local thug who had a knack for destruction. He drove his truck into the friars' flower shop, took his weed-whacker to everything in sight, and doused the place with herbicide. The friars had no option but to close their business. And the moral to this story is: Hugh and only Hugh can prevent florist friars! [Segue into the destruction and bloodshed in today's scriptures, by those wishing harm to others.]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider pruning shears and/or a hoe! Both are alluded to by Proto-Isaiah (Is. 5:6), and both can be symbols of life-giving cultivation and of destruction!

On **October 4**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Francis of Assisi**, the patron saint of ecology. Pray his "Canticle of Brother Sun" and host a blessing of pets, with refreshment for people and pets. Knowing that water can spook some of God's creatures, consider ways of sharing God's blessing *without* holy water!

On **October 4**, we celebrate the birth in 1941 of **Anne Rice**, the bestselling American author of vampire fiction and Christian literature, including *The Vampire Chronicles* and *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*. Raised Catholic,

she attended Catholic schools, but left the Church at age 18. After decades of atheism, she returned to the Catholic Church in 1998 – though not with a full embrace of the Church’s stances on gay marriage, abortion rights, and birth control. In her honor, reach out to someone who has a similarly complex relationship with the church of his/her upbringing!

On **October 5**, the Church celebrates **Bl. Francis Xavier Seelos**, the German Redemptorist immigrant to the U.S. who refused the bishopric of Pittsburgh to be a missionary throughout the U.S. In his honor, consider saying “no” to certain goods, so that you can say “yes” to even greater goods!

On **October 6**, the Church celebrates **Bl. Marie-Rose Durocher**, the Canadian “saint of Beloeil” and reluctant co-foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. Her last years were marked by poverty, trials, sickness and slander. Pray and reach out to those who similarly suffer!

On **October 6**, we remember the passing in 1643 of **Jean du Vergier de Hauranne**, the French Catholic priest who served as Abbot of Saint-Cyran and as spiritual director of the nuns at Port-Royal des Champs. He introduced to France the thought of his friend, Cornelius Jansen, and was imprisoned for his view that contrition (and not the less-perfect “attrition”) could save a person. In his memory, pray for those who might misunderstand you, your intentions, and/or your desire to help others grow in their relationship with God and others!

On **October 6**, we celebrate the birth in 1958 of **Miguel De La Torre**, the Southern Baptist professor who has written over 30 books on social ethics and Latinx Studies. He achieved notoriety in 2005 when he was forced to resign his tenure over his article “When the Bible is Used for Hatred,” which satirized James Dobson’s outing of SpongeBob SquarePants. He continues to comment on ethical issues, Hispanic religiosity, LGBTQ civil rights, and immigrant rights. In his honor, consider your own willingness to speak a prophetic word against the powers that be!

On **October 7**, in the midst of this Month of the Holy Rosary, the Church celebrates **Our Lady of the Rosary**. Nothing is more fitting than praying the rosary on this day! Learn new mysteries. If you have a multilingual community, consider bringing the community together for a multilingual experience of the rosary!

On **October 7**, we celebrate the birth in 1931 of **Desmond Mpilo Tutu**, the South African Anglican archbishop, theologian, and Nobel Peace Prize winner known for his stand on human rights issues and against the racial segregation of apartheid. As the first Black archbishop of Cape

Town, he oversaw the introduction of women priests and led negotiations to end apartheid and institute a multi-racial democracy. In his honor, consider how you are using your influence to address the most pressing human rights abuses around you!

On **October 8**, we celebrate the birth in 1940 of **Thomas Moore**, the American psychotherapist and former monk who has authored a number of popular spiritual works, including his bestselling *Care of the Soul* and *Soul Mates*. His books and lectures have covered such topics as spirituality, religion, ecology, imagination, mythology and archetypal psychology. In his honor, reflect on one of his works as a spiritual exercise!

On **October 8**, we remember the passing in 1973 of **Gabriel Honoré Marcel**, the French Catholic philosopher and Christian existentialist who wrote over 30 plays and 12 books, including his two-volume *The Mystery of Being*. He paid particular attention to the modern struggle against our dehumanization by technology, and he hosted a weekly philosophical discussion group, where he influenced Ricœur, Levinas & Sartre. In his memory, pause to consider the possibly-dehumanizing impact of technology in your life and in the lives of those around you!

On **October 9**, the Church celebrates **St. Denis of Paris** and **St. John Leonardi**. Denis (not to be confused with Dionysius the Aeropagite or Pseudo-Dionysius) is depicted as a decapitated bishop holding his own head and is invoked against headaches, rabies and demonic possessions. Pray for those who suffer these, and for those who are “losing their head” and acting overly emotional or irrational! John Leonardi was a pharmacist’s assistant who, after being ordained to the priesthood, gathered laity interested in ministering in hospitals and prisons. They formed the Clerks Regular of the Mother of God, and John died 14 years later of the plague, which he contracted from his ministry to the ill. In his memory, consider how you are being the hands and heart of Christ to those most in need!

On **October 9**, we remember the passing in 1253 of **Robert Grosseteste**, the English statesman, scientist, scholastic theologian and bishop who has been called the founder of scientific thought in medieval Oxford. He was an original thinker on what today is known as scientific method. In his memory, pray for all who seek to bridge theology to the many great scientific discoveries of our day!

On **October 9**, we remember the passing in 1989 of **Penny Lernoux**, the American Roman Catholic educator, author and journalist who criticized the Roman church’s policies toward Latin America. Drawn to liberation

theology, she attempted to relate Christ's teachings to Latin American struggles against economic exploitation and military dictatorship. She focused her last years on the attempts of John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger to clamp down on dissent and to fortify an authoritarian, pre-conciliar model of the church. In her memory, reacquaint yourself with the tensions between Latin American liberation theologians and the church with which they shared a love/hate relationship!

Sunday, October 11, 2020

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

You'll need to **choose which form of today's gospel you'll proclaim**: the shorter form, or the longer form, which adds four verses on the man not properly dressed for the wedding banquet.

The thread in today's scriptures: More destruction! But this time, God is destroying death—"the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations" (Is. 25:7)! Now God is feeding God's people with "rich food and choice wine: juicy, rich food and pure, choice wine" (Is. 25:6). The psalmist echoes this image of God spreading a table before us (Ps. 23:5), as does the Matthean Jesus with his image of the king's wedding banquet for his son (Mt. 22:2, with its images of destruction). Knowing abundance himself (Phil. 4:12), Paul believed that his God would "fully supply whatever [we] need" (Phil. 4:19). Will we be counted among those worthy to enter the wedding feast (Mt. 11:13)?

