



SPRING 2020

# REFLECTIONS

...recognizing our gifts of time, talent and treasure



"To the threshold  
of the Apostles"  
*ad limina visit*

by Very Rev. James Misko, Vicar General

"Ad limina apostolorum" means "to the threshold of the Apostles." When bishops from across the world travel to Rome for their ad limina with the Holy Father, they begin in prayer at the "threshold of the apostles" — the tombs of Sts. Peter and Paul.

As vicar general, I accompanied Bishop Vásquez for his recent ad limina visit. The ad limina takes place every five years, affording our bishops the chance to meet with Pope Francis and update him on their respective dioceses. Last May, we compiled the Quinquennial Report, a 150-page snapshot of the statistical and ministerial state of the Diocese of Austin

and sent it to the Vatican so that Bishop Vásquez' deliberations with the Holy Father and the other departments of the Vatican would bear much fruit.

The day of our audience with the Holy Father began in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica. Our delegation gathered in a chapel only five meters from the bones of St. Peter. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, archbishop of Galveston-Houston, presided at Mass with the other bishops and priests concelebrating, and one of our Austin seminarians, Deacon Chris Smith, serving as deacon.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >>>



## Upcoming DIOCESAN EVENTS

APRIL 12  
**Easter**

MAY 21  
**Assembly of  
Catholic Professionals**  
Austin

MAY 26-28  
**Priest Summer Gathering**

MAY 30  
**Transitional  
Diaconate Ordination**  
St. Margaret Mary Parish, Cedar Park

For event information, visit [www.austindiocese.org](http://www.austindiocese.org)



After Mass, we made our way to the meeting with the Holy Father. While I wasn't present for the private meeting the bishops had with the Holy Father, Bishop Vásquez introduced me to the Holy Father beforehand. Pope Francis looked me right in the eye as he shook my hand and thanked me for coming. Even though our interaction lasted only a few seconds, it was a moment of profound joy personally for me as a priest. I could see that he truly saw and acknowledged me as someone important to the visit. I watched Pope Francis greet the others in our delegation and, most impressively, he did the very same for each bishop, priest, deacon and seminarian.

Pope Francis then gathered together our group of priests and seminarians for a few minutes, reminding us to have a good sense humor. "Be joyful, and don't take yourselves so seriously," he said in Spanish, encouraging us to be joyful in our ministry.

We then went on our way and the bishops remained with the Holy Father for nearly 2.5 hours. While Bishop Vásquez and the other bishops in our delegation were not free to share specific details from their meeting, they were able to describe the experience, however. Bishop Vásquez said it was remarkably conversational, mentioning that Pope Francis is an "extraordinary" man. He sat amongst the bishops and said that he was prepared to talk about anything they would like to discuss.

Throughout the week, Bishop Vásquez and the other bishops attended meetings at the different departments of the Vatican, once each morning and once each afternoon. We joined them each day for Mass at the other three major basilicas: St. Paul outside the walls, St. Mary Major and St. John Lateran.

The ad limina visit was not just a mere formality, but rather, a true dialogue between the Holy Father and his team of officials in Rome and our bishops here in Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. The leadership of the Universal Church is thoroughly informed and very interested in our little corner of Christendom. Likewise, this experience brought the Diocese of Austin closer to Rome, binding us together in a oneness that is truly Catholic.

## REFLECTIONS

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THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF AUSTIN



## PARISHES COMPLETE PROJECTS WITH CAMPAIGN FUNDS

# ENCOUNTERING CHRIST

With more than 20,000 generous donors to *Encountering Christ* now fulfilling their pledges, many parishes across the Diocese of Austin are working on the projects they identified for their campaigns.

*Encountering Christ* was well-timed for St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, which already planned a major overhaul of the HVAC system on its College Station campus.

The parish is directing a significant portion of its share of campaign funds — \$626,000 — toward the project, which will cost an estimated \$2.9 million. If not for *Encountering Christ* gifts, “we would have been drawing against a line of credit with the diocese,” said Leanne Lewis Tirado, the parish business administrator.

A months-long engineering study completed prior to the parish campaign recommended installing a single chiller boiler plant for the entire campus, then updating or replacing systems in the church, chapel, administration building and parish activity hall. While this required opening ceilings, walls and floors, it did allow the parish to install cable for security system updates also identified for the campaign, Leanne said.

