



Pepe and Mary (right foreground without masks; Fr Tim behind them; Edgar and Zulema on the left) have been foundational members of Se-guidores de la Cruz since we arrived in Reynosa, Mexico. Only one of their eleven children, Esteban, still lives with them at home. They celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary at the end of February with many friends in Christ and family members.

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knowledge, which is personal, but not private. Rather faith is very communal in our knowledge of God. We rely on others for many things which we know.

We live in a society which flattens out the world we live in so as to negate mystery, condemning us to a two-dimensional way of living. Consider how different it is to celebrate Thanksgiving— which has reference to who is receiving thanks and what for— than it is to celebrate Turkey Day, which has reference merely to special food (in exaggerated quantities). If the weekend is punctuated by Black Friday, that further prepares for a Christmas holiday culminating in economic profits while erasing any mention of the mystery of the Incarnation. This is just one example of a culture

which is barreling headlong into redefining history with its spiritual influences and references: additionally, the human person as a creature with innate dignity, and a body/soul composition with one of two specific genders; and the revelation of the mysteries of fatherhood, motherhood, marriage and family. All of these redefinitions are intentionally blind and aim to rid the culture of reference to mystery and the daily revelations of God which give meaning to our lives.

The mother who is teaching her child the Our Father is acting on the chrismal anointing she received at Baptism to share in Jesus' mission as priest, prophet and king. She is also acting in the grace of her Sacrament of Matrimony which in-



GLORIOUSLY REVEALING THE WORKS OF GOD — EUFEMIO & CAROLINA

It is good to guard the secret of a king, but gloriously to reveal the works of God. (Tob 12:7)

Eufemio: My mother was visiting our family for a few days, and we stopped to buy some flour tortillas, a rare treat the kids would enjoy replacing the usual corn tor-

tillas. Leaving my mom and Carolina, my wife, in the car I dashed in to get a few half-kilos. Three ladies were collaborating in different stages of the production, as they talked with considerable animation,

Most parishes will have at least one live enactment of the Way of the Cross on Good Friday. Hopefully, the COVID precautions will allow us again this year (more on p. 7).

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In this Issue

The theme of *mystery* runs through this Spring 2022 *Semilla*.

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their hands moved on auto-pilot kneading or rolling out or flipping the tortillas on the grill. Two were captivated by the speaker who was waxing eloquent on her view of the utter emptiness of the tradition of getting married in the Church. She insisted that a piece of paper cannot—will not—alter her love; especially won't change any less-than-loving circumstances with her man. She spontaneously handed the subject off to me as I approached, inviting me to affirm her stance on the matter. "I'm sure you'll agree?"

I assured her I knew just what she meant. I thought exactly the same way right up until I got married in the Church. Now I have seen so many changes in myself, in our unity as husband and wife, and uni-

ty in our family, that I have to think differently.

It doesn't depend on a piece of paper. I hardly ever refer to the marriage certificate. But I often look at this, I said, holding up the back of my hand so they could see my wedding band. I have been faithful for fifteen years. Thanks be to God! But I know that faithfulness doesn't come from me and my resources. It is not because of my great strength. I tried and tried to curb my drinking as I watched it damaging my relationship with Caro and

my children. I would resolve not to drink for just one week. When the weekend came, I would give in and wake up miserable and remorseful on Monday morning. The last time I got loaded was on our wedding night. After that I have not been intoxicated, even though I drink a beer now and again with brothers or friends. The Lord Jesus has changed me. He came into my life in that way when we decided to allow him into our marriage. I can tell you that Jesus is present in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

How did God lead me to Matrimony? Principally through my wife, Carolina. She was patient, forgiving, believing in me... and yet always calling me to more. Another woman would have given up or sent me packing.

was also confirmed by credible others. Had she given me a different explanation, she could be said to be a 'false prophet'. A prophet, in the Scriptural sense, is someone who knows by divine revelation, something of God's will that is to be announced or performed to make it known to His people. It may or may not be a prediction of the future.

In our life of faith, there are four points that define a mystery. Firstly, a mystery is revealed by God. A second point is that we need faith in order to receive, to accept, the mysteries revealed by God. Faith, is a gift of God's initiative. Faith is a way of knowing God. A third aspect of a mystery, we can always understand more and more deeply a mystery. Notice that the common, misleading definition, 'something that cannot be understood', is almost the opposite of this point. True, we can never fully understand a mystery. But it is always available to be discovered in more of its fullness. Hopefully, those who have lived the mystery of Matrimony in the Sacrament for thirty years, understand much more deeply and clearly than the day of their wedding.

