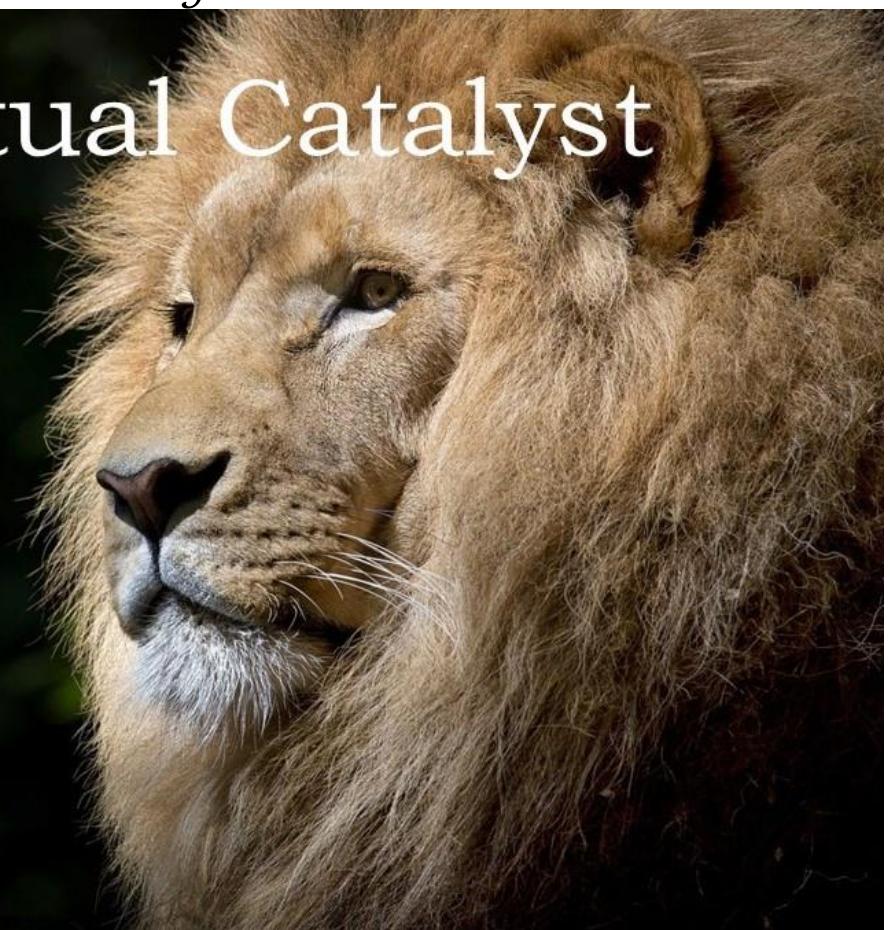


January 2021

Spiritual Catalyst

“The truth is like a lion. You do not have to defend it. Let it loose. It will defend itself.” – St. Augustine



Welcome to the January 2021 edition of the Spiritual Catalyst. I hope and pray that this year will be a year of great joy for everyone. For more reflections and information please check out www.mayjesuschristbepraised.com.

Thank you and God bless
Fr. Tom Pastorius

BREAKING OPEN THE WORD



All the troubles of the Church, all the evils in the world, flow from this source: that men do not by clear and sound knowledge and serious consideration penetrate into the truths of Sacred Scripture.

- Teresa of Avila

January 3, 2021
The Epiphany of the Lord
Lectionary: 20

Gospel Mt 2:1-12

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, He inquired of them where the

Christ was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: *And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.*" Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage." After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded

them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

Spiritual Reflection: St. Peter Chrysologus wrote: "Today the Magi gaze in deep wonder at what they see: heaven on earth, earth in heaven, man in God, God in man, one whom the whole universe cannot contain now enclosed in a tiny body. As they look, they believe and do not question, as their symbolic gifts bear witness: incense for God, gold for a king, myrrh for one who is to die."

Spiritual Questions:

1. What gift would bring to the baby Jesus? And why?
2. What does it say about God's love for us that He became man?
3. How does God becoming man differ from what man thinks it means to become divine?
4. How would encountering Jesus in the manger change your life?
5. How does encountering Jesus in the Eucharist change your life?

January 10, 2021

The Baptism of the Lord

Lectionary: 21

Gospel Mk 1:7-11

This is what John the Baptist proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Spiritual Reflection: Sometimes it is good to see how one part of the Gospel story connects with another part. Archbihsop Fulton Sheen connects the character of John the Baptist with the Last Supper in an unusual way. He writes: "John considered himself unworthy to untie the shoes of Our Lord, but Our Lord would

surpass him in humility as He would wash the feet of the Apostles."

Spiritual Questions:

1. What does the above quote say about Jesus' humility?
2. What does it say about our role in Salvation history?
3. What does it say about God's love for us?
4. Why do you think John was so humble?
5. How did John's humility help aid his mission in life?

January 17, 2021

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 65

Gospel Jn 1:35-42

John was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" — which translated means Teacher —, "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they went and saw where Jesus was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah" — which is translated Christ —. Then he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas" — which is translated Peter.

Spiritual Reflection: We see Jesus change the tables on his potential disciples today. They went to explore the idea of choosing Jesus to be their rabbi and He instead calls them to be His disciples. Theresa of Avila wrote: "He does not ask our worthiness; He asks our openness. I desire my life to be a source of hope for others, a sign that God wills to work out His unique designs in each one of us."

Spiritual Questions.

1. What are you looking for in a God to worship?
2. Does Jesus meet these qualities?
3. How does the knowledge that Jesus chose you before you chose Him affect your relationship w/Him?

4. What role do you believe God is calling you to play in the Church?
5. What role do you think God will call you to play in the future?

January 24, 2021
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Lectionary: 68

Gospel [Mk 1:14-20](#)

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then they abandoned their nets and followed him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.