The new system will be more energy efficient and reduce monthly costs, as well as eliminate the steady stream of bills for maintenance and repairs the parish incurred to keep the old systems up and running. Having the chiller boiler plant will allow for future growth, as any new buildings can be easily connected to it. “All we would have to do is run the chilled water and hot water lines from the plant to those buildings and then install air handling units and the duct work there,” she said.

Even with the hefty price tag, St. Thomas Aquinas parishioners embraced the project because they knew it would make their worship experience more comfortable.

“We had a lot of heating and air conditioning issues in the church, with people being too cold or too hot, and complaints from all over campus about not having the optimum temperature,” Leanne said. “So definitely, from a comfortability aspect, people were on board with it.”

Parishes receive their share of *Encountering Christ* funds as parishioners fulfill

their pledges. More than \$30 million in gifts and pledge payments have already been collected.

“As every dollar comes in as a gift or a payment of a pledge, it is split 30-70 between the diocese and the parish it was pledged to, with the parish share placed in a special account for each parish,” said Scott Whitaker, director of stewardship and development.

St. Louis Parish in Waco chose to first tackle a capital improvement especially meaningful for parishioners because of the recent merging of St. Louis and Reicher schools. The schools’ two parking lots, which had been connected by a driveway, were combined to visually connect the now one school serving students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

“The community was really delighted, because we could show that the schools are now united,” said Father Ryan Higdon, pastor. “It was fresh for the new school year, and the school community felt cared for.”

The project included fixing cracks before resealing and repaving the surface and creating one large parking lot.

In 2020, the parish will address other projects it identified for the campaign, including restoring the water-damaged ceiling in the church, upgrading the sound system and creating an additional drive-through and parking spaces around the John Paul II building.

Father Higdon remains grateful for his parishioners’ generosity to *Encountering Christ*. “The campaign was a beautiful opportunity to really listen to and receive from the people of God — and to encounter them,” he said. “Not just for them to encounter Christ, but for me to encounter Christ in them.”

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# Lent

## JOURNEY TO THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

by Bishop David L. Ricken of Gren Bay, Wisconsin  
Former Chairman of the committee on  
Evangelization and Catechesis, USCCB

1. **Remember the formula.** The Church does a good job capturing certain truths with easy-to-remember lists and formulas: 10 Commandments, 7 sacraments, 3 persons in the Trinity. For Lent, the Church gives us almost a slogan—Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving—as the three things we need to work on during the season.
2. **It's a time of prayer.** Lent is essentially an act of prayer spread out over 40 days. As we pray, we go on a journey, one that hopefully brings us closer to Christ and leaves us changed by the encounter with him.
3. **It's a time to fast.** With the fasts of Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, meatless Fridays, and our personal disciplines interspersed, Lent is the only time many Catholics these days actually fast. And maybe that's why it gets all the attention. "What are you giving up for Lent? Hotdogs? Beer? Jelly beans?" It's almost a game for some of us, but fasting is actually a form of penance, which helps us turn away from sin and toward Christ.
4. **It's a time to work on discipline.** The 40 days of Lent are also a good, set time to work on personal discipline in general. Instead of giving something up, it can be doing something positive. "I'm going to exercise more. I'm going to pray more. I'm going to be nicer to my family, friends and coworkers."
5. **It's about dying to yourself.** The more serious side of Lenten discipline is that it's about more than self-control – it's about finding aspects of yourself that are less than Christ-like and letting them die. The suffering and death of Christ are foremost on our minds during Lent, and we join in these mysteries by suffering, dying with Christ and being resurrected in a purified form.
6. **Don't do too much.** It's tempting to make Lent some ambitious period of personal reinvention, but it's best to keep it simple and focused. There's a reason the Church works on these mysteries year after year. We spend our entire lives growing closer to God. Don't try to cram it all in one Lent. That's a recipe for failure.
7. **Lent reminds us of our weakness.** Of course, even when we set simple goals for ourselves during Lent, we still have trouble keeping them. When we fast, we realize we're all just one meal away from hunger. In both cases, Lent shows us our weakness. This can be painful, but recognizing how helpless we are makes us seek God's help with renewed urgency and sincerity.
8. **Be patient with yourself.** When we're confronted with our own weakness during Lent, the temptation is to get angry and frustrated. "What a bad person I am!" But that's the wrong lesson. God is calling us to be patient and to see ourselves as he does, with unconditional love.
9. **Reach out in charity.** As we experience weakness and suffering during Lent, we should be renewed in our compassion for those who are hungry, suffering or otherwise in need. The third part of the Lenten formula is almsgiving. It's about more than throwing a few extra dollars in the collection plate; it's about reaching out to others and helping them without question as a way of sharing the experience of God's unconditional love.
10. **Learn to love like Christ.** Giving of ourselves in the midst of our suffering and self-denial brings us closer to loving like Christ, who suffered and poured himself out unconditionally on cross for all of us. Lent is a journey through the desert to the foot of the cross on Good Friday, as we seek him out, ask his help, join in his suffering, and learn to love like him.