Holy humor: Before walking into the toy store, the mother pulled her children aside. She said, "Repeat after me: 'The Lord is my shepherd...'" [Put your hand to your ear, so as to encourage your listeners to repeat after you] 'I shall not want!'" [Segue into today's message that God provides for us, fully supplying whatever we need (Phil. 4:19).]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine, the symbols of the elements with which God nourishes us in the Eucharist, or, if you're preaching on the longer form of the gospel, consider a piece of attire (e.g., a tie and/or suit coat, or pearls and an evening gown) symbolic of being "appropriately dressed" for the wedding banquet!

On **October 11**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. John XXIII**, the bishop of Rome who sought to model the Good Shepherd and who advocated for opening the "windows" of the Roman church, to allow in some "fresh air." In his honor, thumb through the documents of Vatican II and find a few fresh insights to enliven your ministry and your liturgy!

On **October 11**, we remember the passing in 1878 of **Félix Antoine Philibert Dupanloup**, the French priest, prolific writer, and "Apostle to Youth" who very vocally opposed purported papal infallibility during the First Vatican Council. He was known for his imposing height, eloquence, zeal and charity, and his fiery rhetoric contributed to the canonization of St. Joan of Arc. In his memory, consider how your own preaching and teaching embody the energy, the powerful voice, and the impassioned gestures for which Félix Antoine was famous!

On **October 12**, we remember the passing in 1600 of **Luis de Molina**, the Spanish Jesuit priest and scholastic who stirred controversy and debate through his staunch defense of free will in the debate over human liberty and God's grace. Molinism was the precursor of Jansenism, a lightning rod issue with respect to submission to the authority of the Roman papacy. In his memory, pause to consider your own views on grace and freedom!

On **October 14**, U.S. society celebrates **Columbus Day**, which is increasingly celebrated as **Indigenous Peoples' Day** in more than 50 U.S. cities. Latin America celebrates this day as *el día de la raza* (the Day of Our People). Find a fitting way to commemorate this day, with an acknowledgement of the sins of the Church in erasing indigenous people and their rich cultures and religions!

On **October 14**, the Old Catholic Church celebrates the birth in 1952 of **Joris August Odilius Ludovicus Vercammen**, the Roman Catholic priest who joined the Old Catholic Diocese of Utrecht and was named Archbishop of Utrecht in 2000. Pray today for Archbishop Vercammen and his flock in the Old Catholic tradition!

On **October 15**, the Church celebrates **St. Teresa of Jesus**, the mystic and Carmelite reformer who modeled her life on the poor and crucified Christ. In her honor, go deeper into your own "interior castle" and consider how you might grow in your own "way of perfection"!

On **October 15**, the Old Catholic Church celebrates the anniversary of the consecration in 1724 of **Cornelius van Steenoven** as the 7th archbishop of Utrecht, by Bishop Dominique-Marie Varlet of the Roman church. This was an historic day: the first of four consecrations performed by Varlet

without the permission of Rome! Pray in a special way today for our sisters and brothers of the Old Catholic Church, who trace the succession of their archbishop back to these consecrations by Varlet!

On **October 15**, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the birth in 1945 of **Simeon Nikolov Dimitrov**, who would become Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 11 million Bulgarian Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **October 16**, the Church celebrates **St. Hedwig** and **St. Margaret Mary Alacoque**. Living 500 years apart, both are known today as patron/matron saints of orphaned children. Find a way today to honor the little ones for whom God shows a particular solicitous concern!

On **October 16**, we celebrate the birth in 1930 of **Sir John Charlton Polkinghorne**, the English Anglican priest, physicist and theologian who has authored 26 books on the relationship between science and religion. In his honor, reacquaint yourself with any one of his works!

On **October 17**, the Church celebrates **St. Ignatius of Antioch**, the apostolic father who emphasized the humanity & divinity of Christ, and advocated for Church unity. Pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions him, & consider how you're bringing greater unity (or not) to the Church!

On **October 17**, we remember the passing in 1993 of **Helmut Gollwitzer**, the Bavarian Lutheran theologian & author who was part of the Confessing Church movement that resisted the efforts of the Nazi regime to control the Church. The diary of his experiences as a prisoner of war in Russia for four years became a bestseller in Germany, and the president of West Germany referred to it as "a great historical document." Gollwitzer later became a pacifist, opposing nuclear weapons, the arms race, and the Vietnam War. In his memory, pray the peace prayer attributed to St. Francis, meditating on how Gollwitzer and so many others have been instruments of peace—and how it is that you, too, might better bring pardon and hope to situations of injury and despair!

Sunday, October 18, 2020

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

We're nearing the end of Fall Ordinary Time: Does **your worship environment** reflect this? (Please don't say that you have same worship environment you had in June!)

- Consider transitioning to a **darker green** in your décor and vestments, to mirror the darkening days of this season. Be sure the greens match—and that your vestments are ironed or steamed!
- Among the plants in your worship space, intersperse tall pottery vases of **dried grasses or willow branches** that reflect nature's changes.
- Incorporate **fruits of the harvest**—particularly those grains that call to mind the sifting of “wheat” and “chaff” that will occur in the final judgment.
- Harvested **squash and pumpkins** can add variety—but be sure to clean pumpkins with a solution of water and bleach, to slow deterioration.
- **Experiment with textures, small prints, discrete woven patterns, and fabrics with a sheen.**
- Complement with **green plants with deeper green leaves.**

For the next five Sundays, the second reading will come from Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians—the first extant writing currently contained in the New Testament! **For the intellectually-curious**, take a moment to share of the dating, audience and context for this letter, its structure and themes, and the fact that the Second Letter to the Thessalonians is likely pseudonymous (attributed to Paul and written in his spirit, even if not written by him)!

The thread in today's scriptures: Give to God that which belongs to God! God anointed Cyrus and subdued the nations before him (Is. 45:1); God gets the credit, even though Cyrus didn't know or acknowledge God (Is. 45:4 & 5)! Those of us who do know and acknowledge God—those of us who are chosen by God, like the Thessalonians (1Thes. 1:4)—“give the Lord glory and honor...[and] the glory due God's name” (Ps. 96:7-8). The Matthean Jesus likewise encourages us to give “to God what belongs to God” (Mt. 22:21).