Spiritual Reflection: Cardinal Henry Newman wrote the following to help us understand what it means to be called by God: "*God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission; I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I have a part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling.*"

Spiritual Question

1. How does knowing that you have a mission in life effect you?
2. How does it feel to be a part of link in God's plan?
3. Do you want to do God's work? Why or why not?
4. What holds you back from doing all you can for God?
5. How does keeping God's commandments lead to fulfilment?

Spiritual Ponderings



"The truth is like a lion. You do not have to defend it. Let it loose and it will defend itself." – St. Augustine

The following is an Archive of my Spiritual Ponderings Columns from the month of November. To see my Current Spiritual Ponderings please check out St. Joseph Parish Bulletin.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
December 6, 2020
Spiritual Ponderings
Bible Compass

For the month of December, I thought I would take a closer look at the Bible as a whole with the help of another book by Edward Sri. This book is called: *The Bible Compass: A Catholic Guide to Navigating the Scriptures*. I hope that my reflections on Edward Sri's thoughts on the Bible will help all of us grow to appreciate the gift that the Sacred Scriptures are to us in an even deeper fashion. Quotes from his book will be in bold and my reflections will be in a normal font.

The Bible is often considered "the greatest book ever written." At first glance, however, it does not appear to be a book at all. It looks more like a library, for it is

a collection of seventy-three different books authored by many different people over the course of many centuries. These books were written from various locations to diverse audiences and in three different languages (i.e., Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). Moreover, the seventy-three books of the Bible reflect a wider range of literary genres: historical narratives, poetry, proverbial sayings, genealogies, personal letters, laws, and prophecy for example.

So why do we consider these many, varied works to be a single great book? Because they all have one very important thing in common—namely, a common author God. And it is this divine author who through these varied books of the Bible, tell one overarching story—the drama of his plan of salvation.

If you were to go into my office right now and survey all the books that I have on my bookcases, you would discover that many of them have to do with theology/religion. There are also books that have to deal with hobbies like cooking, woodworking, and storytelling. In addition, one would find quite a few historical fiction books dealing with topics of Native Americans, the Civil War, and Fantasy Adventure. It is

my hope that when people see the different books, I have collected they see a well-rounded individual. I also hope that a person would not try to read my fantasy adventure books with the same intensity that they may read one of my theology books because they are two different genres.

In the same way, I do not approach all the books of the Bible as if they are all from the same genre. I do not read Genesis with the hopes of finding scientific truths about the beginning of the universe. I do not read the book of Psalms (which is a collection of hymns that were sung in the Jewish Temple) as I would read the Gospel of Luke.

This does not mean God is the only author of Scripture but rather that he is the primary author. Christianity has always recognized that human authors were involved in the writing of the Bible as well. Men such as Sts. Peter and Paul composed sacred books and acted as true authors under divine inspiration. The human writers made full use of their own freedom, creativity, and writing style to communicate their message to their particular audience.

As Catholics, our religion is all about God “incarnating” himself into our world out of love for us. Just as Jesus was true God and true man, we believe that the Scriptures are authored by both God and man. We do not mean that God dictated the Scriptures to the authors but rather that He inspired them to write what they wrote. It is important therefore to try to understand what God intended by the Scripture passage we are studying and the idea of what the human author was trying to communicate to his original audience.

The Church teaches that God positively influenced the writing of the text; thus, the words of Scripture are truly God’s words. Vatican I made this point, teaching that the Church holds these books as sacred and canonical, not because “they contain revelation without error, but because having been written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and as such they have been handed down to Church itself.

The Scriptures are one of many ways that God wishes to unveil himself to us. As we read the Scriptures, we gain more and more knowledge of the one (God) who wrote them. For, example hearing the story of creation and how God spoke and the world came into being, reveals to us just how powerful God is. For no ancient pagan myths had a creation story that took place in this way. Their creation stories always

involved a conflict between good and evil with the evil god being killed, and transformed into creation.

As Vatican II taught, “It is clear, therefore, that in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way, under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”

Cardinal Rigali, the bishop who ordained me to the priesthood, once told me that the “Holy Spirit never contradicts itself.” That one line, has helped me discern God’s will more times than I can count. As Catholics we believe that Tradition (with a capital “T”), Sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are all inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit and therefore they will never contradict each other. If it seems that they are doing that, we must go back to the drawing board and discover where we made our mistake.

**Fr. Thomas M. Pasterius
December 13, 2020
Spiritual Ponderings
Bible Compass**

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone who is not a good listener? The other person may think he understands you, but he really is not paying close attention to what you are trying to communicate. Maybe he only hears part of what you are saying. Maybe he even cuts you off before you finish your sentence. Perhaps he is too quick to relate everything you say back to his own experience or ideas. Talking to someone who listens poorly can be quite frustrating!

I want to be a better listener to God so I have been reading Edward Sri’s book called: *The Bible Compass: A Catholic Guide to Navigating the Scriptures*. I hope that my reflections on Edward Sri’s thoughts on the Bible will help all of us grow to appreciate the gift that the Sacred Scriptures are to us in an even deeper fashion. Quotes from his book will be in bold and my reflections will be in a normal font. In a particular way, let us look at the Five Keys for interpreting Scripture in a Catholic Context.

The First Key: Discover the Author’s Intention
First, we must consider the text’s historical context. As the Catechism explains, “In order to discover the sacred author’s intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture.”

Certain words or actions reported in the Bible may have a particular meaning in the original ancient culture. The more we factor in the historical context in which the text was written, the better we understand the author's intended message. But when we read texts completely divorced from their original context, we may make an erroneous interpretation.

Growing up, I had a hard time understanding why everyone seemed so down on tax collector's in the New Testament because a classmate's father worked for the IRS and he seemed to be a nice guy. Only when I began to understand what it meant to be a tax-collector at the time of Christ did I begin to understand the stories of Matthew and Zacchaeus.