A fourth aspect of mystery comes from St. John Henry Newman's writings on achieving "certainty" in the Christian faith. It boils down to experiencing the Lord's intervention in my life, and then by in-

ference, allowing that experience to reinforce the faith that is growing in my heart and conscience. The mother teaching her son the Our Father is giving him an early thread for knowing God. One such instance, or even several, of what appear to be an experience of God's revelation or of his action in my life, is not sufficient for me to be certain

of His interaction with me. But each experience can be thought of as a thin wire, which when coiled together with many other experiences makes for a strong, reliable, unbreakable cable. This cable is stronger than what Newman describes as the iron rod of a scientific proof, which is not available for the kind of knowledge that comes from our interpersonal relationships. Faith, as a way of knowing God, is not merely knowing things about Him, which are indeed important. We call that kind of information about God and living His life, catechesis. Knowing God implies a relationship of love.

Science cannot measure nor explain love and loyalty in human relationships. Heroism and hope, sacrificing oneself, even giving up one's life for the sake of another, can't be examined by scientific method. Such knowledge is not opposed to science but embodies a different and a more sublime way of knowing. Newman says faith is

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in the family to mail any package. When Maggie learned that the gift was socks, she was completely taken aback. Her reaction— to sit down to catch her breath and then call for her husband Giorgio to come at once to hear the news. Giorgio too was awed and similarly called for Batista, an intimate family friend always present at Christmas and Easter. I took in these reactions with rapt incomprehension. Batista too, responded with deep wonder. Obviously, I needed an explanation of why this gift was so profoundly newsworthy.

Maggie finally explained the meaning of the gesture. A mother sent socks to her son (or sons) during the (Second World) War, to protect them from freezing. The Italian soldiers were sent to the Russian front which proved to be Hitler's debacle. During the unending, fro-

zen, stand-still, Mussolini pulled out of the Axis alliance with the Nazis, making the Italian soldiers targets of the Russians, the Germans and the Partisans as they tried to retreat. The casualty rate was about 85% for the Italians who died in combat or from the elements. The meaning of the gift was that Nonna considered me a son. What an honor! And one not bestowed lightly by Nonna. What if I had failed to mention the gift? I never would have realized her message of love.

The incident is an occurrence of a hidden, natural meaning assigned by a human culture. I needed someone to mediate to me the meaning of the gift I received from Nonna. Maggie was able to act as a natural 'prophet', one who could unlock the true hidden meaning for the people involved. She knew the meaning and conveyed it in such a way that

A beautiful memorial service was celebrated in November for the fourth anniversary of Dick Herman's death. Dick, with his wife Maureen who still lives and serves in Mexico in the mission, are the founders of Servants of the Cross. Several gave stirring testimonies of the influence and love which Dick brought to their vocations. Culminating the celebration, Ricardo and Gilda, with their four children, place everyone's flowers on the shrine.



All of the women listening were totally riveted. They had put down their dough and their rollers, their hands idle. I was telling them of the riches we found, and we are living in the Sacrament. Sometimes you can tell when the Lord has set you up and wants you to plant some seeds. Even the woman who had been so negatively insistent was taking in everything.

I explained that we had lived together and had children for several years before getting married. Marriage had seemed to me no more than a piece of paper until we received— accepted— the Sacrament of Matrimony. Afterwards, what I thought and believed was so different than what I thought before. My wife and I allowed Jesus into our relationship and now we are three persons instead of just my wife and me. If I am messing things up, there is someone I can go to and get it right. There is someone protecting me and helping me in my marriage and family. I can ask forgiveness and be pardoned and then I'll have the humility to ask my wife's forgiveness. I can ask my kids' forgiveness when it is appropriate. That was out of my worldview and absent from my repertoire

Eufemio and Carolina with their children (daughters I-r, Fátima and Valeria; sons I-r, Jesús and Luis Fernando). This photo was captured in 2016. A more updated shot can be seen on p. 5, but some are wearing masks.

before I was married. But the Lord gave me the courage, the openness, the humility. We learned the value of pardon: asking, receiving and granting pardon to others. I see now what I never imagined before, a great richness in being married in the Church. We have our differences and arguments, but they get resolved instead of just fading away leaving doubts, insecurity and resentments.