Holy humor: You've likely heard this joke before. There was a man who was extremely grateful to God for the many gifts that God had given him—but he was always wondering what would be an appropriate gift to put in the collection basket on Sunday mornings. Finally, he came up with what he thought would be the ideal solution: He decided to throw all the money he made that week into the air and allow God to take all the money that God wanted—and he would keep the rest! [Clarify that this is probably not an ideal solution for gifting back to God a bit of what God has given us, and segue into the belief that *everything we are* and *everything we have* belongs to God—and is meant to be shared!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a large coin—perhaps an old Eisenhower silver dollar or a JFK half-dollar! Hold it up when you speak of today's gospel message.

It's **World Mission Sunday:** Consider having a special collection to support a concrete missionary endeavor, and invite congregants to be "missionaries" from afar through their support of the Church's missions!

On **October 18**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Luke:** Incorporate a large Book of the Gospels into today's décor, and, since we're in the Year of Luke, lift high the author of the third gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles. If you haven't already, on this physician's feast, consider celebrating a White Mass with a special recognition and blessing of all who work in medical professions!

On **October 18**, the Old Catholic Church celebrates the anniversary of the consecration in 1739 of **Petrus Johannes Meindaerts** as the tenth archbishop of Utrecht, by Bishop Dominique-Marie Varlet of the Roman church. This was the fourth of four consecrations performed by Varlet over the course of 15 years, without the permission of Rome. Meindaerts, who served as bishop for nearly 30 years, would later consecrate three other bishops to ensure the apostolic succession of the Old Catholic Church. Pray in a special way today for all who have the foresight to think about the legacy they are creating in this world—and for those who fail to do so!

On **October 19**, the Church celebrates **Ss. John de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues & Companions.** They were Jesuit priests misunderstood and martyred by early indigenous Americans. Pray for and reach out to those persons you find most difficult to understand and share with them the merciful, compassionate face of Christ!

On **October 20**, the Church celebrates **St. Paul of the Cross**, founder of the Passionists, a religious congregation that takes a fourth vow of spreading memory of Jesus' passion. Consider how you lift up the

suffering of Jesus as a model for all who follow in his footsteps on the path to redemption!

On **October 22**, the Roman church celebrates **St. John Paul II**, a conservative voice barring our sisters from the ministries enjoyed by women in the early Church. Find a way today to promote conversation on the place of women in the ordained ministries of the Church—both during the first quarter of the Western Church’s history and in Independent Catholicism today!

On **October 22**, we remember the passing in 1965 of **Paul Johannes Tillich**, the German-American philosopher and Lutheran theologian who is regarded as one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century. His works introduced theology and modern culture to popular audiences, and his three-volume *Systematic Theology* helped theologians explore the symbols of Christian revelation as answers to the problems of human existence raised by contemporary philosophy. In his memory, “brush up” on your knowledge of Tillich’s life and works!

On **October 23**, the Church celebrates **St. John of Capistrano**, the Italian Franciscan who attracted so many people that he had to preach outdoors! Think through ways in which you might extend the reach of your ministry and reach more people. John is also the patron of those involved in the legal profession: Consider hosting a Red Mass and/or praying for judges, lawyers, law school professors, law students and elected officials!

On **October 23**, the Church celebrates **St. Anicius Manlius Severinus Boëthius**, the sixth-century Roman senator and philosopher whose *Consolation of Philosophy* expounded on human nature, virtue, evil, justice and free will – and became one of the most popular and influential works of the Middle Ages. As a translator of Aristotle, Boethius became an intermediary between classical antiquity and the following centuries. In his memory, dust off his conversations with Lady Philosophy!

On **October 24**, the Church celebrates **St. Anthony Mary Claret**, the Spanish weaver and printer who was named archbishop of Santiago, Cuba, where he confronted racism, slavery and anti-Christian persecution. Pray and show solidarity today with those who suffer racism, work for unjust wages, and/or are persecuted for their faith!

On **October 24**, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2004 of Nikolaos Horeftakis as **Pope & Patriarch Theodore II of Alexandria**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 1.4 million Greek Orthodox Catholics he serves!

Sunday, October 25, 2020

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

The thread in today's scriptures: The Matthean Jesus boils down the entire Mosaic Law into two precepts: love God and love others (Mt. 22:34-40). Ideally, we should sing with the psalmist: "I love you, Lord" (Ps. 18:2). And Exodus shares the shocking view that if we don't love others—like aliens, widows and orphans (Ex. 22:21-22)—we risk kindling Gods' wrath, such that our spouses will be widows and widowers, and our children will be orphans (Ex. 22:24)! The way in which we give and/or lend to others also manifests our love for others (Ex. 22:25-27). By loving God and others, we all have the opportunity to be "a model for all the believers" (1Thes. 1:7)!

Holy humor: The story is told of the newly-ordained deacon who came to her new community and preached her first homily, titled, "Love God, and Love Your Neighbor." Everyone enjoyed it. She continued to get to know the people, and, a few weeks later, her pastor invited her to preach again. So, she shared her homily: "Love God, and Love Your Neighbor." Her pastor thought it was odd—but maybe the young deacon was so busy ministering to the needs of the people that she didn't have time to prepare a new homily. The deacon continued to get to know the people, and, a few weeks later, her pastor invited her to preach again. You guessed it: She shared the same homily: "Love God, and Love Your Neighbor." Her pastor patiently endured the homily for a third time, but quickly took her aside after Mass. She smiled and replied: "For weeks now, I've been getting to know this community, and I'd love to preach a new homily. Believe me, I would. But it doesn't seem they've done anything about the first one yet!" [Segue into how easy it is to talk about loving God and others—but how difficult it might be to prove that our love for God and/or others is actually growing from week to week!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Use a pattern of some sort! Do you do crafts? If so, you probably have a piece that serves as a model or pattern for other similar pieces? Do you sew clothing? You likely have a pattern that you place on top of the cloth. Do you know how to write? You likely learned by patterning your handwriting on model letters! That's what we're called to be: patterns and models of love (1Thes. 1:7) for those who might become "imitators of us and of the Lord" (1Thes. 1:6)!

On **October 25**, we remember the passing in 1400 of **Geoffrey Chaucer**, the English author widely regarded as “the Father of English Literature” and the greatest English poet of the Middle Ages. The creator of “The Canterbury Tales,” Chaucer esteemed Christianity, even while recognizing that the Church contained some venal, corrupt individuals. In his memory, share with another person your understanding of the difference between Christianity and the Church!

On **October 27**, the Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 1999 of Ktrij Nersessian as **Catholicos Karekin II of All Armenians**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the nine million people he serves!

On **October 27**, we remember the passing in 2011 of **James Hillman**, the American psychologist and author who wrote widely on archetypal psychology. His bestselling work, *The Soul's Code*, suggests that the soul is revealed in imagination, fantasy, myth and metaphor—but also in psychopathology (literally, the “speech of the suffering soul”). In his memory, consider the ways in which you might better allow your soul to “speak” and breathe life into our world!

