

NOTRE DAME PARISH

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The queen stands at your right hand, arrayed in gold.



What Latin or Western Christians celebrate as the Assumption of the BVM into heaven, Eastern Rite Christians celebrate as the Dormition or Falling Asleep of the BVM. In the icon above, the Risen Christ holds the soul of his mother as she

bodily enters into the fullness of Resurrection life.

Mary, as Mother of the Church, represents the fulfillment of every faithful Christian who will have a glorious, risen body, in the Kingdom of God.

MASS INTENTIONS

Saturday, August 14

11AM, Pat McDonald Funeral Mass

4PM, Tom, Florence, & young Tom Gately

Sunday, August 15, 9:30AM

Michael, Carla, & Robert Brandon

Thomas Doody

Monday, August 16 @ 8AM

Kazwara, Szostek, & Martonisi families

Tuesday, August 17 @ 8AM

Tom & Steve McDonald

Wednesday, August 18 @ 8AM

Tom Fitzgerald

Thursday, August 19 @ 8AM

Tom McDonald

Friday, August 20 @ 8AM

John Benish, Sr.

Saturday, August 21 @ 4PM

MASS IN THE GRASS

George Boeckling

Anniversary, Joanne & Tom McDonald

Let Us Pray

- For the eternal rest of parishioner, Patrick McDonald; for his grieving family
- For the schools of Michigan City: that children will be safe and protected from COVID and its variants
- For girls and women in Afghanistan as the Taliban overrules the country
- For healthcare workers
- For those threatened by flooding or drought
- For pregnant women
- For the dying
- For parishioners in retirement communities
- For the homeless and teens who live on the street

Have We (Catholics) Lost Our Sense of Humor?

We live in serious times. People are touchy about politics, climate, vaccinations, COVID protocols, education, worship, homilies... You name it. One can hardly speak of any topic within family or social circumstances without risking an argument (at the very least!). As a preacher, my attempts to connect the gospel of Jesus Christ to the issues of today meet more and more pushback

When I was growing up, Catholic rituals, practices, and traditions could be the subject of humor. Bishop Sheen's weekly TV program included his great wit and smile. J. F. Powers wrote a series of short stories that chided the clerical culture of his time without meanness. TV gave us "The Flying Nun," and

cinema gave us "The Trouble With Angels" about a Catholic girls academy.

Catholic periodicals and books amused me with their cartoons of Speck the Altar Boy and the Two Little Nuns.

In the 1970s, a delightful series produced in Ireland, "Bless Me Father" was driven off WTTW Chicago because it was deemed disrespectful to Catholics and priests. I own the series, and I cannot perceive anything but good humor in the program.

Also in the 1970s were John R. Powers bestsellers, "Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?" and a sequel, "The Unoriginal Sin and the Ice Cream God."

In the early 1980s I studied



journalism at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. I completed the curriculum, but I did not finish a dissertation. I had hoped to do a study of the relationship between religion and humor.

One thing I know. Although religion can be a sensitive subject, a sense of humor is essential to human maturity and holiness.

Father Keith & Rocco

Our Lady, Undoer of Knots



The moment I read that, my internal ears perked up, and it quickly became one of my own favorites. The first time I prayed it, it was as a novena for a difficult "knot" in a relationship. After my nine days of prayer, I was amazed and grateful for how easily the knot of miscommunication was resolved.

A Knotty Marriage

The portrayal of Our Lady as Undoer of Knots has only recently become well known, but its origin dates back more than four hundred years. Unlike devotions that are rooted in Marian apparitions such as Lourdes and Fatima, this one springs out of Mary's intercession in a troubled marriage. It happened in September 1615, when a German

Continued on page 5



Can You See Me Smile?

By Kevin Sheerin

There is an old Chinese proverb that says “a man without a smiling face must never open a shop.” This is pretty sound advice. If you can’t smile and be friendly, then it’s probably not worth your while opening a shop. Pretty logical really. It’s the golden rule of customer service after all. We can all appreciate the value of a smile. It costs nothing to give but enriches those who receive it and is of no earthly good to anyone until it is given away. It is also one of the most powerful means of communication we have at our disposal, and we need no college degree to master its art.