The Lord has His way to unite us and lead us where he knows we can see the fruits of our sacrifices and battles. Before I had my ideas, she had her own plans, and we had no idea where we were going. Now

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Mission Needs

MUCHAS GRACIAS

Despite the economic pressures and shortages during the COVID pandemic, donors and patrons have been very generous with us in the mission. Every gift shows us tangibly the love of Christ, humbles us and calls us to continue giving all to the Lord.

Servants of the Cross
P O Box 3054
McAllen, TX
78502-3054

phone: 956 683 6309
<mexsoc@gmail.com>

Training

- Cabinet heaters will make it possible for Single Men and Women on retreat or living at *El Rancho Nazaret* to have heat. Each unit runs \$150.

The School

- 4 white boards are needed (\$35 ea.) as soon as we resume classes on location, hopefully in April.
- Two ZOOM accounts are needed (\$160 ea.) regardless of whether we continue meeting virtually or on location at *El Rancho Nazaret*.

To donate online go to our website:
<<socmission.org>>.

donations are tax exempt

Grounds & Maintenance

- Housing to shelter a generator from rain and dust needs to be built for \$135.
- An essential and urgent drainage project around our main meeting hall will cost us \$800. Can you help out?

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we are both looking to Jesus who— I could never have imagined— is a Good Shepherd. When you know God’s plan for Matrimony it is so different. He has a plan in general which gives a new confidence; but even more specifically his plan for me and Caro is amazing.

When I got in the car, I told my wife that I was pretty sure the Lord let them hear what He wanted them to hear, because that first gal was filling them full of what they don’t need. But when they heard my testimony, they heard a positive word with true examples of how we have lived and

her heart as well as her home. My relationship with Nonna began with a little friction, because I deferred to Giorgio in terms of my work schedule; after all, I was working for him on a construction project to cover room and board. In a mostly friendly rivalry with her son, Giorgio, Nonna was trying to carve out her own time to assign chores to me that benefitted her pet projects. After settling into a routine with clarity on my priorities, I was able to be handy in her garden and especially cleaning in higher places in her house. More than a foot taller and enjoying a longer “wing-span”, I was built for dusting off shelves and light fixtures that she, at her advanced age, could no longer negotiate even with a ladder. We got along famously and had moments of friendship and what Saint John Paul II called communion of persons.

To give one small example, Nonna prayed each night with a picture of the Sacred Heart and Pope John XXIII. I asked why her devotion was not to Paul VI, who was born and lived in Brescia. She stopped and paused in reflection, then explained with affection and heartfelt devotion that John XXIII grew up a poor farmer, that his family was simple and had to scratch away at a living, “just as we have done all of our life”. And it is also true that Bergamo, John XXIII’s hometown,

Our Liturgy and our Scriptures usually translate the Greek word *logos* as *word*. Other alternative translations could be *meaning, order or wisdom*. Try plugging these alternatives into this familiar excerpt of John’s prologue.

In the beginning was the *Word*, and the *Word* was with God, and the *Word* was God.

² He was in the beginning with God;

³ all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. ...

... ¹⁴ And the *Word* became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

(Jn 1:1-4a; 14)

is only a stone’s throw from Brescia.

An event which occurred in my friendship with Nonna can illustrate for us the concept of mystery. A package arrived for me at Christmas time of my last year in Rome. It was from Nonna with a very simple note of Christmas greeting. She had sent me three pairs of socks. Soon after, in that same winter, as I was again studying in Rome, Nonna passed away in her sleep. When I arrived in Brescia for Easter, it was quite strange for everyone to think of celebrating the feast without Nonna. I mentioned to Maggie, in a quiet moment, that Nonna had sent me a Christmas gift. She was surprised because she didn’t remember any package being sent, and Nonna had to rely on someone

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SECRETS, SACRAMENTS AND MYSTERIES

– by Fr. Tim

[As to] the charism of infallibility, bestowed by Christ on His Church: the pope, under certain carefully designed conditions may personally exercise this power, but so also, in her degree, does any mother who teaches her child the Our Father.¹

This snippet of a mother teaching her child the faith shows one aspect of passing on the sure knowledge of God's purposes in a quite natural occurrence. She enjoys perfect certitude of communicating the mystery of God's word and his love. The son or daughter is learning to know God as Father.