On **October 28**, the Church celebrates **Ss. Simon & Jude**, two apostles about whom we know very little. St. Jude is invoked as the patron saint of hopeless causes and occupies a preeminent space in the canon of Mexican saints. St. Simon the Zealot, according to one tradition, preached and was martyred in Persia along with St. Jude. Pray Eucharistic Prayer I, which mentions them. If you serve a Latino community, be sure to share a prayer card or medal with St. Jude’s image!

On **October 28**, we remember the passing in 1653 of **Libert Froidmont**, the theologian and scientist who corresponded with René Descartes and posthumously published Cornelius Jansen’s *Augustinus*. As a theologian, he chaired the scriptural studies department at Louvain, and, as a physicist interested in meteors, he sought to co-opt, rather than reject, new scientific discoveries. In his memory, consider your own stances toward science and emerging views on the human person and on the world we inhabit!

On **October 28**, the Old Catholic Church celebrates the anniversary of the consecration in 1733 of **Theodorus van der Croon** as the ninth archbishop of Utrecht, by Bishop Dominique-Marie Varlet of the Roman church. This was the third of four consecrations performed by Varlet without the permission of Rome. Pray in a special way today for all who continue to generously share the gift of the Spirit and the sacraments of the Church for the sake of God’s holy people!

On **October 28**, we remember the birth in 1957 of **Scott W. Hahn**, the American Roman Catholic theologian who, influenced by *Opus Dei*, converted from Presbyterianism and became an ardent and conservative apologist for the Roman church. He is the author of various works and is a regular guest on EWTN. On this day, pray that the Spirit might similarly inflame the hearts of those who contribute to the upbuilding of the Independent Catholic movement in our world!

On **October 29**, we remember the passing in 1306 or 1309 of **Godfrey of Fontaines**, the scholastic philosopher and theologian at the University of Paris who wrote on subjects ranging from moral philosophy to epistemology and metaphysics. The “Venerated Doctor” attacked mendicant orders but defended the novel theory of Thomism, formulated by a mendicant and condemned by the bishop of Paris. In his memory, pause to consider the inconsistencies in your own words and actions!

On **October 29**, we remember **the closure of the convent of Port-Royal des Champs** by King Louis XIV in 1709. The convent that sixty years earlier had flourished with 150 nuns had been reduced to 22, all of whom were over the age of 50 and several of whom were now ill. “For the good of the state,” 200 soldiers descended on the convent, gave the nuns three hours to pack their belongings and say good-bye, then drove them in separate carriages to the different convents to which they were now scattered and exiled. Shortly thereafter, the convent cemetery was exhumed, the remains of the nuns there were dumped into a mass grave, and the convent was razed. In memory of this somber event, pray for those whose histories have been purposely erased—throughout the centuries and even still today!

On **October 29**, the Independent Sacramental Movement celebrates the anniversary of the passing in 2009 of **Luis Fernando Castillo Méndez**, the Venezuelan priest who was the last living bishop consecrated by Carlos Duarte Costa. Luis Fernando served as Patriarch of the National Catholic Apostolic Church of Brazil and was persecuted by the Roman church and tortured with hot irons by the Venezuelan government, to make him deny that he was a Catholic bishop. Pray today for all who are persecuted for serving the people of God in the Independent Sacramental Movement!

On **October 30**, we remember the passing in 1896 of **Gustav Adolf** who was named a Roman Catholic bishop at age 34 and a cardinal at age 44. After von Bismarck appointed him Ambassador of the German Empire to the Holy See, Pius IX (who appointed him a cardinal) rejected him due

to his public opposition to the pope's ultramontane position. In his memory, pray for all who are suffering the pain of friendships gone bad!

On **October 30**, we remember the passing in 1987 of **Joseph John Campbell**, the American professor who penned groundbreaking works on comparative religion and mythology. His 1949 book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, pointed to the archetypal hero shared by the "monomyth" of world mythologies. He also drew attention to the various myths surrounding Jesus of Nazareth, noting, for instance, that even if Jesus ascended from the earth at the speed of light, he would still be in our galaxy nearly 2,000 years later. George Lucas credited Campbell for his influence on the Star Wars saga. In Campbell's memory, consider the place of myth in our faith tradition and its many, fascinating stories!

Sunday, November 1, 2020

THE SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS

(white)

The thread in today's scriptures: John shares a vision of the 144,000 people "from every nation, race, people and tongue" gathered around God and the Lamb (Rev. 7:9-10). What characterizes "the race that seeks for God" (Ps. 24:6)? Their hands are sinless, their hearts are clean, and they desire not what is vain (Ps. 24:4). The pseudonymous First Letter of John suggests that, like the saints, the children of God will see God as God is (1Jn. 3:1-3). And the Matthean Jesus shares his "recipe" for achieving the kingdom of heaven and one day being counted among the saints (Mt. 5:3 & 12)!

Holy humor: The story is told of the priest who was preaching to a Sunday school class on the theme of going to heaven. He asked the children, "If I sell my house and my car and give all my money to the church, will that get me into heaven?" Together, the children all answered, "No!" He continued, "And if I give candy to all the kids in the world, will that get me into heaven?" Again they answered, "No!" So, he asked, "Then what can get me into heaven?" And little Roy shouted: "First you have to die!" [Segue into what it takes to be numbered among the saints in heaven.]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Pull out some recipe cards, with simple recipes written on them. See if listeners can guess the recipe based on the instructions. After trying two or three

simple dishes, read the next recipe card: “Be poor in spirit. Mourn. Be meek. Hunger and thirst for righteousness. Show mercy. Be clean of heart. Be a peacemaker.” What is that a recipe for? Eternal happiness (or blessedness)! Yes, follow this recipe, and the kingdom of heaven is yours!

Daylight Saving Time ends today: Be sure to spread word a week or two in advance, so that congregants “fall back” and enjoy an extra hour at home, rather than arrive an hour early for Mass!

On **November 1**, the Church celebrates **All Saints Day**! Consider hosting a heavenly-themed party and costume contest with ribbons for all participants—or minimize the stress by having halos and silver beads that congregants can wear on top of their regular attire. Use the occasion as a way to catechize. Have an All Saints photo booth. Plan some heavenly-themed games. Decorate with silver foil stars and clusters of white balloons. Cover furniture with white sheets and cushions. Drape white tulle around the room, with white lights behind for a twinkling effect. Fill white, silver and clear balloons with air and scatter them all over the floor, to give the effect of walking on clouds. Pull out a fog machine, for an additional effect. Provide a smorgasbord of white treats: finger sandwiches on white bread, cauliflower and jicama with ranch dressing, white cheeses and crackers, marshmallows, yogurt-covered nuts, white M&Ms, macadamia nuts, white chocolate pretzels, cloudlike meringue cookies, and, of course, an angel food cake with whipped cream and coconut. You will have created a heavenly memory!