A second way to discern the human author's intention is to respect the literary genre he employs. The Bible use a variety of literary forms.

I do not read a cookbook the same way that I may read a theology text book or a fun fiction book. I am able to find many more spiritual insights reading the Book of Genesis instead of trying to find historical and scientific facts about the creation of the universe. I have read a non-fiction book by Stephen Ambrose called *D-Day* and a historical fiction book by Jeff Shaara called *The Steel Wave*. Both books were amazing reads but they each had different goals. Ambrose's book was meant to tell me historical facts about the invasion of France and Jeff Shaara's book was meant to entertain me and so he included made up dialogue into his story.

A Third way to discern the human author's intention is to take in account the modes of feeling, speaking, and narrating used in biblical times. The way ancient people reported history, told stories, or wrote letters is often very different from the way we do so today. They did not always give straightforward, chronological "play-by-play" accounts of history but organized material by themes and employed elaborate literary techniques what involving reception, parallelism, allusion, and alliteration-- artistry that modern reader sometimes. Miss.

In the seminary, my New Testament professor stressed what he called the "Reader Response Method." The idea was simply that in order to understand any passage of Sacred Scripture, we needed to try to understand how the author's original audience would have understood the phrases and images the author uses in the Bible story. For example, in Luke chapter 7 we learn about a Roman Centurion approaching Jesus. There are many things in this story that I feel we 2,000 years later take for granted but Luke's originally audiences would have found jaw dropping. For example, the very idea

that a Roman Centurion would approach anyone respectfully would have surprised Luke's original audience listeners. Centurions were not known for being nice. The centurion goes a step forward and respects the Jewish customs of the rabbi and does not force him to enter into the centurion's house. This was so shocking that the early Christians included as a part of their liturgy.

A few years ago, I hosted a seminarian from India for a year at my rectory. He spoke English great, but I quickly learned how many idioms and figures of speech I used each day. Figures of speech (like "waiting for the other shoe to drop") were phrases that need more explaining to him than what I was used to.

Fr. Thomas M. Pistorius
December 20, 2020
Spiritual Ponderings
Bible Compass

I want to understand better the way God speaks to me through the Sacred Scripture so I have been reading Edward Sri's book called: *The Bible Compass: A Catholic Guide to Navigating the Scriptures*. I hope that my reflections on Edward Sri's thoughts on the Bible will help all of us grow to appreciate the gift that the Sacred Scriptures are to us in an even deeper fashion. Quotes from his book will be in bold and my reflections will be in a normal font.

The Second Key: Be Attentive to the Unity of Scripture
As we have seen, understanding the human author's intention is an important first step in biblical interpretation. But since Scripture also has God as its author, there is a second vital principle for interpreting the Bible correctly: "Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written." This principle reminds us that the Bible is not merely a human document written long ago by people far removed from our lives. The Bible is God's timeless word to his people throughout history—a divine word originally spoken through human writers to a certain audience at a particular moment in time, but echoing through the centuries with profound implications for each new generation of Christians. Since the human writers of Scripture were inspired by the same Holy Spirit who continues to act in the Church and in our lives today, the Bible continues to be a personal word from God spoken to each new Christian.

One can watch anyone of the Marvel super hero movies by themselves or within the context of the larger Marvel universe. When one watches them in the

context of the larger Marvel Universe you can see how each individual movie event takes on more meaning in the light of the *Avengers Infinity War* and *Avengers Endgame*. In a similar way things in Sacred Scripture begin to take on more powerful meaning in the light of God's entire plan of salvation. For example, Joseph of the Old Testament and all he went through to save people from famine foreshadows all Jesus the suffering Jesus will endure to save us from sin and death.

The Third Key: Read Scripture Within the Living Tradition of the Church

Have you ever found the Bible difficult to understand? The eight chapter of Acts of the Apostle tells the story of an Ethiopian man who struggles to comprehend the meaning of a certain prophecy from Isaiah. This man was a sincere believer in the God of Israel, traveling home after worshipping in the Temple., but he could not grasp the meaning of the Scriptures on his own.

Just at that moment, the Holy Spirit sent Philip to meet this traveling Ethiopian. Philip asked him, "do you understand what you are reading?" and the Ethiopian replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:30-31?). Philip joined him in his chariot, told him the Good News of Jesus Christ, and explained how Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecy he was reading. As a result of Philip's explanation, the Ethiopian came to understand the meaning of the Scriptures and asked to be baptized into the Christian faith.

This story exemplifies one of the difficulties we face when the Bible is read in isolation from the community of believers. The Bible is meant to be read in the context of "the living Tradition of the whole Church." If we try to read the Bible on our own, a part from the tradition that gave birth to the Scriptures, we will fail to understand its meaning. Like the Ethiopian, we need a guide.

There are four key areas where Sacred Tradition manifests itself in our Church. The first is in our Church's doctrine. The second place where Sacred Tradition manifests itself is in the life of the Church – the lives of the saints, religious movements, popular devotions, and common practices that have gained acceptance in the Church. The third place we find it is in the Church's worship especially in the Church's liturgies. Finally, the Church believes that Sacred Tradition is manifested in the Early Church Fathers

They (the early Church Fathers) are the principal witnesses to the Church's living Tradition, not only because of their closeness to the apostolic era, but also because of how their writings systematized,

deepened, and greatly shaped the Church's understanding of the Apostolic Tradition.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
December 27, 2020
Spiritual Ponderings
Bible Compass

I want to pray better and learn more about the way God speaks to me through the Sacred Scripture so I have been reading Edward Sri's book called: *The Bible Compass: A Catholic Guide to Navigating the Scriptures*. I hope that my reflections on Edward Sri's thoughts on the Bible will help all of us grow to appreciate the gift that the Sacred Scriptures are to us in an even deeper fashion. Quotes from his book will be in bold and my reflections will be in a normal font.