So why am I writing about smiling? Well, probably because this is the one thing I am beginning to miss most in this new Covid world in which we are now living. It seems that the common social smile has become one of the casualties in our determination to halt the transmission of the virus. It has become collateral damage as mask wearing has taken over as the socially accepted norm. We communicate so much through our facial

expressions, but now those vital expressions are hidden behind the masks we wear. As missionaries, one of the first challenges we encounter in arriving in a new country is to learn the language in order to make ourselves understood, which can be a long process. In the initial stages we rely mostly on the non-verbal communication that transcends all cultures – our facial expressions, particularly our smiles. It connects us to people. As the old saying goes, a smile speaks a thousand words and makes us feel at home, especially when that smile is returned to us.

When I arrived here in Hong Kong, although English is widely spoken, there are many who do not speak English or prefer not to, particularly among the homeless. As a person who smiles a lot, I found that although I could not connect to the local people by means of language, a shared smile made all the difference.

Continued next page

Continued from page 3

When you receive a smile, it does have a positive effect on you; it makes you feel good and brightens your day. We all know that when you are greeted with a scowl it causes negative reactions within you and leaves you feeling more irritable. That is why a simple smile is so important. You never know the impact it can have on a person and how it can change their day.

We are having to learn how to see the world through a mask, and it looks like it will be a regular aspect of our lives for the foreseeable future. When we first started to wear masks here one of my colleagues jokingly asked me, "Can you see me smile?" And to be honest, no, I couldn't, although beneath the mask I knew she was. We now have to rely on the expression behind the eyes, as it is the only part of the face that we now see, unless they too are hidden behind sunglasses. Some people have expressive eyes, others not so much.

When we don't see a person's face, then sometimes we don't see the person. Everyone becomes the same, indistinguishable from each other. We become like zombies. We pass each other in the street without even a glance. Why bother smiling if no one can see you smile? I've asked myself that question on numerous occasions when I realize that despite smiling underneath my mask, no one can see it.

There is a risk of becoming desensitized and robotic in our

daily interactions when we don't see each other's faces. The world is a sadder place when we can't smile, and God knows we need something to cheer us up, now more than ever.

Research confirms how vital facial expressions are in human interactions, more so than verbal communication. One experiment carried out between a mother and her baby showed how joyful and happy the baby was once the mother made faces and smiled. When the mother was asked to just look at the baby with no expression on her face, immediately the baby became uncomfortable and began to cry and squirm.

In the business world, when giving presentations, it is not so much what you say but how you say it, that is, via the non-verbal facial expressions the presenter uses. It can make or break a business deal.

It's ironic that toward the end of last year, here in Hong Kong when the city was rocked with protests, laws were put forward to stop people from wearing masks. Now, with the pandemic, the opposite has become the norm, and everyone is now required to wear masks. We know how important wearing a mask is to the prevention of disease. No one is disputing that, but let us not use our masks to disguise who we are and lose that which makes us human.

We hope that, in time, this

virus that arrived on the scene so unexpectedly will eventually lose its virulence, allow us to ditch the masks, and get to see people smile again. Like everyone else, I pray that the lockdowns and restrictions end, that people can get back to work again, and socialize as they did before, but most of all I pray that we can see people smile once more.

But even beneath the mask, let's not become like robots. Let's continue to smile even if no one sees. Smile, and the world smiles with you!

Columban lay missionary Kevin Sheerin lives and works in Hong Kong.

Continued from page 2

nobleman, Wolfgang Langenmantel, and his wife, Sophie, were experiencing serious marital problems. In a last-ditch effort to avoid divorce, Wolfgang sought counsel from Fr. Jakob Rem, a Jesuit priest who was known for his devotion to Mary. Fr. Rem encouraged Wolfgang to bring his marital issues to Our Lady.

The two men prayed together four times over a period of twenty-eight days, and at their last meeting, Wolfgang gave Fr. Rem his wedding ribbon. (As was customary at the time, the bride and groom were tied together with a ribbon during the marriage ceremony, a symbol of their new unity as a couple.) While they prayed, Fr. Rem held the ribbon up to a picture of Our Lady of the Snows, offering her “the ties of matrimony” and asking her “to untie all knots” in the Langenmantels’ relationship. Afterwards, as the priest smoothed the ribbon, it became snowy white.