On **November 1**, we remember the passing in 1955 of **Dale Harbison Carnegie**, the American writer and speaker known for assisting others with their public speaking and interpersonal skills. The renowned author of the bestselling *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Carnegie believed that the best way to influence other people’s behavior is by changing your own behavior toward them. In his memory, reflect on your own interpersonal skills, and consider incorporating suggestions from his works into your life and ministry!

On **November 1**, the Indian Orthodox Church celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2010 of Paulose Mar Milithios as **Catholicos Baselios Mar Thoma Paulose II**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 2.5 million people he serves!

On **November 2**, the Church celebrates **All Souls Day**, an outgrowth from the 1274 formulation of Purgatory, a place where our loved ones and friends are purportedly purged of sin. Consider hosting a Mass of remembrance in a cemetery or mausoleum, and invite all families who lost a loved one during this year. Announce this a few weeks in advance

with a special envelope (since Catholics are accustomed to offering Masses for the dead) onto which congregants can write the names of their beloved departed family members and friends, for inclusion in the intentions of this day. During the presentation of gifts, bring these envelopes forward in a lovely basket, and place them near the altar during the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Church shares four “great sequences” each year: Today’s is the *Dies Irae*. Consider having a gifted cantor sing or chant a setting of this, before segueing into the Gospel Acclamation. Offer a prayer for those who’ve gone before us, and conclude with the popular words: “Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord....”

On **November 2**, Abortion (women’s reproductive health) celebrate *el día de los muertos* (“the Day of the Dead”) with altars in memory of departed loved ones. They fill these altars with photos, *papel picado* (hand-cut tissue paper), yellow & orange chrysanthemums and marigolds, and foods, drinks and objects that call to mind those persons and their lives. Incorporate elements into your own celebration of All Souls Day, and point to the *esqueletos* (skeletons that are eating, drinking, playing the guitar, riding bicycles, etc.) as a reminder of the great mystery of our faith: that those who have gone before us are not dead, but are very much alive in Christ. Send congregants home with ideas for their own simple home altars in honor of deceased loved ones!

On **November 2**, we celebrate the birth in 1936 of **Rosemary Radford Ruether**, the American feminist scholar and Catholic theologian who, despite sanction by the Vatican, has been an outspoken advocate for the ordination of women in the Roman church. As a director of Catholics for Choice, she has advocated for allowing women to follow their Spirit-inspired consciences. In her honor, consider what you are doing to advance Jesus’ and Paul’s vision of a “discipleship of equals”!

On **November 2**, the Eastern Orthodox Church celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 1991 of Aghios Theodoros as **Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 260 million Eastern Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **November 4**, the Church celebrates **St. Charles Borromeo**, the doctor of civil and canon law who established seminaries and formulated a code of moral conduct for clergy. Consider ways to focus today on your own continuing education and formation!

On **November 4**, we remember the passing in 1658 of **Antoine Le Maistre**, the French Jansenist lawyer and author who was the nephew of Antoine Arnauld, the leading Jansenist theologian in 17th-century France, and of Jacqueline-Marie-Angélique Arnauld, the abbess of Port-Royal des Champs, the religious community at the center of Jansenism. A talented jurist, Antoine withdrew from public affairs, greatly displeasing Cardinal Richelieu, and founded an ascetic group of hermits at Port-Royal. In his memory, lift up in prayer all who dedicate themselves to a contemplative life of prayer!

On **November 5**, we celebrate the birth in 1931 of **Charles Margrave Taylor**, the Canadian philosopher who has contributed to many philosophical fields, including the philosophy of religion. His work, *A Secular Age*, argues against the diminished influence of religion in light of science and technology, noting that religion continues to grow and diversify in our world. In his honor, consider your own stance toward the intersection of science, technology and religion, and the role of religion in a quickly-evolving world!

Sunday, November 8, 2020

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

Be sure to **choose which version of the second reading you'll proclaim**: the shorter version, or the longer form, which adds four verses speaking of the dead being raised when Christ comes down from heaven, with those who are living "caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1Thes. 4:17). For the intellectually-curious, note how the parousia in this first extant letter of Saint Paul differs from his vision of Christ's second coming in future works!

The thread in today's scriptures: The liturgical year is drawing to a close, and we begin reflecting on the end times! The author of Wisdom says, "Whoever watches for [Wisdom] at dawn shall not be disappointed...Whoever for her sake keeps vigil shall quickly be free from care" (Wis. 6:14-15), and the psalmist meditates on God "through the night watches" (Ps. 63:6). The Matthean Jesus shares the parable of the ten virgins, concluding, "Stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Mt. 25:13). Even Saint Paul suggests that Christ's return is

imminent, since “we who are alive [will see]...the coming of the Lord” (1Thes. 4:15)!

Holy humor: Try recasting the parable of the ten virgins in contemporary terms! There were ten teens who went to a party. They all took their cell phones, but only five of them took the adapters and cords needed to charge their phones, too. They all used their phones all night—calling, texting, taking photos and videos, and playing games—and they all looked forward to recording the girls’ night karaoke contest in the early morning hours! The party wore on, the batteries of their phones were quickly diminishing, and when the teens who didn’t bring their chargers asked if they could borrow the chargers of those who had brought them, those who thought to bring along their chargers said, “No! We have to charge our phones, too!” [Segue into the gospel’s message of preparedness—particularly since we know neither the day nor the hour of the Lord’s “karaoke contest”!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a symbol of waking up, like an alarm clock, or a symbol of watchfulness, like a torch. Any tiki torch will work: If you’re hosting a backyard party with tiki torches, aren’t you going to check, to make sure they have enough oil to last through the end of the party? Otherwise, what will happen? Exactly!

On **November 8**, we remember the passing in 1308 of **John Duns** (a.k.a., Duns Scotus), the Scottish “Subtle Doctor” of the High Middle Ages. He argued for the Immaculate Conception and developed a complex argument for the existence of God. He is also known for such concepts as haecceity, formal distinction, and the univocity of being. In his memory, refresh your knowledge of him and his works!

On **November 11**, the U.S. society celebrates **Veteran’s Day**. Share a special blessing for all who have served in the military, and celebrate them with a cake or some other fitting symbol of your gratitude!