The Fourth Key: Read Scripture within the Symphony of God's Revelation.

This beautiful harmony between Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium lies at the center of our fourth key for interpreting the Bible: being attentive to the analogy of faith." An analogy of faith refers to the harmonious agreement between all the truths of the faith revealed by God and entrusted to the Church: the truths written in Scripture and the truths handed on through Sacred Tradition. Both Scripture and Tradition flow from the same divine source. Therefore, God is the source of all revealed truth, Scripture can never contradict the elements of Christian faith such as the Creed or Church teaching, and similarly the Christian faith itself can never be at odds with Scripture. In sum, the analogy of faith is "the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation."

Someone who had never watched *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* could never appreciate the character of the evil Emperor in *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* as someone who had seen *Return of the Jedi*. In the same way, the more we know about the Bible the more the stories come alive. Scott Hahn in his book *Hail Holy Queen* points out how four characters; Eve, Bathsheba, Rahab, and Rebecca can give us insight into the Blessed Virgin Mary.

We also learn through Tradition that Mary was Assumed into heaven body and soul. Sacred Scripture does not tell us this but at the same time it does not contradict this statement of faith.

The Fifth Key: Use the Four Senses of Scripture
The four senses of Scripture provide us with our fifth interpretive key for unlocking many spiritual treasures

in the Bible. This key can help us draw vital connections between the Old and New Testaments, the Catholic faith, and our own spiritual lives. With this approach, the people, places, and events of the Bible go from being distant realities, far removed from our day-to-day experiences, to being relevant to our own lives and serving as models for us pilgrims on the Christian path.

Traditionally, there are four senses of Scripture, which are outlined in the Catechism, nos 115-119."

(1) Literal Sense; "The meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture" The actual person, events, place, or thing described in the biblical text. The literal sense gives rise to the following three "Spiritual Senses".

(2) Allegorical Sense: How those persons, events, places, or things in the literal sense point to Christ and his work of redemption.

(3) Moral Sense: How the literal sense points to the Christian's life in the Church.

(4) Anagogical Sense: How the literal sense points to the Christian's heavenly destiny and the last things.

The Bible is a very interested way to communicate with us because God can pack so much into it. Knowing the four senses of Scripture helps me to unlock more of what God wants me to understand and it allows me to grow deeper in my friendship with Him.

We need to recognize, however that the connections between the Old and the New—between the past, present, and future—are not arbitrary but are rooted in God's plan of salvation. In other words, the four senses of Scripture are no mere metaphorical associations. This method of interpretation is not a creative enterprise in which one looks for nice images from the Old Testament that can help explain the Catholic faith. Rather, spiritual exegesis uncovers the

great unity in God's salvific plan as carried out in history.

The God who created this amazing universe also created an amazing plan to save us from our sins. He also created the best way possible to communicate to us through prayer and it includes the use of Holy Scripture. God's effort that He has put into Sacred Scripture is one more proof of just how amazing our God is but also how much He loves you and me.



Please check out www.stjoemanchester.org St. Joseph's Facebook Page for my "New Mercies" Video reflections. Every morning, I reflect on one of the Scripture readings for the day.

A graphic for "NEW MERCIES" featuring a sunset over a hill with three crosses. The text "NEW MERCIES" is at the top, and "Daily Scripture Reflections with Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius" is below it. A quote from Lamentations 3:22-23 is at the bottom: "The LORD's acts of mercy are not exhausted, His compassion is not spent; they are renewed each morning – great is your faithfulness!"



Personal Penance Service

Christmas: What does it mean to be like God?

Beginning:

(+)God come to my assistance, Lord make haste to help me.

Opening Prayer:

O God, who wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and still more wonderfully restored it, grant, I pray, that I may once again share fully in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity through this celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I ask this through Jesus Christ Your Son who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Quick Reflections:

If you were reading St. Luke's Gospel for the first time in the time period that it was written, you might mistakenly think that the story was going to be about Caesar Augustus for he is by far the most famous person mentioned in Luke's Gospel besides Jesus and Jesus' fame was just beginning to spread thanks to the Apostles. Luke in away creates a tension for his readers. He presents to us Caesar Augustus a man who proclaims to be a god and ruler of the world and Jesus a God who became man in order to show us what being truly divine is all about. Most of our sins can be traced back to a mistaken idea of what it means to be like God. Will we follow Caesar Augsts' example or will we follow Jesus example.

Examination of Conscience

1. Caesar Augustus changed his name from Octavius to "Augustus" which means "Great in Stature". The name given to the child of Bethlehem by the angel "Jesus" means "God will save his people." Have I been to concern more about my reputation than about helping others?
2. Caesar Augustus proclaimed himself the ruler of the world as Emperor of Rome. The fact of the matter is that the infant Jesus was the King and Creator of the Cosmos. Do I spend time building up my kingdom or God's kingdom?
3. Caesar Augustus thought he had the best army in the ancient world but the babe in the manger had an army of angels. Caesar Augustus used his army to force people to do things his way. The Christ child only sent his army forth with messages of peace. Do I try to force others to do things my way?
4. Caesar Augustus had the best house in the ancient world. There was not even room for Mary to give birth to Jesus in an inn. Caesar castle/fortress was meant to keep the poor away. Jesus came to be among the poor. How do I treat the poor?
5. Caesar Augustus surrounded himself with only the most popular of people. Jesus surrounded himself with riffraff shepherds and the wealthy magi? Even as a child Jesus sees the person and not their economic status. How do I view people?
6. Caesar Augustus had the best food and material possessions. The little baby Jesus was laid in a manger (a feeding trough for animals) for He came to be the life of the world. Do I hunger and thirst for righteousness or am I more worried about my comfort?
7. Caesar Augustus had the best messengers in the ancient world. Jesus chose the lowly John the Baptist to be his messenger and not the high priests Ananias or Caiaphas. Do I judge people with worldly eyes or with God's eyes?