For additional Lenten resources go to: [austindiocese.org/lenten-resources](http://austindiocese.org/lenten-resources)



## THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING #iGIVECATHOLIC

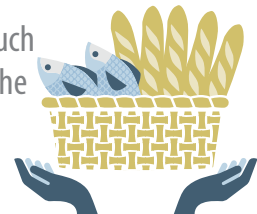
# #iGIVECATHOLIC

#GIVINGTUESDAY

DECEMBER 1, 2020

On **#GIVING TUESDAY**, donors generously gave and showed the world that little is much when God is in it. Together, we supported parishes, schools, and nonprofit ministries in the Diocese. 2019 outcomes and results:

**\$53,368 Raised | 337 Donors | 27 ministries**



### LEADERBOARD

#### St. Mary's Catholic School, West

St. Mary's is ecstatic to be able to move forward with Phase 1 to replace a window unit in the third grade classroom with a mini-split unit and add solar screens to the single-pane windows in this classroom.

#### St. Mary's Cathedral Catholic School, Austin

The Chromebooks arrived and are being put to good use. Thank you to the many supporters that prayed and contributed to the campaign. We were able to purchase 20 new Chromebooks!

#### University of Mary-Hardin Baylor Cru Catholics, Belton

Because of the generosity, these faithful, young women were able to cover all costs (except airfare) and went to the FOCUS Student Leadership Summit to learn how to be missionary disciples on campus. We are so very grateful to our benefactors for making this conference possible!

#### Eagle's Wings Retreat Center, Burnet

Thank you to our "fundraising champions" who gave generously. Funds raised were used to help offset some of the costs of our *Godstock* retreat. We are so very grateful for the support!

#### Marion Shrine of Our Lady of Schoenstatt, Austin

Proceeds from **#iGIVECATHOLIC** go to fund the 10th anniversary of the Good Friday Pilgrimage.

#### St. Thomas More Catholic Parish, Austin

Funds generously donated through **#iGIVECATHOLIC** were for a very specific cause - to replace the aging air conditioning units in the religious education building. Your generosity helped offset the high cost of replacing these units.

For more information and to see participants go to: [austin.igivecatholic.org](http://austin.igivecatholic.org)





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## Celebrating Saints



# PETER CHANEL

(1803-1841), PRIEST AND MARTYR, OPTIONAL MEMORIAL — APRIL 28

Born in France, St. Peter Chanel served as a parish priest for several years before joining the Society of Mary ("Marists") and being sent to Polynesia as a missionary. In 1837, he was assigned to the island of Futuna, near Tahiti. While they were learning the native language, St. Peter strove to preach the Gospel with his life, saying to his companion, "In such a difficult mission one has to be holy." Hard-working and mild-mannered, the people of the island called him "the good-hearted man," and at first he claimed few converts. Then the son of the local chief asked to be baptized. Fearing the erosion of his power over the people and enraged by his son's baptism, the chieftain ordered his warriors to kill the saint. But Oceania's first Christian martyr served only to strengthen the faith, and within two years almost the whole island had converted. Lord, help us to offer our gifts, even when we see little result, understanding as St. Peter Chanel did that "neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything," it is you who brings about the growth.

*Adapted from Sharon Hueckel, **Steward Saints for Every Day**, Copyright © 1999, the National Catholic Stewardship Council, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved.*