On **November 11**, the Church celebrates **St. Martin of Tours**, the soldier who shared his cloak with Christ disguised as a poor man. Consider the persons around you through whom Christ might be appearing “in disguise”! Martin is the patron saint of business owners in Mexico: If you serve a Latino community, share a prayer of blessing with the entrepreneurs who are attempting to support themselves and their families in creative ways!

On **November 11**, we remember the passing in 2013 of **Jerome Murphy-O’Connor**, the Irish Dominican priest and New Testament professor considered a leading authority on St. Paul. He made numerous television

appearances, and he authored several books, including an archaeological guide to the Holy Land. In his memory, explore more deeply St. Paul's life, writings and theology!

On **November 12**, the Church celebrates **St. Josaphat**, the Lithuanian archbishop who tirelessly worked in an attempt to unite the Western and Eastern Churches. Renew your commitment today to deepening ecumenical relations!

On **November 12**, we celebrate the birth in 1936 of **Sandra Marie Schneiders**, the American professor *emerita* who has published numerous works on theology, spirituality, feminism and religious life. In her memory, consider the ways in which you might be pouring "new wine" into "old wineskins" by failing to reimagine your life and ministry!

On **November 12**, we celebrate the birth in 1942 of **John F. Haught**, the American systematic theologian who has written widely on physical cosmology, evolutionary biology and Christianity. His many works provide a space for both scientific inquiry and a biblical understanding of God, and he explores the persistence of biblical literalism, which erroneously looks to the Bible as a source of scientific truth. In his honor, consider your own views toward the "science" contained in the scriptures!

On **November 13**, the Church celebrates **St. Frances Xavier Cabrini**, the first American citizen to be canonized. In honor of the matron saint of immigrants, share a special prayer for all who are attempting to survive and thrive in a foreign land!

On **November 13**, we remember the passing in 1907 of **Francis Thompson**, the English poet and mystic who dropped out of medical school to pursue his passion of writing. His poem, "The Hound of Heaven," describes the pursuit of the human person by God and has been described as "one of the most tremendous poems ever written." In his memory, pray using the words of Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven"!

On **November 14**, we remember the passing in 1831 of **Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel**, the German philosopher who sought to overcome dualisms and whose philosophy of the spirit integrated philosophy, psychology, history, art and religion. Called the "Protestant Aquinas" by Barth, he provided the basis for many great philosophical ideas of the 19th and 20th centuries. In his memory, take a moment to reacquaint yourself with Hegel's life and works!

On **November 14**, the Armenian Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the birth in 1934 of **Catholicos-Patriarch Krikor Bedros “Gregory Peter” XX Ghabroyan**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 758,000 Armenian Catholics he serves!

Sunday, November 15, 2020

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(green)

Be mindful of the **heavily-exclusive language** in today’s scriptures: The first reading speaks to the qualities and skills that bring value to a single gender. The second verse of the responsorial psalm yields to patriarchal notions of a wife and her children “belonging” to a man, and “thus is the *man* blessed” could just as easily be rephrased “thus is the *one* blessed.”

You’ll need to **choose which gospel you’ll proclaim**: the shorter form, or the longer form, which adds three verses on what the servants did with their talents, as well as nine verses on what happened to the servants who received two talents and one talent. If you put yourself in the moccasins of your listeners, you’ll likely spare them the extra 12 verses and summarize those verses as part of your homily instead!

The thread in today’s scriptures: As we mark the last Sunday in Ordinary Time, we’re reminded that the industrious will be rewarded for their labor when the Lord returns to tell us, “Well done, my good and faithful servant” (Mt. 25:21 & 23)! The worthy spouse is more interested in doing good, than in deceptive charm and fleeting beauty (Prov. 31:30). Those who walk in God’s way bear fruit (Ps. 128:3) and “eat the fruit of their handiwork” (Ps. 128:2). They are “children of the light and children of the day” (1Thes. 5:5). They are the ones who will hear the Lord say, “Come, share your master’s joy” (Mt. 25:21 & 23)!

Holy humor: The story is told of the Texas oil tycoon who walked into a bank in New York City and asked for a loan officer. He told the loan officer he was going to Europe for two weeks and needed to borrow \$5,000. Because the man didn’t bank there, the loan officer needed a form of security for the loan, so the tycoon handed over the keys and title to his new Ferrari. The loan officer agreed to hold the car as collateral for the loan and apologized for having to charge 12% interest. You can imagine how the loan officer – and even the bank president – laughed at how the southerner used his \$250,000 Ferrari as collateral for a \$5,000

loan! An employee of the bank then drove the Ferrari into the bank's private underground garage and safely parked it. Two weeks later, the tycoon returned and repaid the \$5,000 loan – with the interest of \$23. The loan officer said, “Sir, we're happy to have your business, and this transaction has worked out very nicely, but we're a little puzzled: Why would a wealthy person like you bother to borrow \$5,000?” And the good 'ole Texan replied, “Where else in New York City can I park my car for two weeks for only \$23 and expect it to be there when I return?” [Segue into the investments and industriousness of the people in today's scriptures!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Try a bag of coins: They call to mind the image of the industrious person helping the needy (Prov. 31:20), the prosperity of Jerusalem (Ps. 128:5), the thief and those who are of the darkness (1Thes. 5:4-5), and the parable of the coins (Mt. 25:14-30). Recall, though, that a talent may have had as much value as...6,000 days' (or 20 years') wages – perhaps some half-million dollars today. What a responsibility to be given a talent or two!

On **November 15**, when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Albert the Great**, the great teacher and mentor who suffered memory loss and dementia before death. Pray in a special way today for all who suffer similar maladies – and for all who so lovingly and patiently care for them!

On **November 15**, we celebrate the birth in 1932 of **Alvin Carl Plantinga**, the American philosopher whose writings on the philosophy of religion include a “free will defense” to refute the argument that a good God could not allow evil in the world. Within the study of theodicy, he is best known for his work, *God, Freedom and Evil*. In his honor, pause today to reflect on your own beliefs with respect to the presence of evil and suffering in our world!

On **November 15**, the Syriac Catholic Church (in union with Rome) celebrates the birth in 1944 of **Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem Joseph III Yonan of Antioch**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 205,000 Syriac Catholics he serves!

On **November 16**, the Church celebrates **St. Margaret of Scotland** and **St. Gertrude the Great**. Margaret raised eight children and lived a life of extraordinary charity that flowed from prayer. Gertrude was a nun whose prayer led to ecstatic, mystical experiences. Pause today to consider the state of your own prayer life. Even better, find some time and space today to focus on growing in your own prayerful relationship with God!