Time For Individual Confession

At this time you should go and celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with the priest and afterwards come back and pray your prayer of thanksgiving in addition to your penance.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

God and Father, I praise you, the source of all that I have and am. Teach me to acknowledge always the many good things your infinite love has given me. Help me to love you with all my heart and all my strength. I ask this through Christ our Lord Amen.

Blessing

May almighty God bless me (+), protect me from all evil and bring me to everlasting life. Amen

Act of Contrition #5

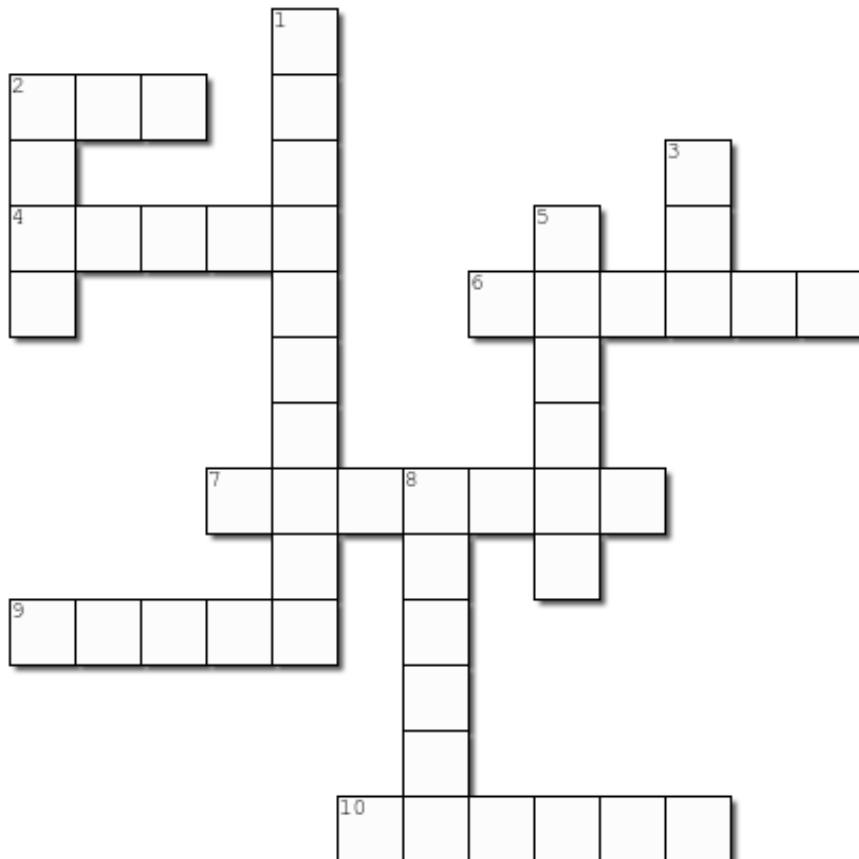
God of all consolation, in your unending love and mercy for me, You turn the darkness of death into the dawn of new life. Please show me compassion in my sorrow by forgiving my sins. Be my refuge and strength. Please with Your grace

lift me up out of the darkness of grief and into the light of Your peace and may I come to have eternal joy in Your presence. I ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.



Name: _____

January 2021



Created using the Crossword Maker on TheTeachersCorner.net

Across

2. 'blank' to the world
4. King who tried to trick the magi into revealing Christ's location
6. Where John was baptizing
7. Gateway to the life of grace
9. A series of books with a Divine and humans authors
10. Where Jesus went after His Baptism

Down

1. Sugary treat meant to remind us of the first people to see the baby Jesus
2. Zechariah's oldest son
3. English translation of the word 'Deus'
5. John's food
8. Place where Mary and Joseph lost Jesus for 3 days

Answers are on last page

Blessing of the Home and Household on Epiphany

The traditional date of Epiphany is January 6, but in the United States it is celebrated on the Sunday between January 2 and January 8.

When all have gathered, a suitable song may be sung. The leader makes the sign of the cross, and all reply, "Amen."

The leader greets those present in the following words:

Let us praise God, who fills our hearts and homes with peace.

Blessed be God forever.

R/. Blessed be God forever.

In the following or similar words, the leader prepares those present for the blessing:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling place among us. It is Christ who enlightens our hearts and homes with his love. May all who enter this home find Christ's light and love.

One of those present or the leader reads a text of sacred Scripture, for example, Luke 19:1-9:

Listen to the words of the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town. Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly,



CNS photo

for today I must stay at your house." And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham."



BLESSING OF THE HOME AND HOUSEHOLD ON EPIPHANY

The intercessions are then said:

Leader: The Son of God made his home among us. With thanks and praise let us call upon him.
R/. Stay with us, Lord.

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, with Mary and Joseph you formed the Holy Family: remain in our home, that we may know you as our guest and honor you as our Head.

We pray:

R/. Stay with us, Lord.

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, you had no place to lay your head, but in the spirit of poverty accepted the hospitality of your friends: grant that through our help the homeless may obtain proper housing.

We pray:

R/. Stay with us, Lord.

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, the three kings presented their gifts to you in praise and adoration: grant that those living in this house may use their talents and abilities to your greater glory.

We pray:

R/. Stay with us, Lord.

After the intercessions the leader invites all present to say the Lord's Prayer.

The leader says the prayer of blessing with hands joined:

Lord God of heaven and earth,
you revealed your only-begotten Son to every nation
by the guidance of a star.

Bless this house
and all who inhabit it.

Fill them (us) with the light of Christ,
that their (our) concern for others may reflect your love.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R/. Amen.

The leader concludes the rite by signing himself or herself with the sign of the cross and saying:

May Christ Jesus dwell with us,
keep us from all harm,
and make us one in mind and heart,
now and forever.