When the Scriptures speak of mystery (secrets or hidden things), they refer to the hidden meaning which God has breathed into all aspects of our human lives. It can be difficult to recognize the ways in which daily God is communicating his love and living presence to

us, or his transcendence. But it is a sure truth. Let us see if an analogy can clarify what Paul says is an omnipresent occurrence for everyone to realize (see Rom 1:19-21).

For four years I lived in Italy while studying theology in Rome. One of my richest experiences was far north of Rome, living with a family during summers and holiday vacations in the city of Brescia, an hour east of Milan. Giorgio and Maggie, whom I had known when they lived in Ohio, had since moved to Giorgio's city of birth. They included me in their rich family life and in the Focolare Movement to which they belong in the capacity of lay leaders. As their apartment was small, I actually slept in a back room of Giorgio's mother's house, further down the block. Affectionately known as Nonna (Grandma)— not only by her grandchildren but by all the friends of the family and even her daughter-in-law, Maggie— she opened to me



Last year our Good Friday observance was limited to the single women living at El Rancho Nazaret, due to COVID restrictions.

Notes

1. David M. Stanley, S.J. "I Encountered God!": *the Spiritual Exercises with the Gospel of Saint John*, The Institute of Jesuit Sources (St. Louis 1986), 289.

learned from the Lord in the Sacrament of Marriage. I have never seen them since, but you could just tell the Lord was touching hearts and changing opinions. The Lord knows when and what and how people need to hear his word.

Caro: I was talking to a neighbor recently who was complaining, but also secretly fearful, about her marriage and trying to convince herself that it was no big deal, even if they went separate ways. They were drifting farther apart and pulling back from one another. They had a spat some days before and she announced that she would no longer be making his lunch. If his attitude was "everyone for their own ways and that'll be fine; then fine and dandy, he can just make his own lunch as well." (Note: in this culture, a woman refusing to serve the main, mid-day meal is a drastic ultimatum.)

She commented on Eufemio and I having four children and wondered how that was working. Since she gave me an opening, I said that people can change. I know that people can change if they let the Lord Jesus take the steering wheel in their life. I told her that I always believed that my husband could change and that I just assume— I have only ever thought— that marriage is permanent. The idea of separating or divorcing, whether it was slowly or quickly, would never be an agreeable outcome to me.



Back row, clockwise: Eufemio, Luis Fernando, Padre Tim, Carolina, Valeria and Fatima. Jesús is not in the picture as he was designated to be the photographer.

I returned to the thought that people can change. I saw my husband's heart soften as he was discovering the love of Jesus Christ. He was changing in front of my eyes and explaining to me as it unfolded for some days or weeks. Then he asked me to forgive him for several things which we had never even spoken about. They were too frightening to risk bringing into the open. I was so amazed that I also opened up to this person, Jesus. I've always been Catholic and always believed, but Jesus I had never known or experienced. I know that people can change, because he changed me far beyond any way I could ever change myself. I'll follow up with my neighbor; she was taking it all in.

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Eufemio: My father-in-law complains that he used to visit, and I would tell him the refrigerator is open to you and help yourself. He knew I was offering as much brew as he wanted. Now he says there is no beer when he visits. He chuckles and blames himself, because he is the one who invited us to *El Rancho Nazaret*.

Caro: We continue to discover more about God's plan for marriage and we are convinced that people, especially our own children, need to hear it. So, we'll keep being surprised as the Lord leads us, and continue telling others what the Lord shows us.



THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY HAVE PIERCED

Every year the Via Crucis is enacted after much rehearsal and re-reading of the passion narratives. The procession begins around 9:00 am and terminates typically at noon or 12:30. Traffic is stopped on back streets; dogs bark from every corner, especially if any of the soldiers ride on horses; chickens scurry underfoot squawking and bustling. One hundred people begin the ambitious course which traverses the Stations of the Cross sometimes adding up to 3 or 4 miles. Onlookers and curious neighbors join in so that perhaps 350 to 500 people gather in prayer and a phone fest of photography for the last five stations after arriving at the Calvary location. But every year the mystery shines through as the Cross of Jesus is lifted up: scandalous, horrific, glorious— sending a wave of silence over young and old. For many years I have not followed along, but rather lingered at the departure site hearing many confessions. And then driving to the Calvary site listening for hours more after the crowds have departed; often hearing confessions of persons who have been many years absent from the Sacrament.

- Fr Tim