On **November 16**, we remember the passing in 1695 of **Pierre Nicole**, the great Jansenist theologian whose *Les Imaginaires* suggested that the supposed heretical opinions ascribed to the Jansenists existed only in the imaginations of the Jesuits. Despite his absent-mindedness and social awkwardness, he wrote numerous popular theological works and a 14-volume work of moral theology. In his memory, encourage the gifts of the persons you're tempted to "write off"!

On **November 16**, we remember the passing in 1989 of **Ignacio Ellacuría**, the Spanish Jesuit priest, philosopher and theologian who was assassinated with other Jesuits by Salvadoran soldiers in the closing years of the Salvadoran Civil War. An important contributor to liberation theology and liberation philosophy, his work was met by strong opposition from the conservative religious and political forces in El Salvador. In his memory, pray for all modern-day martyrs and all who pour out their lives for the liberation of others!

On **November 17**, we remember the passing in 1494 of **Giovanni Pico della Mirandola**, the Italian Renaissance nobleman and philosopher known for his manifesto of 900 theses on religion, philosophy, natural philosophy and magic—the first book to be universally banned by the Roman church. In his memory, research the works that have been condemned and/or banned throughout history!

On **November 18**, the Church celebrates **St. Rose Philippine Duchesne**, who cared for the Native Americans of St. Louis, Missouri. Pause today to consider your own efforts of catechesis and evangelization!

On **November 18**, we remember the passing in 2007 of **Karl Hugo Prüter**, the Congregationalist minister who became an Independent Catholic bishop and founded Christ Catholic Church. For decades, his church was deemed the world's smallest cathedral by *Guinness Book of World Records*. He also established St. Willibrord Press to publish and distribute Independent Catholic literature. In his memory, recommit yourself to leaving a greater legacy within the Independent Catholic movement!

On **November 18**, the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2012 of Wagih Subhi Baqi Sulayman as **Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 22 million people he serves!

On **November 20**, we celebrate the birth in 1942 of **Daniel A. Helminiak**, the American Roman Catholic priest and theologian who has written widely on such topics as neuroscience, human sexuality, and the psychology of spirituality. He is renowned for his bestseller, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, which argues that the Bible does not

condemn, but is actually indifferent to, same-sex relationships. In his honor, share a copy of his book with someone who might be in need of a bit of good news on what the Bible really says about his/her sexuality and/or the sexuality of his/her children and grandchildren!

On **November 20**, we celebrate the birth in 1943 of **Luke Timothy Johnson**, the American Benedictine New Testament scholar and historian of early Christianity. He has written widely on Luke-Acts, the Pastoral Letters, the Letter of James, and the Greco-Roman context of early Christianity. He has voiced his disagreements with the Roman church, including its prohibition of same-sex marriage. In his memory, acquaint yourself with his scholarship!

On **November 20**, the Russian Orthodox Church (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the birth in 1946 of **Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev**, who would become Patriarch Kirill of Moscow. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the Russian Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **November 21**, the Church celebrates the **Presentation of Mary**, a day observed for centuries despite its lack of scriptural basis. Many artists depict her as a three-year old presenting herself to God. If you serve a Latino community, be sure to note the tie between this act and the traditional *presentación de 3 años*, in which Latino parents present their three-year-old children to the Church!

On **November 21**, we remember the passing in 1861 of **Jean-Baptiste Henri-Dominique Lacordaire**, the French priest, theologian and political activist who reestablished the Dominican Order in post-Revolutionary France and whose liberal Catholic views were not welcomed by the Roman papacy. He demanded the separation of church and state, challenging French clergy to embrace apostolic poverty over state salaries, and he attacked conservative, government-appointed bishops as ambitious and servile. He was an early advocate for freedom of conscience and freedom of press—both of which were condemned by Gregory XVI. In his memory, pause to consider how your own words and actions contribute to and/or limit basic human freedoms!

On **November 21**, the Independent Sacramental Movement celebrates the consecration in 1897 of **Anthony Stanislas Kozlowski**, who organized the Polish National Catholic Church in Chicago for Polish congregants dissatisfied with their mostly-Irish Roman Catholic bishops. Pray today for those unable to identify with the Church's ministers around them!

On **November 21**, the Polish National Catholic Church celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2010 of **Prime Bishop Anthony Mikovsky**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 26,000 people he serves!

Sunday, November 22, 2020

CHRIST THE KING OF THE UNIVERSE

(white)

The Sundays of Summer/Fall Ordinary Time have come to an end: **Decorate your worship space** in white and gold. Be sure your vestments match the environment and are ironed or steamed. Highlight the solemnity of this day with an arrangement of fresh flowers!

The thread in today's scriptures: Ezekiel, the psalmist and the Matthean Jesus imagine God to be like the ancient shepherd-kings, tending the sheep, shepherding them rightly, and separating the sheep from the goats (Ez. 34:11-12 & 15-17, Ps. 23:1, Mt. 32-33). Paul imagines Christ putting all his enemies—including death—under his feet, then “hand[ing] over the kingdom to his God and Father” (1Cor. 15:24). Will you be part of that kingdom? It depends on whether you’re counted among the “sheep” or the “goats” (Mt. 25:34-46)!

Holy humor: Have you heard the story of the woman who was walking in the countryside when she saw a shepherd tending a huge flock of sheep? She asked him, “How many sheep do you have there?” The shepherd asked, “Which kind, dear: the white sheep or the black sheep?” She said, “The white ones, for example.” He said, “There are about 200 white sheep in this meadow.” “And how many black sheep are there?”, she asked. “About 200, too.” She continued, “And what do they eat?” The shepherd asked, “Which ones, dear: the white sheep or the black sheep?” She said, “I don’t know...the white ones.” He replied, “They eat the greenest grass.” “And the black ones?”, she asked. He replied, “The black sheep eat the greenest grass, too.” She continued, “And how much wool does each sheep produce?” The shepherd asked, “Which ones, sweetheart? The white sheep or the black sheep?” By this point, the woman was beginning to get annoyed. “The white sheep,” she said. He replied, “The white sheep produce an average of 12 pounds of wool each year.” “Uh-huh. And the black ones?”, she asked. He replied, “And the black ones produce about 12 pounds of wool each year, too.”

Exasperated, the woman asked: “Why do you always ask me which sheep—the white ones or the black ones—if the answer is always the same for all of them?” The shepherd replied, “Well, that’s easy. That’s because the white sheep are mine!” “Oh,” she said. “I didn’t think about that. And whose are the black ones?” And the shepherd replied, “The black ones are mine, too!” [Segue into the scriptural image of God shepherding all “sheep” – and even the “goats,” too!]