R/. Amen.

It is preferable to end the celebration with a suitable song, for example, "O Come, All Ye Faithful" or "We Three Kings."

—From *Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers*





DAY ONE

January 21, 2021

INTERCESSION

May the tragic practice of abortion end.

PRAYERS

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

REFLECTION

At every stage and in every circumstance, we are held in existence by God's love. The presence of an illness, disability, or other challenging situation never diminishes the value of a human life. God does not call us to perfection of appearance or abilities, but to perfection in *love*. Christ invites us to embrace our own lives and the lives of others as true *gifts*.

Abortion tragically rejects the truth that every life is a good and perfect gift, deserving protection. This violent practice ends the life of a human being at its very beginning and horribly wounds all those involved. But Christ came that we "might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10), taking on human flesh for the sake of our redemption. May our culture experience the power of God's transforming love, that all eyes may be opened to the incredible beauty of every human life.



ACTS OF REPARATION (choose one)

- Take a break from television and movies today. Consider spending some of that time praying with today's reflection.
- Pray the short prayer "Every Life is Worth Living," reflecting on the gift of human life. (The prayer is also available to order or download at usccb.org/worth-living.)

*Heavenly Father, thank you
for the precious gift of life.
Help us to cherish and protect
this gift, even in the midst of
fear, pain, and suffering.
Give us love for all people,
especially the most
vulnerable, and help us bear
witness to the truth that every
life is worth living.*

*Grant us the humility to
accept help when we are in
need, and teach us to be
merciful to all.
Through our words and
actions, may others
encounter the outstretched
hands of Your mercy.
We ask this through
Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

ONE STEP FURTHER

Abortion is frequently a topic in the news, political debates, and everyday conversations with family or friends. Because abortion can be a controversial and emotional issue in any arena, many of us may feel intimidated when the topic arises, not knowing what to say. *Another Look at Abortion* provides a basic overview and summarizes key points. This article will help you be better prepared to witness to the sanctity of human life: respectlife.org/another-look-at-abortion.



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3 WAYS TO JOIN





DAY TWO

January 22, 2021

Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children

DID YOU KNOW ?

In the Catholic Church in the United States, January 22nd is designated as a particular day of prayer and penance, called the “Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children.” As Catholics, we are called to observe this day through the penitential practices of prayer, fasting, and/or giving alms.

More Information: usccb.org/january-22

INTERCESSION

May all unborn children be protected in law and welcomed in love.

PRAYERS

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

REFLECTION

Today, on this 48th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, we mourn the many children’s lives ended by abortion and remember in prayer those who suffer the aftermath. The Church comes together today to pray for the protection of all unborn children and to make reparation for abortion, trusting that the Lord hears our prayers.

The importance of prayer is reflected in *Evangelium vitae* (100), which says, “A great prayer for life is urgently needed, a prayer which will rise up throughout the world. Through special initiatives and in daily prayer, may an impassioned plea rise to God, the Creator and lover of life, from every Christian community, from every group and association, from every family and from the heart of every believer” (*Evangelium vitae* 100). May that prayer arise in our hearts today and each day forward until every human being is protected in law and welcomed in love.

ACTS OF REPARATION (choose one)

- Fast from one meal today.
- Offer this brief “Prayer for Life” for all unborn children whose lives are at risk. (The prayer is also available at usccb.org/prayer-for-life)

*Father and maker of all,
you adorn all creation
with splendor and beauty,
and fashion human lives
in your image and likeness.
Awaken in every heart
reverence for the work of
your hands, and renew among
your people a readiness to*

*nurture and sustain
your precious gift of life.
Grant this through our Lord
Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with
you in the unity of the Holy
Spirit, God forever and ever.
Amen*

- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

ONE STEP FURTHER

More women and girls consider abortion than we may realize. They are our relatives and friends, people who work with us or for us. Even if someone identifies as being pro-life, the shock of an unexpected pregnancy, the devastation of a difficult prenatal diagnosis, shame, pressures, or fears may influence her to consider abortion.

If someone shared with you that she was pregnant and hadn’t ruled out having an abortion, would you know how to respond in a loving way that is life-affirming for both her and her baby? Learn about the four steps of the L.O.V.E. Approach™: Listen and Learn, Open Options, Vision and Value, and Extend and Empower (respectlife.org/l-o-v-e).

*The L.O.V.E. Approach™ is trademarked by Heartbeat International, Inc. and may not be adapted or modified. The L.O.V.E. Approach™ is used in “What to Do When a Friend Is Considering Abortion” with permission from Heartbeat International, Inc.



3 WAYS TO JOIN





DAY THREE

January 23, 2021

INTERCESSION

May every expectant mother receive compassionate care and support as she nurtures the life in her womb.

PRAYERS

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

REFLECTION

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, she opened her heart to receive his message that she would conceive the Son of God in her womb. As a young, betrothed, but unmarried, woman, Mary knew that her pregnancy presented many challenges. Despite this knowledge, she faithfully responded, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

Like the Blessed Mother, women who unexpectedly become pregnant often face significant challenges. They, too, are called to place their trust in God and faithfully respond to His gift of new life. And we are called to walk with them in their time of need. As Jesus taught us, when we love and serve others, we are loving and serving Him.

May all expectant mothers be encouraged by Mary’s example and receive support and grace in lovingly welcoming their children into the world.

ACTS OF REPARATION (choose one)

- Sign up to pray for and serve expectant mothers in need in your community through a parish-based program called *Walking with Moms in Need* (walkingwithmoms.com/pledge).
- Pray the Angelus today (usccb.org/angelus). You might also consider saying it every day for the next week—on awakening, at noon, or at 6 p.m. (or all three times).
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

ONE STEP FURTHER

When a woman is facing an unexpected pregnancy, the reaction of the first person she tells tends to set the tone for her decision-making. Pregnancy can be difficult and frightening, but no matter the circumstances, it’s important for an expectant mother to feel supported and loved. Read *10 Ways to Support Her When She’s Unexpectedly Expecting* (respectlife.org/support-her) for simple tips on how to provide loving, life-affirming support for a friend who is unexpectedly pregnant. Your support may be the only support she receives.