Wolfgang took heart and returned home with new hope for his marriage. While the details are lost to history, it is known that he and Sophie did indeed reconcile.

The story of their saved marriage was passed down over time—first to their son, and then to their grandson, Hieronymus Langenmantel, who became a priest. Around 1700, Fr. Langenmantel commissioned a painting of his grandparents’ story. The artist came up with an image that depicts Our Lady working to untie knots in Sophie and Wolfgang’s marriage sash—symbols of the problems that had led them to the brink of divorce. One angel presents the knotted ribbon to Mary, and another receives the smoothed ribbon from her hands.

Faith Unties the Knot.

While the illustration that normally accompanies the devotion shows Mary untying the knots in the Langenmantels’ white wedding sash, I prefer to think in terms of a necklace chain. If you’ve ever owned a necklace made of fine chain links, you know how easily it can knot and tangle. And you know how incredibly difficult it can be to try to pick apart those tangles. I had one such chain, which

became snarled from my habit of tossing it carelessly into the drawer. The knots were so impossible to undo that I finally gave up and discarded the chain.

This is the image that sticks in my mind when I think about Mary Undoer of Knots. Sometimes the knots and tangles in our lives become so ensnarled that we begin to think it’s hopeless even to try undoing them.

The idea that we can bring these problems to Mary, asking her to carefully pick them apart and make the “chain” of our lives fit to wear again, is one of the most comforting aspects of this devotion. For me, at least, it brings up the image of Mary patiently and tirelessly tweezing apart the knots until, at last, the chain lies smooth and clear.

Pope Francis has talked about this devotion and how Mary’s faith “unties the knot of sin.” This idea alludes to Mary’s role in salvation history. St. Irenaeus, writing in the second century, put it this way: “The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by the obedience of Mary. What the virgin Eve bound by her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith.”

We, too, can be bound by our own disobedience, Pope Francis explained. When we do not follow God’s will for our lives, “a kind of knot is created deep within us.” These knots take away our peace and serenity. They are dangerous, since many knots can form a tangle which gets more and more painful and difficult to undo.

But we know one thing: nothing is impossible for God’s mercy! Even the most tangled knots are loosened by his grace. And Mary, whose yes opened the door for God to undo the knot of the ancient disobedience, is the Mother who patiently and lovingly brings us to God, so that he can untangle the knots of our soul by his fatherly mercy.

The Knot in My Life

What are these “knots of our soul”? Knots of financial stress, wayward children, addiction, illness, depression, divorce, infertility, unemployment. . . . Most of us are dealing with at least one large knot. Not all of them are the result of our own sin. Some are simply the painful situations

that come from living in a fallen world. Whatever their cause, the knots can become so entangled that we fall into a sort of despair that they will ever be undone. I know I have. One aspect of my life – my finances – became so knotted that I had just about given up on trying to untangle it.

The knot began when I left my job to take care of my mother in her last year of life – a year that extended to five. The situation became complicated by the theft of her investments in a Ponzi scheme that wasn't revealed until the week of her funeral. It cascaded when I developed some health problems. Countless nights since then have been eroded by panic and worry.

The whole knotty mess was so overwhelming that I didn't even think about turning to Our Lady Undoer of Knots. However, as I began to write this article, I felt a gentle nudge: *Perhaps it's time to hand this area over to Mary's care.* I've done that – and would like to report that the knot has been completely untied. Although that hasn't happened, I remind myself that Mary may be untying the knots, that God has promised us “daily bread,” and I have indeed received some. As I wait, I take comfort in Pope Francis' words:

“All the knots of our hearts, every knot of our conscience, can be undone. Do I ask Mary to help me trust in God's mercy, to undo those knots, to change? She, as a woman of faith, will

surely tell you: “Get up; go to the Lord: he understands you.” And she leads us by the hand as a Mother, our Mother, to the embrace of our Father, the Father of mercies

Nothing Will Be Impossible

What knot in your life is creating pain for you? Turn over your problem to Mary. As she works on the knot, she will point you to Jesus. He tells us in no uncertain terms never to limit what God can do: “Amen, I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20).

Woodeene Koenig-Bricker is the author of several books, including Facing Adversity with Grace .