Looking for a visual aid for your homily or object lesson? Consider a golden crown and a crozier or shepherd’s staff! That’s the image we have in today’s scriptures of the shepherd-king! Invite your listeners to consider how well they’re following in the footsteps of the shepherd-king and tending the “sheep” and the “lambs” around them!

Thanksgiving is this week: Consider hosting a post-Mass **Thanksgiving dinner**, complete with traditional foods!

For Thanksgiving, consider sharing with each family a laminated card with a beautiful, meaningful **Thanksgiving meal blessing**. Include your community’s name and contact information on it. Congregants will use it, then find a special place for it, so that they can use it in future years!

Will your community have an **end-of-year appeal**? After the celebration of Thanksgiving this week, congregants will be receiving end-of-year appeals from a number of non-profit organizations. Consider an appeal, perhaps to launch on Giving Tuesday next week! Also, be thinking about a custom holiday card that you might design and print during the coming days, to be shared during the holidays as a symbol of your appreciation for all who have supported your community throughout this year!

On **November 22**, when it doesn’t fall on a Sunday, the Church celebrates **St. Cecilia**, the matron saint of musicians. She was martyred for refusing to forsake her vow of virginity and sacrifice to pagan gods. Find a small way today to grow in your own musical ability. If you’re not entirely confident in your vocal abilities, ask a gifted friend for a brief vocal lessons! Also, if you haven’t recognized your parish’s instrumentalists and vocalists recently, this is an opportune time to do so!

On **November 22**, we remember the passing in 1963 of **C.S. Lewis**, the British Anglican writer and theologian whose fiction and Christian apologetics have been read by millions. In his memory, read one of his works and/or consider the written legacy you’re leaving!

On **November 22**, we also remember the passing in 1963 of **Aldous Leonard Huxley**, the English Nobel Prize winning author, philosopher, humanist and pacifist who wrote on mysticism and who illustrated the similarities between Western and Eastern mysticisms. In his memory, reflect on the universality of your own spiritual vision!

On **November 22**, the Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the anniversary of the installation in 2005 of Ilias Giannopoulos as **Patriarch Theophilus III of Jerusalem**. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 500,000 Greek Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **November 23**, the Church celebrates **St. Clement I, St. Columban**, and **Bl. Miguel Agustín Pro**. Clement I addressed division in the Church and urged Christians to live in love and union. Columban was a monk who urged the Church toward greater holiness. Miguel Agustín was a Jesuit priest murdered by the anticlerical, anti-Christian political regime in Mexico. Consider today your own commitment to unity, holiness and our faith!

On **November 23**, the Assyrian Church of the East celebrates the birth in 1941 of **Warda Daniel Sliwa**, who would become Catholicos-Patriarch Gewargis III. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the people he serves!

On **November 25**, the Church celebrates **St. Catherine of Alexandria**, a saint removed from the canon of saints—but later restored as a gesture of good will to Orthodox Christians. Consider today what gestures you're making—or could be making—to increase ecumenical relations!

On **November 25**, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa (recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) celebrates the birth in 1954 of **Nikolaos Horeftakis**, who would become Pope & Patriarch Theodore II of Alexandria. In a spirit of ecumenism, pray for him and for the 1.4 million Greek Orthodox Catholics he serves!

On **November 26**, we remember the passing in 1984 of **Bernard Joseph Francis Longeran**, the Canadian Jesuit philosopher and theologian regarded as one of the prominent Catholic thinkers of the 20th century. In his memory, spend a few minutes reacquainting yourself with his life and works!

On **the fourth Thursday of November**, U.S. society celebrates **Thanksgiving**: Find a way to involve your congregants not only in celebrating the abundance they enjoy, but of sharing with others. Encourage a canned food drive to assist those who will hunger during

the upcoming holiday season, or volunteer for a community Thanksgiving dinner! For the intellectually-curious, note how the turkey is traditionally a symbol of bounty, a rare treat for early settlers in the New World, and/or point to the nine “turkeys” in today’s gospel who lacked an “attitude of gratitude”!

And with that, we’ve come to the end of the Year of Matthew!

Please know of our prayers for you and your community as you seek to make each Sunday of this Year of Matthew extraordinary – for the sake of those to whom you minister!

And, if you have any feedback on how we can improve this text for use by you and your community, please write us at pastor@HolyFamilyACC.org and/or call us at (512) 826-0280. Happy Year of Matthew!

**Important Dates to Remember
& Celebrate in Our Community!**

December

January

February

March

April

May

**Important Dates to Remember
& Celebrate in Our Community!**

June

July

August

September

October

November

Our Plan for Making Each Celebration Extraordinary!

December 1 - First Sunday of Advent

December 8 - Second Sunday of Advent

December 15 - Third Sunday of Advent

December 22 - Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 24/25 - The Nativity of Our Lord

December 29 - The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary & Joseph

January 5 - The Epiphany of Our Lord

January 12 - The Baptism of Our Lord

Our Plan for Making Each Celebration Extraordinary!

January 19 - Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 26 - Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 2 - The Presentation of Our Lord

February 9 - Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 16 - Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 23 - Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 26 - Ash Wednesday

March 1 - First Sunday of Lent

Our Plan for Making Each Celebration Extraordinary!

March 8 - Second Sunday of Lent

March 15 - Third Sunday of Lent

March 22 - Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 29 - Fifth Sunday of Lent

April 5 - Palm Sunday

April 9 - Holy Thursday

April 10 - Good Friday

April 11 - The Easter Vigil

Our Plan for Making Each Celebration Extraordinary!

April 12 - The Resurrection of Our Lord

April 19 - Second Sunday of Easter

April 26 - Third Sunday of Easter

May 3 - Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 10 - Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 17 - Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 24 - The Ascension of Our Lord

May 31 - Pentecost

Our Plan for Making Each Celebration Extraordinary!

June 7 - The Most Holy Trinity

June 14 - The Body & Blood of Christ

June 21 - Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 28 - Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 5 - Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 12 - Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 19 - Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 26 - Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Our Plan for Making Each Celebration Extraordinary!

August 2 - Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 9 - Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 16 - Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 23 - Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 30 - Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 6 - Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 13 - Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 20 - Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Our Plan for Making Each Celebration Extraordinary!

September 27 - Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 4 - Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 11 - Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 18 - Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 25 - Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 1 - All Saints

November 8 - Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 15 - Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Our Plan for Making Each Celebration Extraordinary!

November 22 - Christ the King of the Universe

Other Notes on How We'll Make Our Celebrations Extraordinary...

**Final thoughts on
how we'll make each celebrations extraordinary
during this Year of Matthew...**

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