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3 WAYS TO JOIN



DAY FOUR

January 24, 2021

INTERCESSION

May expectant fathers lovingly support the mothers of their children in welcoming new life.

PRAYERS

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

REFLECTION

Fatherhood has its origins in God, who chose to reveal Himself to us as Our Father, sending his only Son for the sake of our salvation. Fathers therefore have a special role “in revealing and in reliving on earth the very fatherhood of God” (*Familiaris consortio* 25). Fathers are called to exhibit “generous responsibility for the life conceived under the heart of the mother” (FC 25). They are uniquely entrusted with the protection and defense of both mother and child and, in this way, in safeguarding the sanctity of human life.

As evidenced in our world today, the role of the father “is of unique and irreplaceable importance” (FC 25). Often women choose abortion because they do not have the support of the child’s father, or—even worse—the father of the child pressures her to make the decision to abort. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge with compassion that men can also be overwhelmed by an unexpected pregnancy and that society increasingly tells them that they should have no say in their children’s lives. In the face of these false messages, we pray that expectant fathers will find courage in the example of Saint Joseph—who embraced the role of father amid difficult circumstances—and offer loving, life-affirming support to the mothers of their children.

ACTS OF REPARATION (choose one)

- Give up sleeping on your pillow—or even your bed—tonight. Offer this small sacrifice for the intention that expectant fathers will courageously answer their call to support both mother and child.
- Pray a decade of the Rosary for all expectant fathers, that through her intercession, Our Lady may inspire in them the virtues of Saint Joseph: usccb.org/how-to-pray-the-rosary.
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

ONE STEP FURTHER

Research continues to show that one of the top reasons a woman chooses abortion is due to a lack of financial resources. Read *Poverty and Abortion: A Vicious Cycle*, which explores the connections between abortion and poverty, and how the absence of fathers contributes to this ongoing cycle (respectlife.org/poverty-and-abortion).



3 WAYS TO JOIN

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DAY FIVE

January 25, 2021

*If you or someone you know is suffering after abortion, confidential, compassionate help is available.
Visit hopeafterabortion.org.*

INTERCESSION

May each person suffering from the loss of a child through abortion find hope and healing in Christ.

PRAYERS

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

REFLECTION

After more than four decades of legalized abortion, many children's lives have been ended, and many parents and family members suffer that loss—often in silence. Yet God's greatest desire is to forgive. No matter how far we have each strayed from His side, He says to us, "Don't be afraid. Draw close to my heart." Be assured that it is never too late to seek God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Consider the parable of the Prodigal Son. After repenting of sinning against his father, he returns from far away to seek forgiveness and work as a servant. But the father sees him approaching, runs to warmly embrace him, and hosts a banquet to celebrate his return. So, too, does God welcome all of His repentant children, no matter how serious the sin. Let us turn confidently to Our Lord, Who is love and mercy.

ACTS OF REPARATION (choose one)

- Abstain from meat today.
- Pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy for those who are suffering the loss of a child through abortion, asking that they find healing and peace (usccb.org/divine-mercy-chaplet).
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

ONE STEP FURTHER

If a friend confided in you that she had an abortion, would you be able to listen and respond in a way that brings her closer to healing? Learn how in *How to Talk to a Friend Who's Had an Abortion* (usccb.org/friend-had-abortion).



3 WAYS TO JOIN

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DAY SIX

January 26, 2021

INTERCESSION

May expectant mothers choosing adoption receive grace and support in embracing this loving option.

PRAYERS

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

REFLECTION

Mothers placing their children for adoption often face many challenges along the way. One of the greatest obstacles can be inaccurately perceiving adoption as abandonment. But mothers who make an adoption plan for their children are not abandoning their children. Rather, they are exemplifying the sacrificial love of Christ on the Cross in choosing to do what is best for their children, even at great cost to themselves. Like Christ, they pour out their bodies and souls for the sake of another. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that, in the face of fears and trials, we can “hold fast to the hope that lies before us. This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm” (Heb 6:18-19). We pray that each expectant mother choosing adoption will be filled with “the peace of God that surpasses all understanding” (Phil 4:7) as she makes a loving choice for her child. Let us all cling fast to the anchor of hope, for we have received “a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Rom 8:15).

ACTS OF REPARATION (choose one)

- Do you have a sweet tooth? Or do you prefer salty snacks? Pick your favorite kind of treat, and give it up for the day.
- Look up one of the Scripture passages from today’s reflection, and spend some time with it in prayer. What is the Lord saying to you?
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

ONE STEP FURTHER

Accompanying Expectant Mothers Considering Adoption suggests nine ways to offer ongoing support to a woman who is considering making an adoption plan for her unborn child (respectlife.org/mothers-considering-adoption). Many of the tips given are also helpful for supporting a friend who is experiencing a challenging or unexpected pregnancy, even if adoption has not been brought up. Supplemental resources regarding adoption can be found at usccb.org/adoption-resources.



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3 WAYS TO JOIN



DAY SEVEN

January 27, 2021

INTERCESSION

May all who support or participate in abortion experience a conversion of heart to seek and receive the Lord's boundless mercy.

PRAYERS

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

REFLECTION

When God fashioned the human person in His own image and likeness, He destined us for eternal life with Him. Yet because of the sin of our first parents, death entered the world. The book of Genesis recounts the first occasion in which a person takes the life of another, as Cain violently kills his brother Abel. This instance of brother rising up against brother "at the very dawn of history is thus a sad witness of how evil spreads with amazing speed" (*Evangelium vitae* 8).

From the time of creation, disregard for human life has continued to spread. When we, like Cain, allow sin to find a place in our hearts, we become blinded to the truth. Sometimes this blindness might be so deep that we fail to recognize the undeniable humanity of unborn children. We may even tragically believe the lie that abortion is an act of compassion. But we know that "life, especially human life, belongs only to God: for this reason whoever attacks human life, in some way attacks God himself" (*EV* 9). Let us pray that all who support abortion will encounter the transforming love of the Father and, with repentant hearts, seek His mercy.

ACTS OF REPARATION (choose one)

- Smile. Ask God today for the grace to be extra joyful and to share the light of Christ with those most in need of His love and mercy.
- Make an act of faith, hope, or love (usccb.org/faith-hope-love).
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

ONE STEP FURTHER

Evangelium vitae (*The Gospel of Life*) was written to reaffirm the value and inviolability of every human life and to appeal to all people to respect, protect, love, and serve every human life. A brief summary highlights key themes and foundational teachings from the papal encyclical, exploring how the Church's teachings regarding human life are at the heart of Jesus' entire Gospel message (respectlife.org/gospel-of-life-summary).



 9daysforlife.com

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3 WAYS TO JOIN





DAY EIGHT

January 28, 2021

DID YOU KNOW ?

Although the annual National Prayer Vigil for Life is closed to in-person attendance due to health concerns, you can participate live from anywhere in the country on Thursday, January 28! Visit usccb.org/national-prayer-events-for-life for more information.

INTERCESSION

May civic leaders work for the protection of all human life, in every stage and circumstance.

PRAYERS

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

REFLECTION

The Declaration of Independence boldly affirms that first among our inalienable rights is the right to life, given to us by the Creator. Yet despite being so solemnly proclaimed, the right to life is today threatened and often denied, particularly at the moments when life is most fragile. Our laws should—first and foremost—protect life. But “our highest Court does not recognize children in their mothers’ wombs as persons and claims that abortion is a constitutional right. Further, many political leaders work actively to increase access to abortion. Some falsely describe it as health care and even as a basic human right” (*Priorities at the Polls*). Laws and policies that legalize or promote an intrinsic evil like abortion violate the virtue of justice.

Those who work as public officials and civic leaders have a duty to serve the common good, and therefore have a profound obligation to safeguard this most fundamental right to life. Through our own prayer, witness, and civic participation, we can encourage our leaders to truly answer

their call to protect the rights of all people. For “there can be no true democracy without a recognition of every person’s dignity and without respect for his or her rights” (*Evangelium vitae* 101).

ACTS OF REPARATION (choose one)

- Sacrifice some of your free time to do a small act of service, such as making breakfast for a family member, writing a note of encouragement to a coworker, or praying for the intentions of a friend.
- Sometimes restrictions on religious freedom constrain our efforts to live out the Gospel of life. We must be free to live out our Catholic faith in the public square. Offer this Prayer for Religious Liberty, that Christians may always be free to respect, protect, and defend human life: usccb.org/prayer-for-religious-liberty.
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

ONE STEP FURTHER

When discussing faithful citizenship in 2019, the U.S. bishops reaffirmed, “the threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed.” Archbishop Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas and Chair of the Committee on Pro-Life Activities, explains more in *Priorities at the Polls*: respectlife.org/priorities-at-the-polls.

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3 WAYS TO JOIN



DAY NINE

January 29, 2021

March for Life, Washington, DC

INTERCESSION

May all who defend life find strength and renewal in the Holy Spirit.

PRAYERS

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

REFLECTION

God has carefully, tenderly created every person in His own image and likeness, to be in a loving relationship with Himself. From each tiny child knit within a mother's womb, to every person approaching death, all are loved perfectly and completely by God: "It is therefore a service of love which we are all committed to ensure to our neighbor, that his or her life may be always defended and promoted, *especially when it is weak or threatened* [emphasis added]" (*Evangelium Vitae* 77).

In a world in which those who are most vulnerable are so often overlooked and disregarded, Christ calls us to embrace and uphold the unconditional dignity of every human life. In answering this call, we help to build "a new culture of life, the fruit of the culture of truth and of love" (*EV* 77). May the Holy Spirit continually renew us as we strive to faithfully defend God's gift of life.

ACTS OF REPARATION (choose one)

- Do you love your cup of tea or coffee? Abstain from caffeine today, or try your coffee black.
- "Unplug" for some time today, and reflect on how God may be asking you to help build a culture of life in your home, workplace, or Church community.
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

ONE STEP FURTHER

Watching the news and reading headlines, we may often feel helpless in the face of heartbreaking lack of respect for human life. When our efforts to make a difference feel small, it's important to remember that changing the culture is a process of conversion that begins in our own hearts. It includes a willingness to be instructed by the Holy Spirit and a desire to be close to Jesus—the source of joy and love. *How to Build a Culture of Life* briefly explains where to start: respectlife.org/culture-of-life.



9daysforlife.com

3 WAYS TO JOIN



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Prayer to Overcome Indifference



Getty Images

All too often, Lord, we turn away from the world's many problems,
which seem too big, too complex, or too far away.
Forgive us our indifference.

It is easier, Lord, to see only what is around us:
our lives, our homes, our challenges.
Forgive us our isolation.

Help us to see with your eyes:
eyes which notice one another
and help us understand.

Help us to dream your dream:
of communities that reach out and dialogue
and where diverse people creatively cooperate.

Help us to be people of solidarity and action,
so moved by prayer, encounter, and understanding
that peace can become a reality.

Amen.

Answers	Across: 3. Gabriele	1. Joseph	2. Elizabet	3. Genesios	4. Elgith	5. Jordán	6. Augustus	7. Bethehem	9. Jordán	Down: 1. Joseph	2. Elizabet	3. Genesios	4. Elgith	5. Diego	6. Mexico	7. Mexico	8. Mexico
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